A History of the Society

The Northamptonshire Natural History Society was founded in 1876 by George Claridge Druce – a leading botanist of the day. The first meeting was held in the Council Chamber of the Guildhall in Northampton and was chaired by Lord Lilford, the great Victorian ornithologist. Lord Lilford went on to serve as President of the Society from 1876 to 1896.

From the very beginning, the Society welcomed naturalists and scientists from all walks of life. Social, Political and theological barriers were breached, and the membership included working men and women, clerics, businessmen, lawyers, doctors, architects and other of the "professional" class, and such eminent names as Earl Spencer, Charles Darwin, Thomas Huxley, Joseph Hooker, Nathaniel Rothschild, Sir Hereward Wake, V.D. Cary-Elwes and Lady Knightley of Fawsley.

The Society – now in its 144th year – continues to promote interest and research into natural history and allied sciences, especially relating to Northamptonshire, and consists of a number of Sections dealing with Archaeology and History, Astronomy, Geology, Natural Sciences and Photography. The Journal, which began in 1880, contains a wealth of information accrued since the formative years of the Victorian era, as many of the original members were active in their respective fields as early as the 1840s and 1850s.

First 100 years

THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY AND FIELD CLUB 1876 – 1976

ROLAND AGUTTER

Adequately to trace an exhaustive account of the Society's activities from its modest inception to the present day, and to include all the personnel involved, may well not be possible, but it is hoped that no major event or figure has been omitted. The task has been to sift through an enormous amount of material, and to glean information from, among others, the enthusiastic researches of the late Mr Paul Chapman, and from discussions with veteran members whose further investigations have made it possible to shape this story of ever-increasing interest in the wealth of natural marvels to be found in the County.

Commencing in 1880 the Society Journal records the major activities but the first four years are only recorded in back numbers of the Mercury. Mr Humfrey commenced the research into the published reports and this work was then taken up by Tom Barratt who took photographic copies.

Early in 1876 several Northamptonshire Natural History enthusiasts met at the Mechanic's Institute in Gold Street to discuss the possibility of forming a local society to further their engaging pursuits. Reference is to be found in the Mercury dated 4th March 1876:

'The Field Club Society are glad to learn that an effort is being made by a few gentlemen of the town who are lovers of country sights and sounds to establish a Natural and Field Club Society for the town of Northampton and neighbourhood. Such a Society is much to be desired and we hope it will be attended with every possible success.'

At a further meeting about a fortnight later in the Architectural Society's rooms, a provisional committee of seven, including Mr Druce and Rev R S Holmes, with Mr Jecks as chairman, resolved that the Society be launched as soon as 30 members be found, and rules were drawn up. The Rt Hon Lord Lilford, FLS, FZS had expressed his interest in the new venture and had accepted the invitation to the Presidency. He was to remain President until his death 20 years later.

Now, after a hundred years, these occasions are seen in perspective as events which were to become of much consequence to naturalists over a wide area. With reasonable certainty as to date, it may be said that the inaugural meeting of the Society was on 21st April 1876, in the Council Chamber at the Guildhall, but many years were to elapse before a permanent home was found. In his address Lord Lilford warned against allowing the newly-formed Society to degenerate into the kind of picnic club which he had witnessed elsewhere, and which died a natural death. He stressed the need for accurate observation and suggested that one must approach a study of the works of the Creator with an open mind, with thoughts purified and elevated-open to wonder. The interests of the Society would embrace botany, entomology, geology and ornithology, together with a study of such particular aspects of natural phenomena as might form a link between them. The meeting was well attended and Mr Jecks stated that there were 62 members. Seconded by Mr Manfield, he thanked Lord Lilford for his consent to be President.

Mention must now be made in some detail of the specific aims of the Society – 'to foster and encouragea love for the natural (and historical) features of the countryside'. It is not always clear when the different sections were added. There are many; where to begin?

The countryside walk or ramble, with or without the encouraging FT – full tea expected – has always had an enthusiastic following. The earliest recorded occasion was in 1876, when an invitation was received from Earl Spencer to visit Harlestone Firs. On a Monday in mid May a party started from West Bridge at three o'clock and proceeded across moors to Dallington. On the way Mr Hull and Mr Jecks drew attention to matters geological found in a disused quarry.

The Rev G Nicholson pointed out such few birds as were to be seen, including a nightingale! Botanical observations were noted by Mr Druce and included a long list of flowers and plants (with Latin names) which were observed on entry into Dallington village; some of them were rare and thought now perhaps to be extinct. The party ended up at the Fox and Hounds in Harlestone. Eight new members joined the Society.

