

THE CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

A CONDENSED HISTORY

The Society was founded in the year 1867, primarily, it is believed, at the instigation of Robert Drane, F.L.S. (1883-1914), in whose memory, sixty years later, a tablet was placed upon the entrance to No. 16 Queen Street, Cardiff, by the Society, recording that here he had lived and here the Society had been founded.

While the records of the manner of its foundation may be incomplete and even contradictory in some details, the basic facts are not in dispute; a preliminary meeting was held on 29th August, 1867, and the first general meeting took place on 11th September, 1867. There were twenty-four original members whose names are recorded in the minutes and, of these, one, Evan John, J.P., of Llantrisant, survived to attend the unveiling of the tablet referred to above, in the Diamond Jubilee year of the Society, 1927.

Twenty years before the foundation of the Society an earlier scientific society had been formed in Cardiff and subsequently a second one, but both had ceased to exist by 1863. A museum collection begun by the first of these societies had, however, been maintained in being and later became the nucleus of the town Museum after the Cardiff Corporation adopted the Libraries Act, when the Free Library Committee appointed in December 1863 a sub-committee to "manage and arrange the Museum". Interest in this Museum appears to have lapsed, however, after the middle of 1865.

Meanwhile, Robert Drane, who had come to live in Cardiff in 1855 and had contributed both specimens and his active help to the Museum, was clearly dissatisfied with its lack of progress. So, it is recorded, he called together at No. 16 Queen Street two friends of like interests, Philip S. Robinson and R. Rhys Jones, and put to them his idea of forming a society to help the Museum.

As a result of their discussions others were consulted, the preliminary and inaugural meetings were held, and the Society was constituted with William Adams, C.E., F.G.S., President, William Taylor, M.D., Vice-President, and Philip S. Robinson, Honorary Secretary. At the end of the Society's first year, in September 1868, the membership stood at seventy-six, with three honorary members, one of whom was the then Marquess of Bute. Amongst the names of the seventy-six members, twenty-six are marked as being the original Promoters of the Society. Robert Drane became the first life-member.

The early meetings of the Society were held, by permission of the Corporation Library Committee, in the Museum room, and thus began the close association of the Society with the Cardiff Museum which was maintained until the establishment of the National Museum of Wales, with which institution it has always had an especially close connection and the most cordial relations. Many functions of the Society are held in the Museum; not least in

importance the now annual President's Reception. The use of the Court Room has been granted for the Society's Council Meetings, and the general meetings of the Society are held in the Reardon Smith lecture theatre. Many members of the Society serve, or have served, upon the Court of Governors (on which the Society has an appointed representative) and upon the Council and committees of the National Museum. Members of the staff of the Museum have always closely associated themselves with the activities of the Society over the years.

With University College, Cardiff, also, there have always been the most cordial relations; in particular, it may be mentioned that for almost three-quarters of a century there existed a very close association between the Department of Zoology and the Society's Biological and Geological Section. The Principal of the College and the Director of the National Museum are *ex-officio* members of the Council of the Society.

In its Memorial to the the Privy Council on 23rd March, 1905, urging the location of the National Museum at Cardiff, it was recorded that the Society was then the largest scientific society in Wales; that the foundation of the then Cardiff Museum had been due to the Society; and that its support and enlargement had been one of the main objects of the Society's existence. It can, therefore, justly be claimed that the ideals and labours of the Society during the years 1867-1907 came to fruition in the National Museum of Wales, founded by Royal Charter in 1907 and formally opened by the late King George V on 19th March, 1927, the year of the Cardiff Naturalists' Society's Diamond Jubilee.

