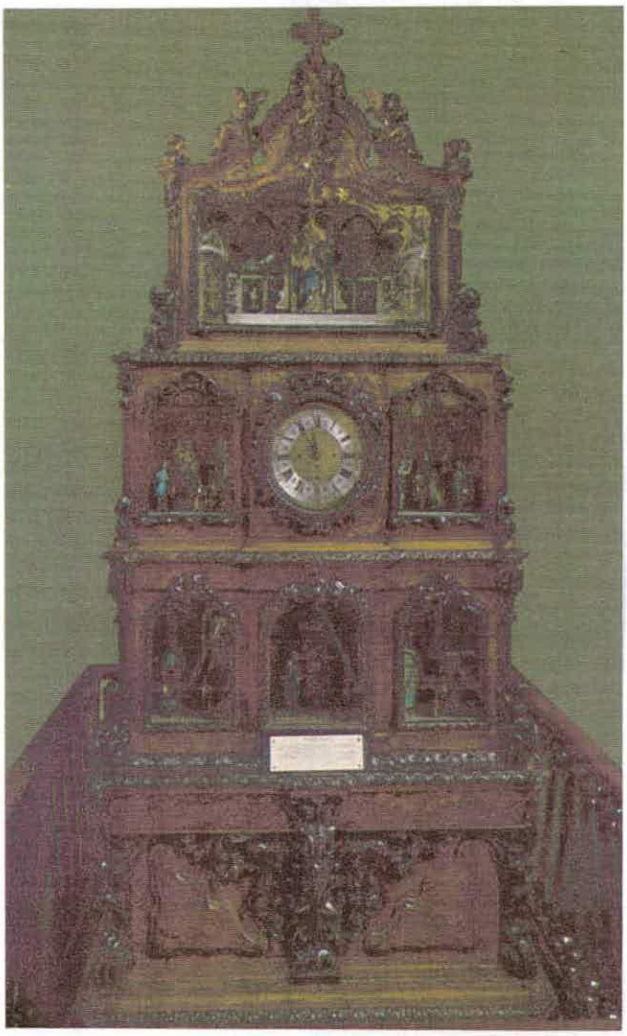
Report on

THE APOSTLE CLOCK

at

THE HORNIMAN MUSEUM,

100 London Road, Forest Hill, Lewisham



by

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1. Introduction

Historical information has been requested on the Apostle Clock, situated at the north end of the north hall gallery in the grade II* listed Horniman Museum, London Road, SE23. The Museum is currently being extended and remodelled, with the aid of a grant of £10 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund. It will feature new public spaces – galleries, a café and a shop – and the entrance will be re-orientated, so that visitors to the 'new' Museum will enter the building from the Horniman Gardens. This work is set to be complete for 2001-2. As part of the rearrangement of the Museum, Listed Building Consent has been sought for the re-location of the Apostle Clock. It is proposed that the clock be moved from its present position, and exhibited in the Emslie Horniman Gallery, at the start of a case which will focus on the Horniman Family.

English Heritage has objected to this relocation and, after a curatorial response was submitted by the Horniman Museum's Nicky Levell, Curator (Collections History), further historical information has been sought. This report pays particular attention to the original plans drawn by Charles Harrison Townsend, to the origins of the Apostle Clock and its introduction to the Museum, and the clock's relationship to its space.

Access has not been gained to the original architect's plans, held at the London Metropolitan Archives, which are currently classed as 'Unfit for Consultation'. Full-size colour copies of these plans have been viewed, however, but little trace could be seen of the 'pencil note' referred to in this report.

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2. The Horniman Museum

The Horniman Museum is centred around the collections of Mr Frederick John Horniman (1835-1906), MP, a successful tea merchant who, in the second half of the nineteenth century, amassed a vast number of objects and 'curios' from his travels in Egypt, India, Ceylon, Burma, China, Japan, Canada, the United States and Europe. By the 1880s, these specimens filled his London Road home, Surrey House. So much so, in fact, that according to legend, Horniman's wife issued an ultimatum; either the collection would have to go, or she would. In the end, the collection stayed, and the family moved up the hill to Surrey Mount.[1] Mr Horniman opened his former home to the public in December 1890, and it eventually became known as the 'Surrey House Museum'.

Within a short space of time, it became obvious that the space provided for the collections was inadequate, and an extension was built. In December 1893, Sir Somers Vine opened the enlarged Museum to the general public. On June 1 1895, Surrey Mount Gardens were made free to the people as an additional attraction.

By the following year, 1896, it became clear that even more space was needed for the collections, which had been growing continually both through gifts from the public and private acquisition. Designs for a new museum were commissioned from Mr Charles Harrison Townsend (1851-1928), architect of the Bishopsgate Institute (designed 1892, built 1893-94) and the Whitechapel Art Gallery (designed 1896, revised 1899, built 1899-1901). In May 1898, the old Museum was demolished and on 16 November of the same year, the foundation stone of the new building was laid by Mrs F. J. Horniman. Due to the nature of the site – a narrow frontage, with a slope of land too steep for levelling – the Museum was divided into two large halls approximately equal in size (104 feet long by 47 feet wide), connected together by a wide central staircase (**Fig. 1**). The floor of the north hall was placed on a plane with the gallery of the southern (entrance) hall. Along the east side of the Museum was placed a corridor, extending along the entire length of the building and communicating with the two halls. Above it, opening onto the gallery of the south hall, were the caretakers' apartments, the resident curator's rooms and an exhibition room; opening onto the north hall were the library, the naturalists' room and the insect room. The total cost of erection was around £49,000.[2]

The finished building was stylish and fresh in appearance, bearing only limited resemblance to the Art Nouveau or Arts and Crafts architecture of the time (**Figs. 2 and 3**). Townsend's work, because of its originality, received mixed criticism, but *The Studio* described the Museum in 1901 as 'a new series of frank and fearless thoughts expressed and co-ordinated in stone'.[3] Its design, now known as 'Free Style', was of an organic character, using simple motifs and symbols such as squares, circles and semi-circles. The tower of the Museum is the climax of this, with its symbolic geometry and tree of life carving. On the street frontage, Townsend – ever mindful of craft and ornament – included a mosaic by Robert Anning Bell and rich metalwork. The interiors of the Museum were far more plain (**Fig. 4**), and have been described by Alastair Service as 'almost Baroque in effect'.[4] *The Studio* was able to write of the Museum that 'it is easy of access, it is spacious and unpretentious in its internal planning, and every care has been taken to make it a place in which a crowd may move easily without jostling, and without feeling in the least bewildered'.[5]

In 1901, Mr F. J. Horniman presented the Museum, together with the large gardens, to the

[1] Coulter 1999, p. 137
[2] HRBCP (July-Oct 1903), which contain a copy of the Annual Report of 1901-2
[3] *Studio* 1901, p. 198
[4] Service 1977, p. 50
[5] *Studio* 1901, p. 201

London County Council, as the representative of the London people, and the Museum opened on 29 June of that year. A Horniman Museum Sub-Committee was immediately created, as part of the Historical Records and Buildings Committee, the Chairman of which for 1901-2 was Emslie J. Horniman, the son of the Museum's founder. The Committee quickly agreed that 'the arrangements of the objects in the museum had not been effected on the lines which would be expected in a museum under the charge of a public authority to be used for definite purposes by the public' and rearrangements were put in hand, under the supervision of Dr A. C. Haddon.[6] These changes seem to have been begun in February 1902, and continued over the next three or more years.