A further excursion followed on 15th June, this time to Fawsley Park, at the invitation of Sir Rainald Knightley. Badby Woods were also included. Shells and fossils were found in gravel pits between Flore and Weedon. Considerable time was spent at an old owl roost, the old church and the Dower house. Many plants, some rare, were noted between Fawsley Ponds and Badby Woods. Some members searched, some were content merely to enjoy the surroundings. A pleasant walk to Daventry was followed by tea at the Peacock. The Rev G Nicholson chaired a meeting later, but matters which might have led to prolonged discussion were avoided at Mr M P Manfield's suggestion; hence, when ordered vehicles arrived, all were home again by 9pm.

Fourteen enthusiastic Geologists left by the 2.14 train on 10th August to examine, under the guidance of their President, Mr W Hill, the iron and limestone pits at Blisworth. Among the various phenomena were found an echinoderm, the palatal teeth of a shark, a good specimen of a zoophyte and a broken tooth of a species of lizard, the Teleosaurus.

Appropriately enough this first purely geological expedition was on a Thursday, the day sacred to Thor the Strong, the pounding and crushing god of Scandinavian mythology, of whom the 'Brethren

of the Hammer' may, in one sense perhaps be called the followers. Mr Jecks spoke of the glacial drift, and contributed an article published in the Mercury, on 26th August; the beautiful little crystalline and spiral shells can be carefully abstracted, not hammered out, in perfect condition. Mr Jecks pointed out that large blocks of ironstone are used for mantelpieces and other monumental work.

Members were off again in early September on a further journey of discovery. Some 40 to 50 travelled by train leaving Bridge Street at 9.38am with the tag 'Naturalists' pasted on the windows! The destination was Lilford Hall. Lord Lilford had much with which to entertain his guests. There were serpents, lizards, owls, all of whom showed marked displeasure at being disturbed, as did presumably the falcons and inmates of the aviaries, together with the laughing jackass who was provoked to give forth his inimitable cachinnation. After a tour round the grounds, members were fortified with an abundant repast.

Later in the month mainly geologists took part in what was to be the last ramble of the year. They went to pits on each side of Kingsthorpe Hollow. Sir John Robinson, Bart joined them and they walked across to Moulton, halting at a pit in Gypsy Lane, where Sir John pointed out the spindle tree. He took them to Moulton Hall, and later to a pit on his property where were found fossiliferous rocks, oolites. Sir John arranged for them to be sent to Mr Hull. Mr Jecks contributed an article on the palatal teeth found in the jaws of Lepidotus Chorastor, and claws of crab and lobster all discovered in a pit at Buttocks Booth. He must have been very knowledgeable in matters connected with geology, and a great help to all similarly minded students. A long treatise by him on Northampton ironstone (7th October 1876) was photographed for further reference.

'Northampton Naturalists Society' (sic) had a large attendance for its open meeting of the winter session on 14th October. As Lord Lilford was unable to be present, Sir John Robinson was voted to be chair. An inaugural address was given by the Rev J R Berkley, FLS. His commentaries on over 50 years study apparently warranted a paper so interesting and full of enlightened information on many varied aspects of nature, that it too, was photographed.

'Evolution is an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion during which the matter passes from an indefinite, incoherent, heterogeneity to a definite coherent homogeneity, and during which the retained motion undergoes a parallel transformation.' Perhaps the composer of that masterly piece of scientific jargon, Mr Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), who would appear to have anticipated Darwin, found that a more pellucid style of writing would be inadequate to enunciate the law of physical evolution. No doubt Mr Jecks helped to disentangle the bewildering muddle at the Architectural Society's rooms, when he read a paper on 'Darwinism' in November. A report appeared in the Mercury.

It must have given great satisfaction to the nucleus of 30 who founded the Society, to review all that they had accomplished in stimulating an interest in natural history within the year: no figures are available to show the increase in membership. All were fortunate to be able to achieve their aims and enrich their knowledge of the studies they professed by the encouragement of much complimentary talent.

Passing on to 1877: the 'Northampton Naturalists Club' continued to hold its monthly meetings, usually at a lecture hall in Gold Street.

In February members went to 'some' hall where there were exhibits of instruments particularly to botany, geology and entomology; also on display were live beetles, bird's eggs and plants. The occasion was not confined to science; it concluded in geniality, with a sing-song at the piano.

To commemorate the first year, a soiree was held in March, and an address given by the Rev. R Winterbottom. Much scientific apparatus, microscopes, etc., together with bird's eggs and lepidoptera from Whittlebury were to be seen. There were informative comments from Mr Druce and Mr Jecks. Later in the same month the Rev Wood, late curate of All Saints, lectured on coleoptera.

