

PRESIDENTS OF

BUTESHIRE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

- 1905 — 1920 J. N. MARSHALL, M.D., Ch.B.
 1920 — 1922 Rev. W. GALBRAITH.
 1922 — 1925 Rev. J. M. McWILLIAM, B.A.
 1925 — 1928 A. G. BURGESS, M.A., D.Sc., F.R.S.E., F.E.I.S.
 1928 — 1932 JAMES SMITH, J.P.
 1932 — 1936 R. D. WHYTE, J.P.
 1936 — 1947 DOROTHY N. MARSHALL.
 1947 — 1949 J. V. THOMSON, M.B., Ch.B.
 1949 — 1951 MARY A. SMITH, M.A.
 1951 — 1953 JAMES D. MACKENZIE, M.A., B.Sc., LL.B.
 1953 — 1955 HAROLD HILL, A.M.I.M.E., F.R.S.A.
 1955 — DOROTHY N. MARSHALL, F.S.A.

THE BUTESHIRE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY (1905 - 1955)

HISTORICAL SURVEY

By MARY A. SMITH, M.A.

On December 12, 1905, The Buteshire Natural History Society held its first meeting in the New Public Halls, East Princes Street, Rothesay. As we trace the history of its expansion in this Jubilee Year of 1955, it is fitting that we should first pay tribute to the society from which it stemmed and whose characteristics it has striven to develop.

The Archaeological and Physical Society of Bute was founded in 1872 "to investigate and record the Antiquities and Physical History of the County of Bute, and to form a Museum and Library bearing on the objects of the Society and on Antiquities and Natural History in General."

The membership was to consist of "such persons as take an interest in the objects of the Society and are willing to contribute, either by paper or donations to the Museum and Library, to the Society's work."

A meeting place was soon found, Chapelhill House being leased from the Town Council in 1873, and there the Museum and Library were gradually built up. Notable among the donors was the then Marquess of Bute, Honorary President of the Society, who encouraged a further development by granting the site of the Old Battery (where the Indoor Baths now stands) for the building of an Aquarium. For a number of years this was a successful and well-managed concern.

A new venture was launched in 1874, when the Society bought a set of meteorological instruments.

These were set up at Barone Cottage, where for many years Mr James Kay recorded observations, which were published by the generosity of Lord Bute. A connection was established with the Scottish Meteorological Society, which continues to this day. By 1900 Mr Kay was able to draw up an abstract of the Rain-fall figures for one hundred years, owing to the fortunate survival of records kept by the proprietors of the local Cotton Mills.

Unfortunately, by the end of the century interest in the Society had waned. By death and removal from Rothesay, it lost many of its leading members, and ultimately resolved itself into a committee which confined its duties to the care of the Museum. Financial difficulties caused the members to take stock of the situation. What means could they devise to revive interest in the Society and preserve the collections and the valuable Meteorological Records?

The name of Dr. John Nairn Marshall becomes prominent at this time, and largely owing to his efforts and those of the admirable secretary, Adam D. Macbeth, the Museum Committee decided to appeal to citizens likely to lend their support. Here is an account of what happened:—

At Rothesay and within the Norman Stewart Institute, on the 24th day of November, 1905, Sir William McEwen of South Garrochty was called to preside over a meeting of local gentlemen invited to attend by the Museum Committee of the Archaeological and Physical Society of Bute.

Dr. John Nairn Marshall moved that the latter society be resuscitated under the name of the Bute-shire Natural History Society. This was seconded by Mr John McKay, Headmaster of Rothesay Public School, and unanimously adopted by the gentlemen present. The Marquess of Bute became Honorary President, a Committee was formed under the presidency of Dr. J. N. Marshall, and those members who

were admitted at this meeting, and before the end of 1905, rank as founder members.

To launch the new Society, a lecture was given by J. Russell Thomson, Esq., on the 12th December, when a draft constitution of the Society was submitted to those present and adopted. The objects are stated in Section II viz.

“ The Society is formed with the consent and approval of the remaining members of the Archaeological and Physical Society of Bute, for the purpose of taking over the Museum and Library formed by that Society and presently in the Museum Building, Chapelhill, Rothesay, with all obligations thereto attaching: rearranging and enlarging the collections therein, and especially the collections representative of the Natural History and Archaeology of the County of Bute: and for the purpose of encouraging the study of local Natural History, Geology, Meteorology, Archaeology, and cognate subjects.”

Shortly afterwards, in 1907, Lord Bute, having acquired the old Aquarium building, offered to house the Society's collections there, and also give space for a library and lecture-room. In addition, his Lordship paid the salaries of three curators, graduates who carried out research work as well as adding to the collections. Of these, R. C. Bruce Gardiner was later in charge of the Wood Preservation Society, while Messrs Coventry and L. P. W. Renouf were to occupy professorial chairs in Toronto and Cork respectively.