Of this early twentieth-century phase, the principal addition was the Lecture Hall and Library, built on the left of the main front of the Museum in 1910-11, and opened on 28 January 1912 (**Fig. 5**). The building was designed by Harrison Townsend who, as early as 1903, had submitted his proposed plan and elevation to the LCC. He expressed his certainty that the building 'will add to the design and not look like an addition'[7] and today, it remains an important, integral part of the Museum's London Road façade.

3. The Apostle Clock

The Horniman Museum's Apostle Clock is, although small-scale in comparison to vast clocks like that at Strasburg Cathedral, still large and impressive by any standards (**Fig. 6**). It rises to around ten feet in height, and is made up of four principal storeys or compartments, the lower one being an elaborately carved base and the third containing the clock face itself. The case is of walnut. The clock (known as an eight day clock, as it only needs to be wound once a week) strikes all the quarters of the hour, but at four o'clock in the afternoon the piece really comes to life.[8] The figures in the middle chamber below the dial enact successive scenes from the Life of Christ (the Nativity, Christ talking to the Elders in the Temple, and the three Marys outside the sepulchre), and in the chamber above the dial the Apostles pass before their Master, each bowing their heads. The last, Judas, turns his back. The four side chambers contain the gongs, and represent the Ages of Man, from childhood to old age. The figures move to the accompaniment of chimes playing a thirteen bell carillon, thought to be tunes from old German hymns.

Very little is known about the provenance of the Apostle Clock. The Horniman Museum, in labelling the piece, describes it as a 'model of the Strasbourg Cathedral clock', which was 'made in Germany in the mid-19th Century, probably by a peasant of the Black Forest, who used many older parts.'[9] The famous Strasburg Cathedral clock (**Fig. 7**) was built in three phases; it was begun in 1352 and completed twenty years later, then remodelled in the 1570s by Isaac Habrecht, and finally reconstructed in 1838-1842 by Jean Baptiste-Sosime Schwilgué.[10] It has been described as 'probably the most spectacular and intricate automaton and astonomical clock in the world'[11] and is vast, towering above the floor of Strasburg Cathedral. In the upper compartment of the clock is a figure of Christ, and when Death strikes the hour of noon the twelve Apostles pass before the feet of their Master, bowing as they go.

However, according to Mr Paul Buck of the British Museum's Horological Department, the Apostle Clock does not come from the Black Forest at all. Although the clock is not signed, which remains somewhat puzzling, Mr Buck has stated that the case is probably German,

[6] HRBCP (Jan-March 1903), report of 20 March about debate of 10 February 1903
[7] HRBCP (April-June 1903), letter of 10 June 1903 from C. Harrison Townsend
[8] Perhaps there was a connection between the four o'clock (tea time) chiming, and Horniman's tea?
[9] See file on Apostle Clock held in the Museum's Library
[10] See: Britten 1971, pp. 43-48 and Lloyd 1958, p. 121
[11] Fleet 1972, p. 87

and the movements are English. The date is thought to be somewhere in the latter half of the nineteenth century, probably nearer 1900 than 1850. Moreover, Mr Buck believes that the Apostle Clock is not a copy of the Strasburg Cathedral clock, as has been suggested since the early twentieth-century. He feels that its design is more inspired by the great clocks at Prague (Fig. 8), begun in the fifteenth century and reworked 1865-66 when the figures of the twelve Apostles were added, and Lubeck. Either way, Mr Buck endorsed the fact that the Apostle Clock is a rare example of its type.[12]

4. *The Introduction of the Apostle Clock to the Horniman Museum*

This is an area of some debate and complexity. As Nicky Levell states in her report of January 2001, the Apostle Clock was never mentioned in any of the guides describing Surrey House Museum (the forerunner to the Horniman Museum), and is not listed as part of the 1898 inventory of objects that F. J. Horniman presented to the LCC in 1901.[13] Neither is the clock mentioned in the 1901 *Account of The Horniman Free Museum and Recreation Grounds, Forest Hill*, in annual reports, or as a gift or acquisition in any of the papers of the LCC's Horniman Museum Sub-Committee (part of the LCC's Historical Records and Buildings Committee). Only one early photograph showing the north end of the north gallery has been found during the present research (published in the Museum's 1901 *Account*, and in *The Studio*[14]), and that is not especially clear (Fig. 9). However, it does show that that the clock – which now towers up into the north arch of the gallery – was not then present. Indeed, the Apostle Clock is not documented in any Museum literature until 1904, when the LCC published *A Guide to the Collections of The Horniman Museum and Library*. This pamphlet contains a plan of the gallery of the north hall, on which 'Model Clock' is clearly marked at the centre of the north staircase (**Fig. 10**). The Committee Papers reveal that this plan had been prepared by 19 February 1904.[15] In the index of the collections is included 'North Gallery. Model of the celebrated clock in Strasburg Cathedral.' Although the *Guide* goes on to give a more detailed break down of the majority of the exhibits, the clock is not mentioned again.

Research has unearthed the proofs of this 1904 *Guide*, submitted to the Horniman Sub-Committee, and marked with suggestions for alterations. These papers were looked at by the Committee on 12 December 1903, so the clock was certainly in place by that date.[16] Furthermore, the Committee Papers include information on an attempted burglary of 5 December 1903, when caretaker Alfred Wilkes found a man – later charged – 'behind a clock in the North end of the North Gallery'.[17]

So, although it can be proved that the Apostle Clock certainly occupied its present position by the last month of 1903, its origins remain obscure. Given the detailed recording of building works in the papers of the Horniman Museum Sub-Committee, by whom all expenses had to be authorised (from replacing the swing doors in the entrance lobby and providing new umbrella stands to installing new electric lighting and heating apparatus), it is indeed peculiar that no mention is made of the installation of the Apostle Clock. Gifts and purchases, from Australian seaweed to a mummified hawk and king penguin, are likewise listed in detail, and no clock is mentioned. That the LCC made an oversight, or that the clock was missed in the inventory of 1898, both seem outside possibilities.

[12] Information kindly given by Mr Paul Buck, Horological Curator at the British Museum.
[13] Levell 2001, p. 2
[14] *Studio* 1901
[15] HRBCP (Jan-Feb 1904), 19 February 1904
[16] HRBCP (Nov-Dec 1903), 12 December 1903
[17] Ibid, 18 December 1903

That leaves two options; either the clock was incorporated *c*1901 as a basic architectural feature of the new museum, or it came into the hands of the LCC between 1901-3, perhaps as an unspecified part of a larger collection.[18]

The first option is not impossible. Although the clock is not mentioned in the Museum's 1901 *Account of The Horniman Free Museum*, no real opportunity is provided for the listing of it. The plans provided do not detail the exhibits and contents of the various cases and the pamphlet, unlike the 1904 *Guide*, does not contain an index or 'Guide to the Collections'. As with the 1901-2 *Annual Report*, the *Account* simply has a list, by subject rather than location, of the 'more important collections' only. The 1904 *Guide* implies that the clock was not considered 'important', as even then it was not included in a more detailed break down, and so the absence of the clock from the *Account* seems to be understandable. The photograph of 1901 which looks towards the north gallery is also not sufficient proof that the clock was not already a part of the Museum's collections. The clock may have been temporarily removed, perhaps for safe-keeping whilst the collections were rearranged.