March also saw the first mention of the Photographic Section, which was to capture the enthusiasm of many members, until today it has become a separate source of delight and instruction in the art of many. Obviously the aesthetic appeal of the pastime is limitless; whether it be to show the grandeur of, say, a church building, the delicate tracery of a window etc., or to realise the fragile beauty of a spider's web. One of the pioneers for the Society in the photographic field was Mr Harry Manfield, and he exhibited a frame of views transferred to glass for the 'Magic Lantern'. In a discussion which followed, between among others the Rev Sanders, Mr Law and Mr J Katterns, it was the considered opinion that gaslight was not the best medium for their presentations!

There were pitfalls, as for instance the early ill-fated occasion when the photographic president at the time, with party, went to take a picture of a church interior. Exposure was calculated at 45 minutes. Meantime, all went for a walk around the village. On return, the president found that he had forgotten to remove the lens cap!

Further exploration during the summer included Duston meadows, long before the days of 'development', where botanists led by Mr Jecks found the mouse-tail, thought to be a doubtful native. Moth larvae were also taken. On return Rev Sanders read a paper on the protective resemblance in birds and insects.

Fungi – edible or not? The question exercises the minds of many; Mr Scrivens's talk at the opening meeting of the winter session in September at, the Council chamber of the Guildhall, doubtless did much to clarify the mind of many a puzzled member. Also during the month an outing by waggonette included Warkton, and Brigstock feast. On the way Mr Manfield took a photo of Geddington cross.

Entomologists with an urge to be able to particularize, as between one spider and another, and one beetle and another would almost certainly have had their queries resolved by, respectively, Canon Wormald in November, and Mr E Pressland in the following January. In between, Mr Beeby Thompson discussed in detail the early history of photography.

Lord Lilford presided at a soiree in February (1878) when the purport of an address by the Rev S J Sanders FGS, was to emphasise the needs of a society engaged in scientific pursuits. Apparently the talk had its humourous moments.

Mr Jecks was an outstanding personality. A man of wide culture and general knowledge, he devoted himself with boundless energy to the Society's aims from earliest days. He undertook the arduous duties of Secretary; and his informed mind proved invaluable in stimulating many, who otherwise seldom met in life's daily routine, to explore the wonders of nature. When it became known that he was leaving the district to reside in Somerset, a meeting was called in March, again at the Architectural Society's rooms in Gold Street. On behalf of members the Rev Sanders presented him with 'Five Handsome Volumes@, and the Rev G Nicholson supported the many expressions of esteem. All wished Mr Jecks happiness and prosperity for the future. It now became necessary to find another General Secretary, and at a further meeting, under the presidency of Lord Lilford held later in the month, Mr Druce was elected to the office. It was reported that there were now 100 members.

Interest had been shown in the characteristic branching of the trees of the County, their size, age, height and comparative length of life, and Mr Richard Scriven agreed to collate any information. Later in the autumn there were lectures by Mr Beeby Thompson and Mr Druce, on the relative physiological differences between the lower and higher species of animals, and Ranunculacea. Mr Druce also reported a gift of 20 volumes from Lord Lilford descriptive of some 20 Egyptian birds known, as the libis', storks mostly found in lakes and swamps. In early summer of 1879 much was learned from the Rev Sanders in a talk on the caves of Britain, as for instance at Brixham, which contained bones of bearss hyaenas, woolly elephants and other animals now extinct. Also during the year Sir Herewald Wake discoursed on entomology, Mr Scriven on common ferns, Rev Beasley on weather forecasts (it is not known whether or not they wore less or more reliable then, than today), and Mr Beeby Thompson on polarization of light; the last two respectively in January and February 1880.

The AGM in 1880 was held on 18th March, with Mr Scriven as Chairman. Sir Herewald Wake was appointed Vice-President in the stead of the Rev Wm Thornton, who had resigned. It was decided that in future the name of the Society should be 'Northamptonshire Natural History Society and Field Club', as now. Subscriptions were to be 10s annually, meetings to be 'ordinary' and 'sectional', the latter to be of not less than six members, and the AGM was to be held on the third Thursday in February. Sir Herewald Wake was chairman at a large attendance at a later meeting, which included Lord Lilford, and here, occurs the first mention of the Midland Union of Natural History Societies.

Mr Druce's impending resignation on leaving the town for Oxford was reported in late July.