In these surroundings the Society put in good work, adding to scientific knowledge in general, and to the records of Bute. After the sale of the Aquarium building, accommodation in the Old Mansion House, High Street, was kindly given by the Marquess of Bute for some years in the early 1920s.

There is now, however, a spacious building in Stuart Street, ample for all local needs in the way of collections, with a central hall for a meeting place and library. This was built in 1926 by the Marquess of Bute, and generously handed over by his Lordship to

the Bute Natural History Society, with an endowment for the upkeep of the fabric.

Here, the Society continued its work of building up the collections, until in 1950 it was fortunate in securing a grant from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, whereby it was possible to have them rearranged in a modern manner. This work, which is fully described in a separate article, was carried out by J. G. Scott, of the Archaeological Department at Kelvingrove, and by Mrs Scott, with great skill and artistry.

The hall on the left-hand side of the building contains specimens of bird, animal, insect and aquatic life native to the island and its waters.

The Ornithological Section owes much to the members of the Bute family. The late Marquess was most active in adding to it, and the interest has been sustained by the present Marquess, to whom the Society is indebted for several interesting papers. It has had distinguished curators in the persons of the Rev. J. McWilliam and Lord David Stuart. At present, it is in the charge of Mr Charles Kirkwood, a keen student of bird life.

The first President of the Society, Dr. J. N. Marshall, had a wide range of interests, embracing zoology, botany and geology, but it is in the field of archaeology that his most original work in Bute was done. The late Marquess shared this enthusiasm and encouraged the excavations which revealed Bute to be a treasure-house of pre-historic remains. Dr. Marshall's mantle has fallen on his daughter, Miss Dorothy Marshall, curator of the Archaeological Section, who continues her father's work in Bute sites, when she is not in demand for excavations in North Africa, Cyprus or Jericho.

Together they are responsible for many of the relics shown in the hall on the right of the Museum

entrance, where also are housed recent by-gones and geological specimens.

In the geological section useful work was done in the early 1930s by a young Buteman, Archie Lamont, M.A., who was also responsible for a series of three lectures on Geological Subjects, and later, having gained his B.Sc. and Ph.D., for several lectures printed in the Society's Transactions.

In meteorology, the legacy of recordings left by the Archaeological and Physical Society of Bute has increased in value with the years. Mr Penney (at Glenburn) and later Messrs Davidson, Finlay, McPhail and McDermott (at Arden Craig) have piled up a mass of accurate records. In the past, these have proved useful to the Meteorological Society, the recordings are used at present by the Meteorological Office, and the Air Ministry has expressed approval of the instruments. Our Society record with gratitude the courtesy of the late Sir John Reid, and at the present time of Lord Colum Crichton-Stuart in making these records possible by housing the instruments in the gardens at Arden Craig.

Dr. Andrew J. Hall, who compiled the weather notes in the early days of the Society, used to comment on the lack of a sunshine recorder. This was remedied in 1913 when Lord Bute included this instrument in his generous gift of a complete new set. The Town Council kindly prepared a base for the recorder, and access to the site in the Tower of the former County Buildings (Castle Street) at their own expense. There the records were taken by Mr D. Dewar, and the report compiled by Mr R. D. Whyte.

Later, it was decided that better results might be obtained on higher ground and, for more than a decade now, the Recorder has been situated on the old Museum Building (now a dwelling-house). The cards are in the charge of the Rector of Rothesay Academy, who compiles the report. This brings the wheel full

cycle, for the Archaeological Society had the use of this school until they acquired Chapelhill House in 1873.

Under the heading of Cognate Subjects, Local History should surely rank high. In this connection, the Society has been fortunate in two of its secretaries, Adam D. Macbeth and Robert D. Whyte, who embodied the results of their researches in papers of great interest and value.

The former, as already noted, was a driving force in the old Archaeological, and gave impetus to the new Natural History Society. He has a permanent memorial in the bookplate which he designed — a drawing of the shell "*Pectens Varius*," with the name of the Society on a ribbon above the shell, and the words "*Scriptura Quoque Dei Erat*" on a ribbon below it.

His successor in office, R. D. Whyte, has been a notable personality in the Society's annals, first as a Botanist, and later as a Historian.

At the turn of the century, Bute boasted a flourishing Botanical Society. Its moving spirit was Mr J. Ballantyne, then manager of Rothesay Gas Works, who, according to the minutes, "had been instrumental in bringing the peculiarities of Bute as a rich Natural History field" before experts on the Continent, and had infected many local people with his enthusiasm for botanising. The name of R. D. Whyte occurs time and again in the records, as demonstrator, as lecturer and as leader of excursions. And when the Natural History Society of Glasgow held its Jubilee Celebrations in December, 1901, there was a delegate from the Bute Botanical Society, its Secretary, Mr R. D. Whyte.