The architect's original plans for the Museum, now held by the London Metropolitan Archives[19], admittedly do not position the Apostles Clock, as has been pointed out by Nicky Levell.[20] However, written in pencil by the north staircase are the words 'Strasburg clock here'. Miss Levell explains this by saying that the original Clerk of the Works' plans functioned as working drawings until September 1903, when a new series of plans were drawn up. She says that the intention to exhibit the clock was therefore recorded on earlier drawings at some stage before late 1903.[21] The fact that the clock is singled out at all is interesting. No other exhibit or case is marked, as one would expect if the LCC were using the plan to record the arranging of collections. Even if the plan were being used in such a way, it does not mean that the pencil mark could not have been made at an early date. Perhaps, during construction, Mr Horniman acquired the clock specifically for its present position, and asked that it be incorporated?

The area of floor on which the clock stands is a very curious architectural feature (**Fig. 11**). One would have expected to see in this position an open well staircase, which would have added dignity to the north hall's design and allowed extra light to penetrate from the four north windows to the hall's ground level. The small 'landing' serves no structural purpose at all, except that it creates beneath it a small, L-shaped space, now used as a store-room. This space, unplastered and extremely basic, must always have served such a purpose, and could not have been a major influence on the building's design. So, it is arguable that Harrison Townsend incorporated the 'landing' specifically to house a key exhibit.

Nevertheless, the second option, that the clock was acquired between 1901and 1903 by or for the LCC is admittedly the most attractive of the two. Indeed, one piece of interesting evidence comes from the Historical Records and Committee Papers for April to June 1903. A report of 22 May details various suggestions made by F. J. Horniman – whose involvement with the Museum did not cease until his death – and includes one asking that the LCC 'place a suitable exhibit in the niche or recess at the back of the Museum'.[22] Although this is not entirely clear, no 'niche or recess' exists on the rear, external façade of

[18] HRBCP (Jan-March 1903), a report of 20 March mentions 'some valuable exhibits which have recently come into the Council's possession', including 'the collection of ethnographical objects from the Maldive Islands, presented by Mr J. Stanley Gardiner MA, and a donation of Egyptian antiquities from Abydos, presented by the Egypt Exploration Fund.'

[19] LMA Document ref: LCC/misc/P/244/1 no.2. This document is, at the time of writing, unfit for consultation, but a copy is held by the Horniman Museum.

[20] Levell 2001, p. 1

[21] Ibid, p. 3

[22] HRBCP (April-June 1903), report of 22 May 1903; among other things, F. J. Horniman paid for various painting works to be carried out at the Museum (see HRBCP (Jan-Feb 1904), 22 Jan)

the building, and the only area of the inside, north section of the Museum which seems relevant is the 'landing' on which the clock now stands. Indeed, the word 'recess' describes the area precisely. Furthermore, the date – spring 1903 – seems to be fitting. Whether Mr Horniman then chose or presented the Apostle Clock for the position, or whether someone from the LCC or the Museum did that, is not documented. Nonetheless, the choice must have seemed perfect – the clock fitting the 'recess' almost exactly and blending extremely well with the architecture – and the finality of the decision is underlined by the clock's being marked on the original plans. The choosing of the Apostle Clock for this position is likely to have been approved by F. J. Horniman, and would have become evident to Charles Harrison Townsend, who remained in close touch with the Museum and its benefactor. In October 1903, Mr Horniman authorised Harrison Townsend to confer with the Council's officials as to works being carried out at Surrey Mount,[23] and a few months previously the architect had produced his designs for the new lecture hall,[24] which must have involved site visits. Townsend therefore remained in close touch with Mr Horniman, and may have had opportunities to comment – unofficially – on the placing of the exhibits. But this can remain nothing more than conjecture.

5. The Apostle Clock and its Setting

Regardless of whether the Apostle Clock was included as part of the original scheme, or whether it was added *c*1903, it is certainly true to say that its place within the Horniman Museum has been fixed for almost one hundred years. The clock occupies a prominent position at the head of the north gallery, one from which it can be well seen and well heard. Miss Levell questions its visibility, writing that 'the role the Clock could or may have played in relationship to the architecture as one moves through the North Hall was ruined or severely marred in the first decade of the twentieth century', when the LCC installed a series of table-cases surmounted on and running the length of the north hall gallery's balustrade.[25] This view is questionable, in that the clock towers above the table-cases which are themselves not overly intrusive, but also not entirely appropriate, as the clock was fixed in its position before the cases were installed (**Fig. 12**).

Unlike the rest of the Museum, which – as is the nature of all museums and galleries – is in a constant state of flux, the Apostles Clock has never been more than temporarily moved from its present position. Thus, it has been treated in a rather different way from the rest of the exhibits, which have been arranged and rearranged time and time again. This view of the clock as a fixture has been underlined by the Museum's staff themselves. The clock is placed on its own, specially designed, wooden plinth, and at some point in the mid-twentieth century, an iron railing was built around the front of it, annexing the clock from the rest of the north gallery (**Fig. 13**). Previously, as is shown in an undated LCC photograph held by the London Metropolitan Archives, the clock had been surrounded by railings on only three of its four sides (**Fig. 14**). The new railing, instead of simply serving to keep members of the public away from the clock (any rope or cordon, such as those seen in galleries, would surely have served this purpose), was designed to be completely in keeping with the original work. Indeed, the scrolled ironwork and wooden handrail matches the original work exactly, and seems not to be new, but to be a reused portion of early twentieth-century railing.

Additionally, at some point in the twentieth century, an acrylic panel has been inserted into the back of the clock, which is otherwise unornamented and would not originally have been seen (**Fig. 15**). This alteration – of great interest, in that it enables the figures and workings

[23] HRBCP (July-Oct 1903), 2 October, report on letter from Horniman
[24] HRBCP (April-June 1903), letter from Townsend of 10 June
[25] Levell 2001, p. 6

of the inside of the clock to be viewed – was unquestionably made to exploit the clock's physical position to its utmost. That, as Nicky Levell states, the north staircase is one of the Museum's primary fire escape routes, does not lessen the impressiveness of the clock's clear back panel, which can be well viewed simply whilst ascending the stairs.

Unlike the rest of the museum, which – since the earliest days of the LCC – has been organised by subject (anthropology, natural history, art, etc.), the Apostle Clock has never been included in an obvious scheme. Miss Levell writes that the clock 'occupies an anomalous position in a Gallery devoted to Natural History' but it has long done so, since at least 1904.[26] This, again, is a way in which the clock is differentiated from the Museum's exhibits or collections.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can only be underlined that the Apostle Clock has certainly occupied its present position for ninety-eight years, and has been treated – by the staff of the Horniman Museum themselves – as a fixture. The addition of the clear back panel and the front railing have intensified the union of the clock with its architectural setting.

