John Aage Gjestrum

A brief summary of the texts on pp. 4–92 with biographical notes.

John Aage Gjestrum was born in the village of Bøverbru in Toten municipality, close to the lake Mjøsa in Southeast Norway. In his early teens he was deeply influenced by Johannes Sivesind, who was then director of Toten Museum and over the years came to serve as John Aage’s inspiring mentor. Sivesind left Toten in 1967. Ten years later, after having completed his studies, John Aage returned to Toten to become museum director. He was only 24 years old, which was in those days sensational for a museum director in Norway. In the 1980s he continued and developed the variety of activities introduced by Sivesind aiming at the integration of collecting both of objects and oral tradition with local history research and publishing – all this in close collaboration with the local population. Doing so he soon discovered the startling affinity between the work in Toten and the French ecomuseum ideas. This certainly inspired him in his efforts but also in his international outlook and engagement. Toten ecomuseum in short time became internationally known as an idea come true and referred to as a model to imitate.

From the Toten-period three texts from 1988 are reproduced (p. 4 ff) that mirror John Aage’s commitment to local history, esp. the period when early industrialism began to affect an area of traditional agriculture. The texts were printed in the yearbook of the museum, which John Aage edited 1978–1991. They deal with the establishment of a factory for the production of matches which existed during some thirty years at the end of the 19th century. He has studied how it was financed, how technology was taken over, working force recruited, and pays attention to the problem of child
labour and the living conditions of the workers.

In 1989 he became editor of the Norwegian museum journal, *Museumsnytt*, with which he stayed for three years and substantially contributed to its renewal. He engaged in national museum politics and began to be absorbed by the history of museums and their societal functions. He left Toten Museum and joined the Department of Museology at Umeå University to start his doctoral studies. At the same time he deeply engaged himself in international work and took on museum consultancies.

In a text (p. 21 ff) reprinted from *Museumsnytt* 1993 he examines the crucial founding years of the Norwegian Museum association when centralistic ideas confronted the visions and aspirations of the founders of local museums (folkemuseer). He explores the ensuing development in an essay from the same year, "From local museum (folkemuseum) to ecomuseum" (p. 33 ff) where he sees the latter as a logical consequence of the former. Two years later he offers a museological perspective on the issue of museum studies in Norway (p. 53 ff) where he uses the history of the museum in Bergen as a starting point and the early attempts there to integrate the museum with the university.

In 1992 John Aage was already deeply engaged in the study of the small mining town Røros which was to become the subject of his doctoral thesis. One of the first fruits was the essay "Exhibitions of living people" (p. 60 ff) published in 1995 in the ethnologic journal *Dugnad* (with an English summary). And in 1999 he summarized the theme of the thesis in an article (p. 75 ff) reprinted from a Swedish journal for humanistic studies *Tvärsnitt*. He outlines the history of the small town founded in the 17th century and put on the Unesco list of World Heritage in 1980. He shows that its antiquarian qualities were much at random selected as a national monument at the turn of the century and how the antiquarian motifs for evaluating the site as cultural property changed over the years, depending on the changing political conditions. It gives an important illustration of how cultural heritage is created and looked upon through a century. Unfortunately the thesis remains uncompleted. In a rather playful manner he discusses the problem of selecting cultural heritage in the article (p. 71 ff) "Can we protect a telephone number?" (1997).

His frequent participation in several of ICOMs international committees resulted in a network which became an invaluable resource when in 1993 *Nordisk Museologi* came into being. He and his international friends are constantly present in the 16 issues he managed to conclude. However he was also busy contributing to the many reports and bulletins of the ICOM committees as can be seen from the bibliography.

Finally four extracts have been chosen from his work as museum consultant. The first one (p. 80 ff) was a study for the committee of Swedish local museums disclosing the amazing fact that there was a serious discrepancy between the official Swedish definition of a museum and the ICOM definition. This difference had as a consequence that the local museums were not included in official statistics! The second (p. 84 ff) is taken from a thorough study of the Norwegian Art Nouveau city of Ålesund which aims at the creation of a centre for the study of Art Nouveau architecture focussing on conservation, documentation and urbanistic ideas, The project includes an international database and network around this particular study and research. For this large study Marc Maure was his co-author. The third extract (p. 88 ff) proposes the establishment of a much needed resource centre and advisory service for the protection and restoration of traditional architecture in Southeast Norway. In the fourth extract (p. 90 ff) John Aage returns to the subject of early industrialisation. This time his report "From preserved milk to Viking Milk" deals with the reuse of a big factory, originally founded on the technology of ‘condensed milk’ and the immense produce of milk in the area.

The readers of *Nordisk Museologi* can look forward to many reminiscences of John Aages ambition with the journal in future issues.