The new Society in Bute, then, was fortunate in having such an enthusiast on the Botanical side, and a Herbarium was soon maintained.

During his secretaryship, which lasted nearly twenty years, he acquired special knowledge of the growth of the Society, and is the only founder member still actively concerned in providing material for lectures. The Royal Burgh of Rothesay, which he served as Town Clerk, rewarded him, on his retirement, for his interest in Burgh affairs past and present, by making him a Freeman of the Royal Burgh, a distinction which he shares with our Honorary President, the Marquess of Bute, and our Honorary Vice-Presidents, the Earl of Dumfries and Lord David Crichton-Stuart.

Others, especially local clergymen, have devoted themselves to studying various aspects of local history, and there is much to interest the student in the volumes of the transactions. Among these is a paper, prepared for the Scottish History Society in 1943 by the Marquess of Bute, on Isle of Bute Charters. This is included in Vol. XIII, by permission of that body, and gives information not generally available.

The records have been greatly enhanced by the contributions of the Photographic Section, founded in 1929 on the suggestion of Mr Duncan Dewar, and later in the charge of Messrs A. P. Hunter and N. McNeill.

Mr Hamilton Brown's slides of Old Rothesay have historical value, as also Miss Margaret McNab's coloured photograph of Rothesay Academy before the disastrous fire of March, 1954. The present club exhibits work from time to time, and the excellent studies by Mr Douglas Nicholson of the castles, chapels and standing stones of Bute, shown at the Jubilee Exhibition of August, 1955, should prove helpful to those interested in the antiquities of our island.

Here it may be appropriate to mention the beautifully prepared booklet containing notes on some archaeological sites in Bute, and photographs by Mr Whyte and Miss Marshall. This was published through

the generosity of Sir John Reid of Ardenraig on the occasion when the British Association for the Advancement of Science made an Excursion to Bute in 1928.

The cine-camera too, has been used by the present lanternist, Mr Edward Mackenzie, to record for future generations, the doings of the Natural History Society on its various outings.

Moreover, we are not strangers to the Television Screen: an interview with Miss Marshall and Mr W. Glen Aitken on the site of their excavations at St. Ninian's Chapel formed part of a programme about the Clyde area.

Mention of the Jubilee Exhibition of 1955 recalls activities not usually connected with Natural History Societies! On the suggestion of Miss Dorothy Marshall, a series of exhibitions has been held under the aegis of the Arts Council, affording an opportunity to local people of studying contemporary paintings in various media. Guide lecturers Mr Thom and Miss Daisy Anderson were also willing to give helpful criticism to local amateurs.

In 1953 the interest taken in these experiments inspired Mr Hamilton Brown to arrange a show of work done on the island. This embraced paintings by local amateurs, an interesting collection of Arts and Crafts practised by the W.R.I. institutes in Bute (sponsored by Mrs J. V. Thomson), and a few examples of the work of Rothesay-born artist, Leslie Hunter. For the first time, too, members of the Photographic Section were asked to exhibit their work.

For the Jubilee Exhibition, the Arts Council supplied a representative selection of the works of Leslie Hunter. The Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh, loaned valuable archaeological "finds" sent to them in earlier days from Bute. The Art Department of Rothesay Academy provided examples of the pupils' work, while the entrance hall glowed with Mr Robert

McFie's heraldic shields. The works of local artists, and the photographic exhibits already mentioned, completed an exhibition well worth offering to the public.

So much for what has been done in the past. What of the future? We hope that the Junior Branch may supply the answer to that.

It has always been the policy of the Society to stimulate interest among school children. Parties, under proper supervision, were allowed by his Lordship to visit the Aquarium. Later, the local doctors and headmasters, under the Convenership of Dr. Marshall, circulated sets of questions (costing one penny per set), and several months afterwards, one of these was used as an examination paper. Those who gained over 80% were rewarded with prizes of books or lenses at choice. The School Board of Rothesay recognised the educational advantages afforded in this and other ways, by making a grant each year until the scheme was discontinued.

Later on, Bute resumed this practice, being one of the first Education Authorities to contribute to Museums. Nowadays, Bute Education Committee, and the Town Council have continued the practice of giving grants, most welcome to a Society whose resources are so slender.

Some ten years ago, a more ambitious scheme was attempted. The Buteshire Junior Naturalists' Society was founded for the purpose of fostering interest in the world of outdoors, and of making acquaintance with the history of the island. Under the guidance of Miss Marshall, assisted by Mrs Reynolds, Miss Smith and Mr Hamilton Brown, the new venture met with immediate and enthusiastic support.