Although, as has been stated, the origins of the clock remain obscure, the findings set down in this report point to the fact that Mr F. J. Horniman himself recommended that an exhibit be placed in the space at the centre of the north staircase, which was designed by C. Harrison Townsend specifically for that purpose. Furthermore, and despite this not being documented, F. J. Horniman is likely to have approved the choice. Thus, the clock is not only interesting in its own right, and for its relationship to the Museum's space, but also historically, in its associations with the Museum's founder. The best way to honour this is surely to leave the clock in the position it has occupied for so long, and to which it is so well suited.

[26] Ibid, p. 5; the 1904 *Guide* mentions that the north hall was dedicated to natural history.

Sources and References

1. Published Material

AAQ 1975	Alastair Service, 'Arts and Crafts Extremist: Charles Harrison Townsend (1851-1928)', *Architectural Association Quarterly*, Vol. 6, no. 2, (spring, 1975)
Architect 1901	'The Horniman Museum', *The Architect*, (July 19 1901), p. 40
Britten 1971	F. J. Britten, *Old Clocks and Watches and their Makers*, (1971 edition)
Builder 1902	'The Horniman Musem, Forest Hill', *The Builder*, (February 8 1902)
Coulter 1999	John Coulter, *Sydenham and Forest Hill Past*, (1999)
Fleet 1972	Simon Fleet, *Clocks*, (1972)
LCC 1901	LCC, *The Account of the Horniman Free Museum and Recreation Grounds, Forest Hill*, (1901)
LCC 1901-2	LCC, *First Annual Report of the Horniman Museum*, (1901-2)
LCC 1903	LCC, *Second Annual Report of the Horniman Museum*, (1903)
LCC 1904	LCC, *Third Annual Report of the Horniman Museum*, (1904)
LCC 1904 *Guide*	LCC, *A Guide to the Collections of the Horniman Museum and Library*, (1904)
Lloyd 1958	H. Alan Lloyd, *Some Outstanding Clocks over 700 years 1250-1950*, (1958)
Service 1977	Alastair Service, *Edwardian Architecture*, (1977)
Studio 1901	'The Horniman Free Museum', *The Studio*, Vol. 24, (20 December 1901), pp. 196-202

2. Unpublished Material

HRBCP	Historical Records and Buildings Committee Papers, held by the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA)
Levell 2001	Nicky Levell, *Report: The Apostles Clock: A Curatorial Response to English Heritage's Objections to relocate the Apostles Clock*, (17 January 2001); copy in HA&RT File Lewisham 29

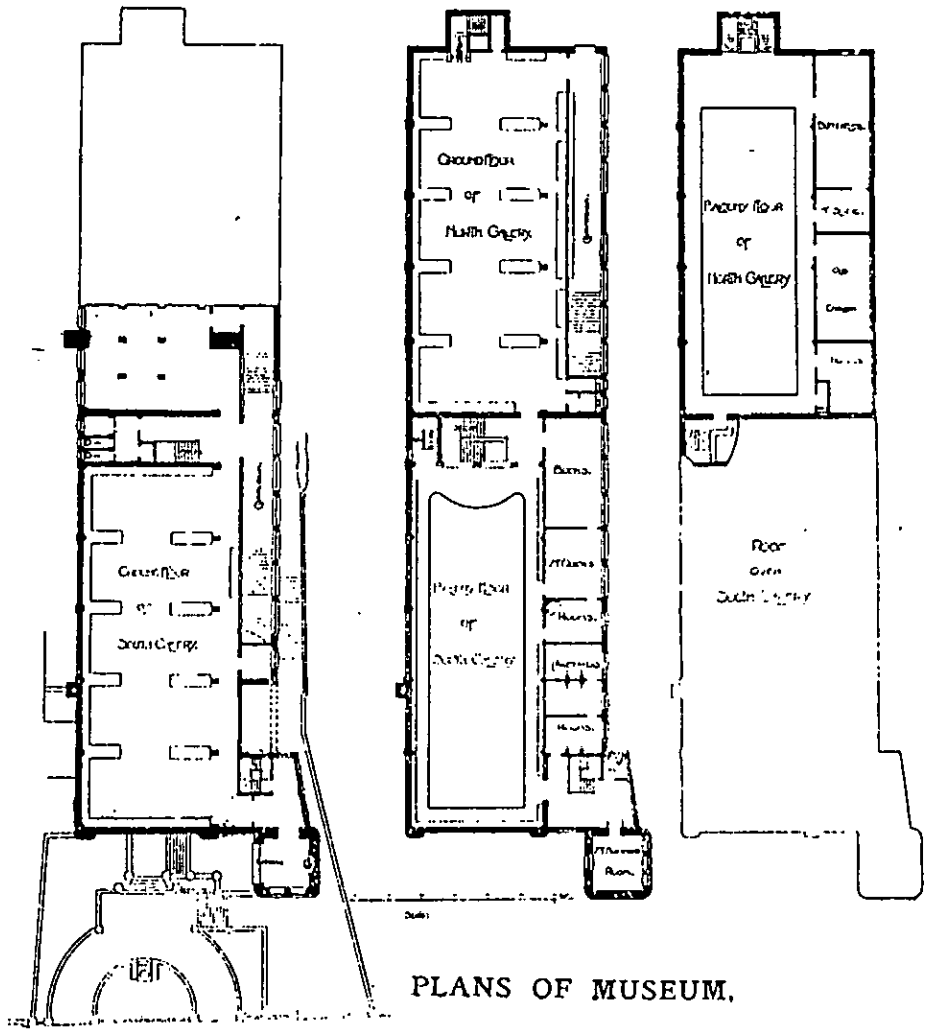

Figure 1; Original architect's plans of the Horniman Museum, as published in the LCC's *Account of the Horniman Free Museum and Recreation Grounds, Forest Hill* (1901)