While the establishment of the Museum was the keynote of the Society's early activities, as well, its original Rule 3 laid down the objective of "practical study of Natural History, Geology and the Physical Sciences", but as early as the first Presidential Address in March, 1868, we find Archaeology referred to, also, as one of those matters "our Society professes to become acquainted with". Apart from fieldwork and research by individual members, this objective has been pursued by the establishment of specialist Sections within the framework of the Society's activities, and as early as 1875 the first, a Geological Section, was formed. This and two other early Sections had relatively short lives, but in 1887 a Biological and Microscopical Section came into being which, five years later, was re-designated Biological and Geological, and under this title had a continuous existence for over eighty years. Branching from it in 1946 was formed a still strong and active Ornithological Section but, regrettably, in this era of specialisation, lack of support for the very broadly based nature of the parent Section caused it to fall into, it is to be hoped, no more than temporary abeyance in 1973. Archaeology has always been a major activity of the Society and this Section has been in existence since 1894, with only one early and very short period of quiescence: the Society and this Section have carried out many important excavations, notably those at the Roman fort, Gelligaer (1899-1900-1901), and at Breach Farm, near Cowbridge (1937). A Photographic Section came into being in 1911 and a Junior Section, covering all aspects of the Society's work, was formed in 1920. These four Sections are in active existence at the present time.

Annual volumes of *Transactions* have been published since the one for the first-year 1867-8, until the second world war. Since then two or more annual records have at times had to be condensed into one volume, so that the report of the centenary celebrations was published in volume XCIV; two volumes have appeared since.

In these *Transactions*, besides containing the records of meetings and other activities of the Society and its Sections, there have been published many papers by members based on original research, papers read to the Society and Sections, etc., as well as *Lists* of the

fauna and flora, and records of the geology, archaeology and history of the county of Glamorgan and the city of Cardiff. As an annexe to volume XCIV, and as its contribution to the Society's centenary, the Ornithological Section published a new *Birds of Glamorgan*, a fully bound volume which did justice to both the subject and the occasion. A supplemental revision was produced in 1974.

Originally the Society's area was conceived as only that part of Glamorgan eastwards of the Ogmere river, later altered to a landward radius of thirty miles from Cardiff, but, for many years, for all practical purposes it has regarded the whole of the county as within its purview; and this will continue, despite the division into three counties in 1974. As well, it has frequently gone much further afield, e.g., in the publication of the *Mammals of Breconshire* in vol. XXXIX and the *Birds of Monmouthshire* in vol. LXX. In this connection, too, it should not be forgotten that the first scientific records of Skomer Island (then Pembroke-shire), which was declared a National Nature Reserve, 1959-63, through the efforts of the then West Wales Field Society, were made by members of the Cardiff Naturalists' Society, in particular by Robert Drane. Drane first noted and recorded in the *Transactions*, vol. XXXIII, the island's unique vole, *Clethrionomys skomerensis*, and the safeguarding of the sea-bird colonies on Skomer and Grassholm was assured for very many years by the fact that these islands were leased by the late J. J. Neale, J.P., of Penarth, a member of the Society from 1885 until his death in 1919, and twice its President.

An annual record of meteorological observations made in the Society's district was a feature of the *Transactions* from the first volume in 1867-8 until 1949, when it was discontinued. Although the county lists of the flora and fauna, as originally published, are now somewhat out of date (except the *Birds of Glamorgan* already mentioned) they have been kept up-to-date by the annual publication in the *Transactions* of botanical, entomological and ornithological notes, and by the Glamorgan Annual Bird Report produced by the Ornithological Section. The Society initiated, and many members are currently taking an active part in, the compilation of a new *Flora of Glamorgan*, the original Flora having been published in the *Transactions*, vol. XXXIX-XLIII, 1906-1910.

The Society has, for a great many years, conducted an almost world-wide exchange arrangement with societies publishing like journals and has thereby acquired a library of upwards of 10,000 volumes, which is housed in the library of the National Museum of Wales, and is there available for reference.

The association of the Society with the British Association for the Advancement of Science began over eighty years ago when a delegate was sent to the meeting at York. The Society joined the Conference of Corresponding Societies when it was instituted in 1885 and has been represented by a delegate at the annual meeting ever since.

The present membership of the Society, including family members and members of Sections, is well over 1000. Its activities include general meetings during the winter, in the course of which lectures are delivered at members' meetings by members of the Society and others, and public lectures by persons of standing or note upon subjects germane to the Society's aims. Field meetings are held between spring and autumn. The Sections' activities are, broadly, on similar lines.

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