Each evening began with a "spot" competition, the objects coming from field, flood and shore, including specimens from the Museum cases.

Thereafter, the speaker for the evening followed, and over the years the "Juniors" have heard excellent talks on such widely varied subjects as "Bees," "Stars," "The Care of Pets," "The Monte Carlo Rally," "Fur-Trapping in Canada."

Whenever possible the talks have been illustrated by slides or films and even by gramophone records (Ludwig Koch's recordings of bird-song). The youngsters owe a great debt to Mr Edward Mackenzie, whose time and private collection of films have always been at their service.

In the Summer Term excursions have been made to St. Blane's Chapel, Dunagoil, the Dhu Loch Waterworks, the Bull Loch, the Cut, Inchmarnock, the Marine Biological Station at Millport and Toward Lighthouse. The "Juniors" have been fortunate in sharing, at second-hand, in Miss Marshall's experiences while excavating in Cyprus and Jericho, and in seeing a "dig" actually in progress at St. Ninian's Chapel. Some of the older ones were lucky enough to be in Mr Glen Aitken's team! High-lights were the nights when Mr Aitken showed models of the camps at Oakwood and Boncastle.

Last winter the study of bird-life received a new impetus when Mr Neil M. Dobbie took over during Miss Marshall's absence.

With so varied a programme, it was not surprising that the numbers have risen from 50 to 120, but this presents a problem. It makes the running of "spot" competitions nearly impossible, and confines the members to passive instead of active participation in the evening's programme. This limitation is not desirable and a solution of the difficulty is being sought.

The parent body expect, in time, to recruit members from the Juniors as they grow up. Unfortunately, a great many of them leave the island to

continue their studies, but perhaps it is not too much to hope that some of them may return as lecturers.

THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES

As far back as January 4, 1883, the Archaeological Society resolved that ladies should be eligible as associate members, but there is no sign that they took any active part in advancing scientific studies.

In 1906, however, Lord Bute deprecated the suggestion that they should be allowed to join the new Society as full members, on the grounds that they could not take part in practical work, and that their presence would restrict the scope of the lecturers.

Infiltration did not begin until 1920, when Mrs McWilliam became the first lady member in November, and Mrs Marshall the first lady life member in December! Innovations followed thick and fast; a lady lecturer (Miss Sheina Marshall) appeared on the syllabus in 1921: Miss Douglas (Infants' Mistress in the Academy) proposed a vote of thanks in 1922, and 1923 saw the election of ladies to the Council, while Miss Dorothy Marshall became librarian.

From this time onwards, Miss (now Dr.) Sheina Marshall, and Miss Dorothy Marshall contributed erudite papers in Marine Biology and Archaeology respectively, while Miss Jenny McLagan did practical work in replenishing the Botanical Cabinets, and giving a course of lectures in Botany.

In 1937 Miss Dorothy Marshall took the chair, her presidency lasting throughout the war, despite her efforts to retire from the post.

Because of Miss Marshall's unflagging enthusiasm, the long tradition of service rendered by the members of her family, and her distinction as an archaeologist,

the Council proposed her as a worthy president for this Jubilee Year of 1955, a choice warmly approved by the members at the Annual General Meeting.

This Survey would not be complete without mention of the officials who served the Society so faithfully. On Mr R. D. Whyte's resignation the offices of Secretary and Treasurer were divorced, the first being filled by Mr Thomas McDougall, member of an old Bute farming family, whose meticulously kept minutes are in themselves a valuable source of information. He was followed by Mr J. C. G. Macmillan, whose fine presence and rolling periods enlivened so many meetings, and for briefer periods, by Dr. Reynolds, Miss Marshall, W. Glen Aitken and the present secretary, Dr. Morrison.

The financial affairs passed into the capable hands of Mr J. Campbell, actuary, Clydesdale Bank, and are now in the charge of Mr Hugh Adam, his successor in both offices, and a careful guardian of our funds.

One cannot name all the persons who "take an interest in the objects of the Society and are willing to contribute . . . to the Society's work," but thanks in general terms may be afforded to librarians, to curators, and to those who have looked after the fabric of the building or bettered its amenities in any way.

As a Society, we have not only followed the ideals of the old "Archaeological," but also branched out in other directions. Yet there is one lesson we still might learn from its members. Being few in number, they were constantly being urged (if not actually compelled!) by their energetic secretary to prepare papers. Could we not emulate this co-operative spirit, on a smaller scale, perhaps, by taking a more active part in the meetings? Any piece of research, however small, is worth undertaking and reporting: things remembered by older people may be worth recording: observations in the field of Natural History may open the eyes of others to new interests.

In our Jubilee Celebrations we may reflect with pride on what has been accomplished, and resolve to give the Society a vigorous send-off on the way to its Centenary.