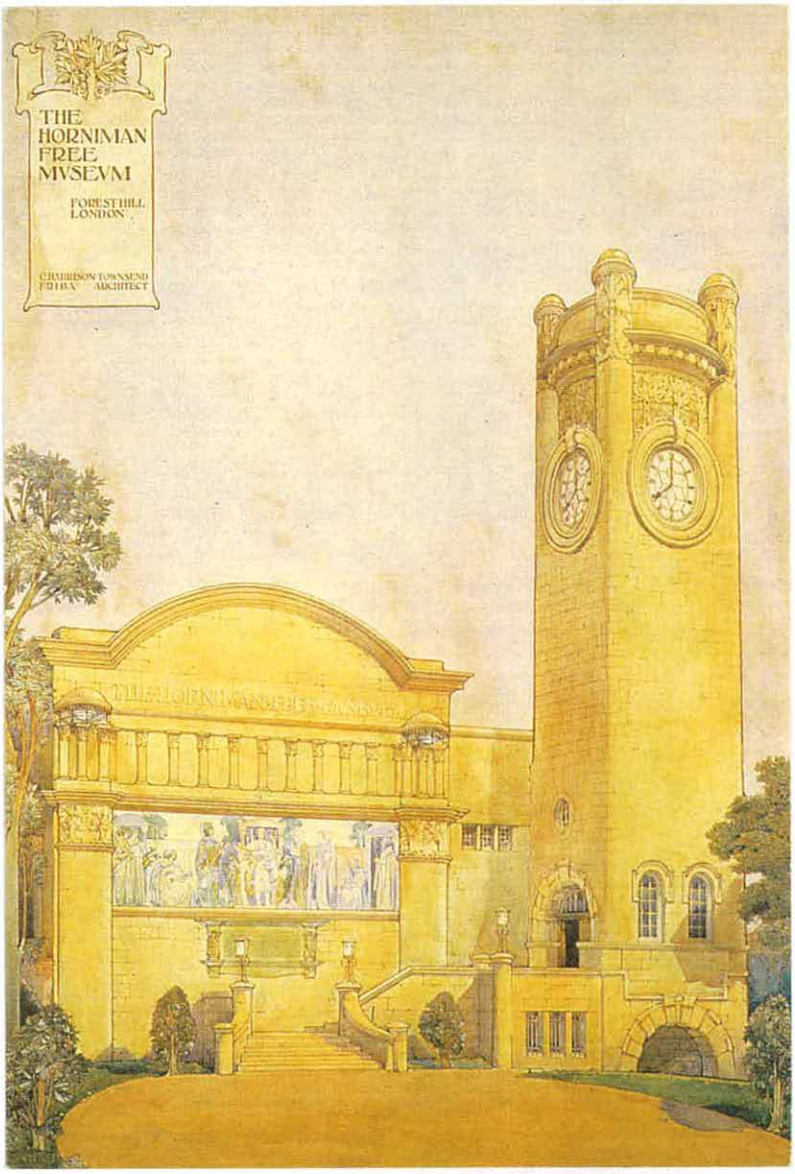

Figure 2; Architect's design for the main, London Road, façade of the Horniman Museum

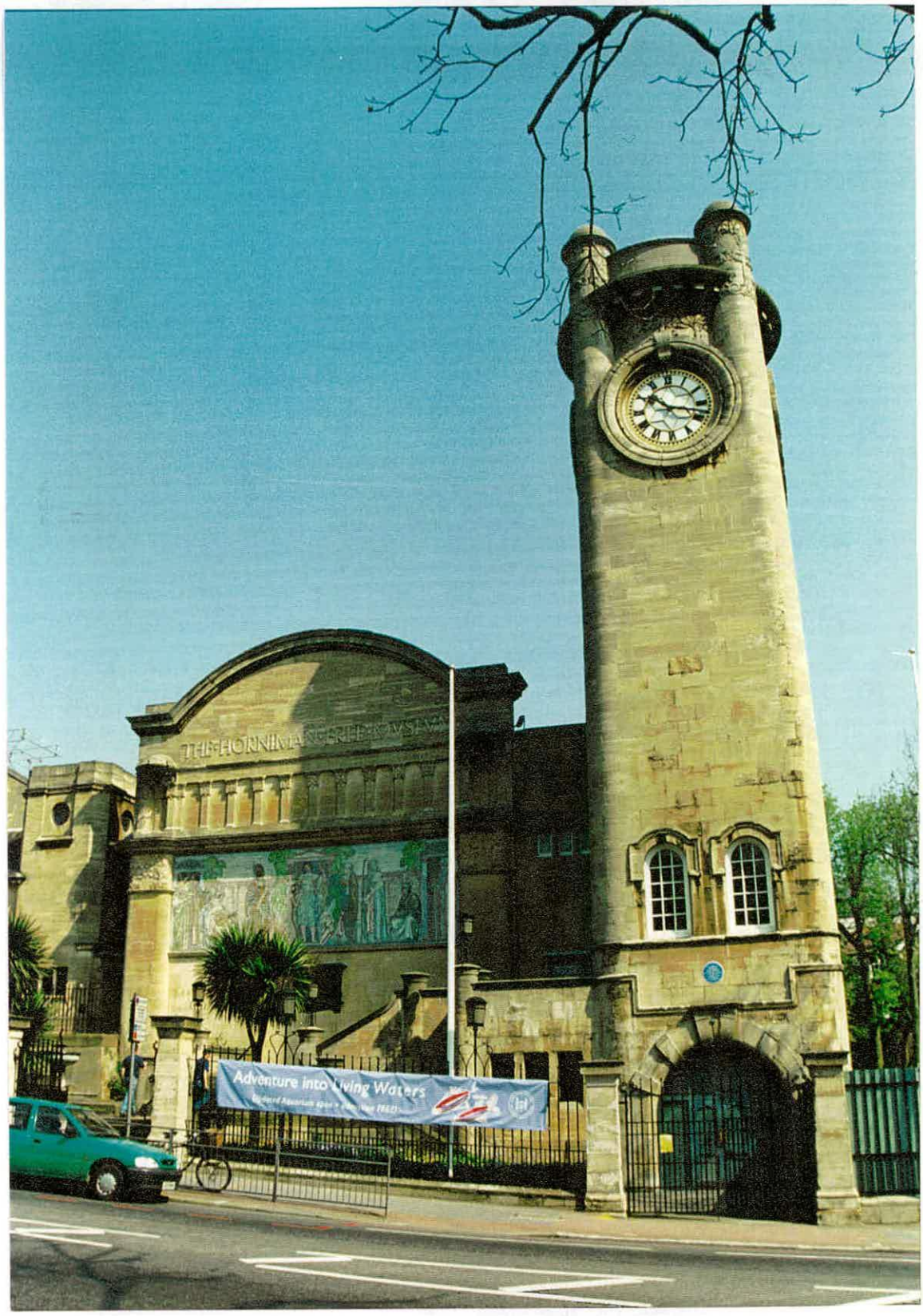

Figure 3; Photograph showing the main, London Road, façade of the Horniman Museum as it is today

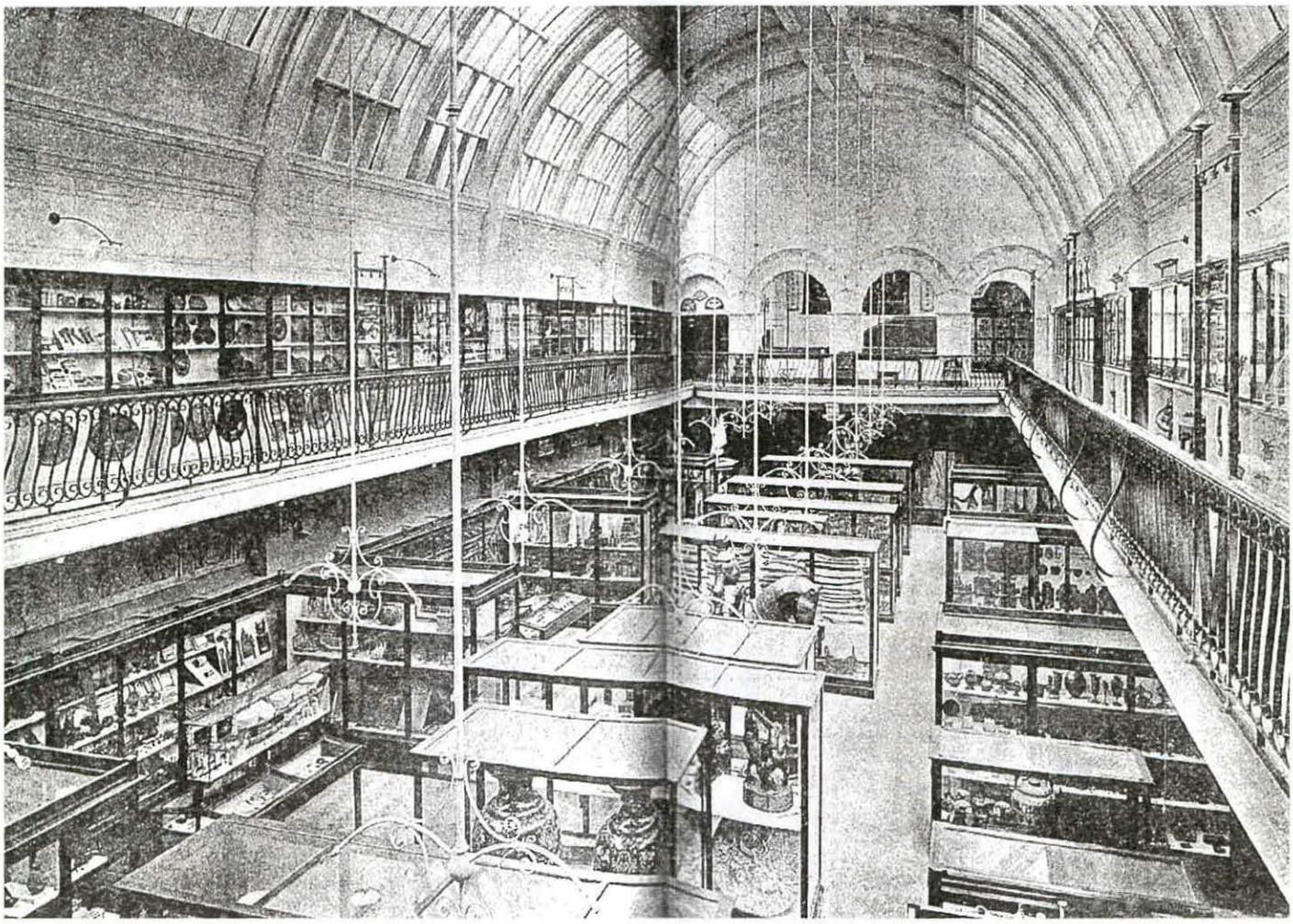

Figure 4; Early photograph of the south gallery, published in *The Architect* on July 19 1901

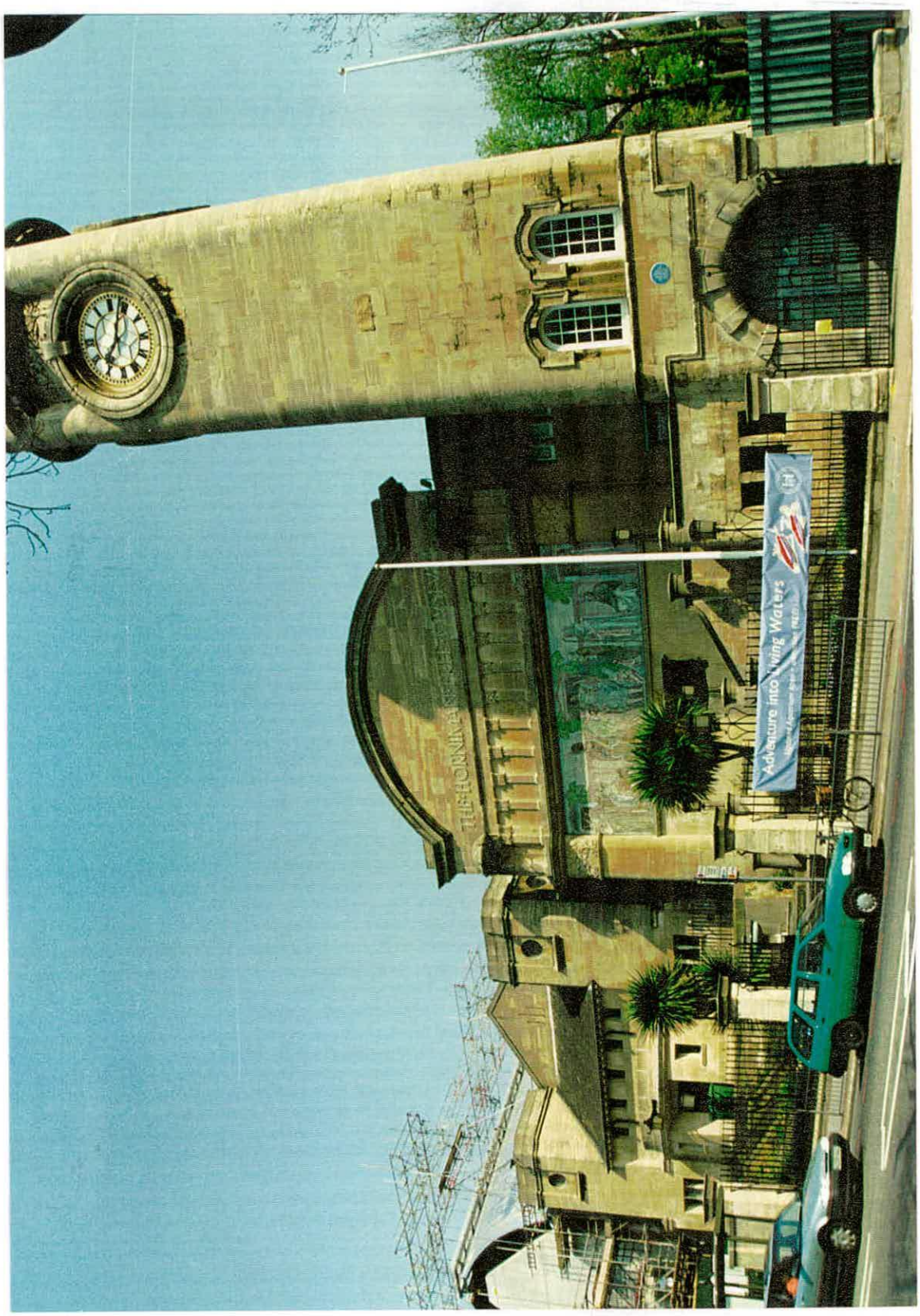

Figure 5; Recent photograph showing the main, London Road, façade of the Horniman Museum, with the Lecture Hall and Library (built 1910-11) on the left

Figure 6; The Horniman Museum's Apostle Clock, which probably dates from the mid-nineteenth century

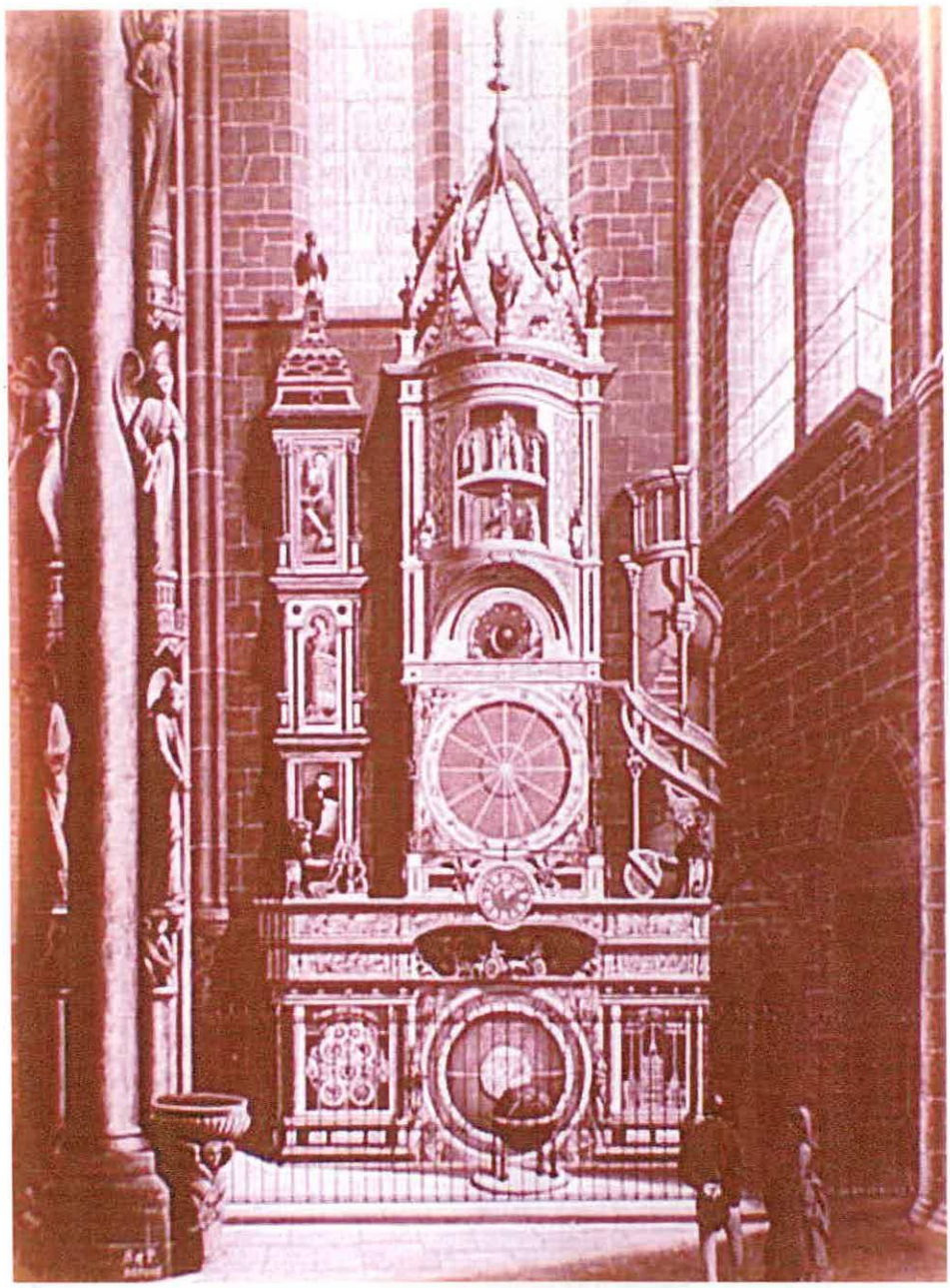

Figure 7; View of *c*1900 showing the Strasburg Cathedral Clock. This photograph can be seen on the internet page of the Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University (www.library.northwestern.edu/spec/siege/images/PAR00920.html)

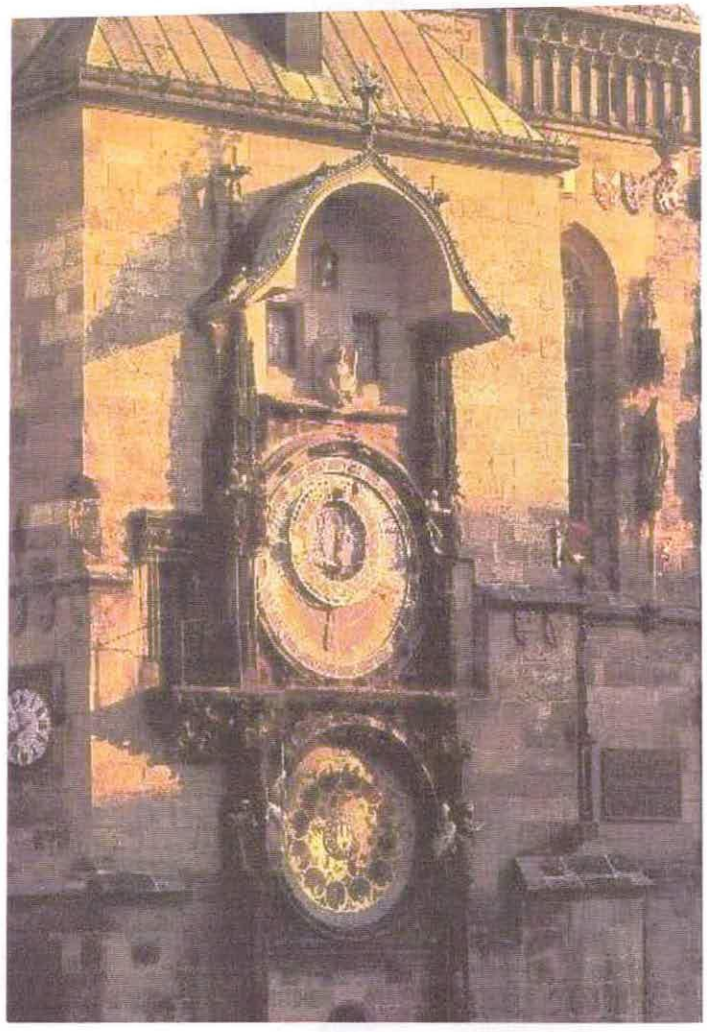

Figure 8; Photograph of the Astronomical or Astrolabe Clock on Prague's Old Town Hall. The clock was begun in the fifteenth century, and reworked in 1865-66, when the figures of the twelve Apostles were added. Photograph from the Astrolabe website (www.astrolables.org/prague.htm)

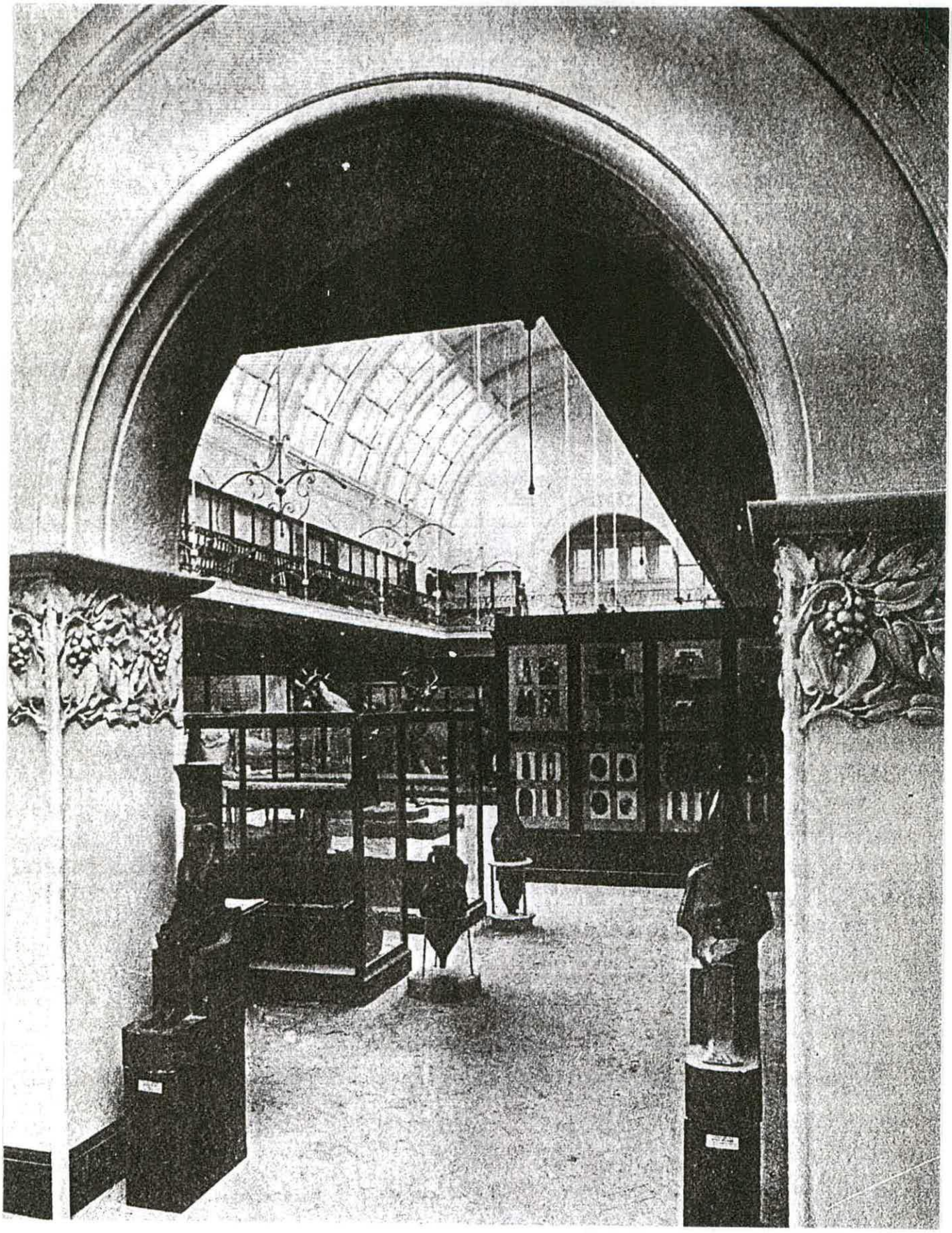

Figure 9; Early photograph showing the view from the central staircase into the north gallery, as published in the LCC's *Account of the Horniman Free Museum and Recreation Grounds, Forest Hill* (1901) and in *The Studio*, Vol. 24 (1901). The arch in the background marks the postion where the Apostle Clock now stands

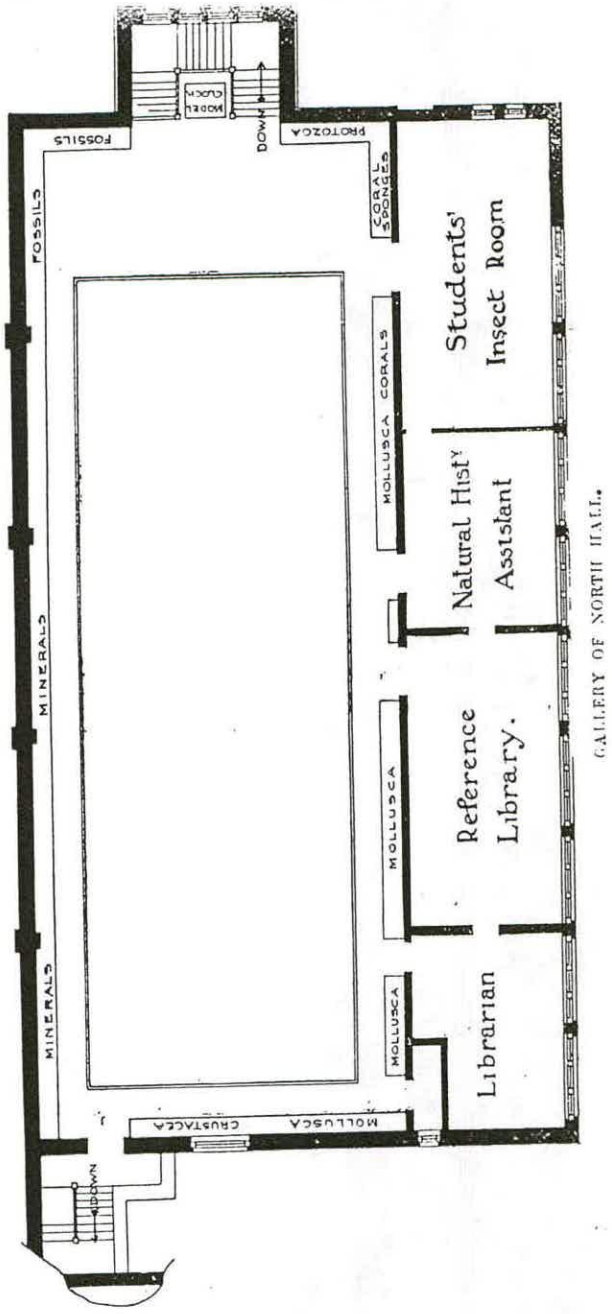

Figure 10; Plan published in the LCC's *Guide to the Collections of the Horniman Museum and Library* (1904), showing the position of the Apostle Clock

Figure 11; Photograph showing the unusual architectural space on which the Apostle Clock now stands

Figure 12; Photograph taken from the east side of the north gallery, showing the Apostle Clock in relation to its surroundings

Figure 13; The Apostle Clock as it appears today, showing the railing added at the front of the piece some time in the mid-twentieth century

Figure 14; Undated LCC photograph, now in the collections of the London Metropolitan Archives, showing the Apostle Clock without its front railing

Figure 15; Photograph of the Apostle Clock, from the north staircase, showing the clear panel inserted into the back face of the clock to allow the viewing of the internal mechanisms