In modern parlance, the highlight of 1880 was the first ever issue of the Journal. The Committee had been somewhat apprehensive as to whether or not they had sufficient material to warrant publication. Their fears were groundless: there had been much encouragement from Lord Lilford, Mr Druce, Mr Thompson and Mr Sharp FGS, FSA and there were enough relevant matter to serve for several years. Originally intended as a quarterly account, rising costs reduced it to half-yearly, and yet again to an annual publication as now. Any of the volumes is of absorbing interest, as, for instance the record in the first volume of the appearance of a golden eagle, so far from its normal breeding haunts as Northamptonshire. In Scotland it is protected by owners of deer forests and grouse shootings, but the one seen by a certain John Barratt in woods near Burghley House in October 1849 was not so defended, and he promptly shot it. What pertinent comments would James Fisher have offered!

In the Journal for 1881 appears a photograph of a tree at Titchmarsh, the Cedar of Lebanon. Its girth was 21 ft 9 in, and at three feet-21 ft 3 in. It was 67 ft high and the lower branches covered a circle of about 90 ft diameter. The Rev Littleton Powys, sometime rector of Titchmarsh, who died in 1842, recorded that this tree 'was carried there by one William Nichols', sometime parish clerk, 'who was about 20 and who judged it to be of that age when planted' – Mr Nichols died in January 18.14 at the 'age of 90; presumably the tree was some 157 years old. It is doubtful it was in fact 20 years old at the time he carried it? Perhaps 137 years would be more nearly correct.

The continued progress of the Society was reported at the AGM held in the Guildhall, 7th March 1882, though only 12 new members were elected during the year, and almost that number were lost for one reason or another. During the year there were excursions to places as far afield as Castleton in Derbyshire, and Belvoir Castle, Leicestershire. In numbers the parties consisted of 70 and 40 members respectively. All the sections were very active, and the geological provided a long and informative dissertation on the history of Coal. There were authoritative sources from Prof Hull LLD,

FRS, director of the geological survey of Ireland; from the head of the Botanical Dept. of the British Museum; the Mining Record Office, and the Royal Coal Commission, etc.

According to the ninth annual report in 1885 there were now 222 members, a net increase of 20 during the year. The annual subscription was still 10s. Congratulations upon the Society completing its first decade, from 7th March 1876, when Mr Jecks called the first meeting, came from many quarters. It was on a sound financial footing; and the most energetic Sections continued to be microscopical botanical and geological. The happenings of these early years have been chronicled in some detail, far they pointed the way to further expansion of the Society's aims, to additional Sections, etc., such as the archeological, in November 1896, which opened up exciting projects; might evidence of Saxon or Danish settlements be uncovered? The varied spheres of action, and extensive range of field studies have since been continued, together with the annual publication of the Journal which has faithfully recorded them.

Then, in September 1896, it was learned that Lord Lilford had died. A letter of condolence was sent to the Rt Hon Edward N R Powys; his letter of acknowledgement is attached to the Minutes, 10th September 1896. The Society owed much to Lord Lilford's zeal and dedication. For 20 years he had been ever ready to befriend members in their enthusiasm for anything natural historical, or to act as host on many occasions at his house, where there was always much to be seen. The Society sustained a sad loss.

It now became desirable to resolve the question of the future Presidency, and the office of Vice-President. These matters were the subject of discussion at three committee meetings, the first on 9th March 1897, when it was decided that the President should be elected annually, and the Vice-Presidents were asked to fill in the position in rotation. This was recommended by Mr Thompson at the AGM 12th March 1901. At a further meeting on 23rd February 1904, it was agreed to put forward at the AGM a resolution to the effect that henceforward the President should be placed on the list of Vice-Presidents for two years, rather than increase the list indefinitely, and this has since been followed.

At the turn of the century the Club had every reason to congratulate itself on the success of its endeavours to foster an interest in nature's wonders, the limitless variety of creation and phenomena, far beyond human imagination. The library was by now quite extensive; some regret was expressed that the books, available to all members, appeared to be largely unread. Then, too, the Journal had provided a mine of information: as one example, the writer, a mere typo in natural history studies, had no knowledge of the great English earthquake of 1884, until he was intrigued to read an account of it by Mr Markham, that about 9.17am on 22nd April the shock was felt in many counties, with some damage in Essex. In Northampton Mr Jos Jeffrey and his wife 'felt the room in which they were sitting "move to and fro" '. Others reported that lustres on vases jingled. Similar experiences befell residents in some 15 villages on the County, but without damage.

In the early years of this century, proposals for the exchange of publications were received from a number of other societies, such as Missouri Botanical Gardens, Nottingham Naturalists Society, an Archeological Society in USA, and the Instituto Geologico do Mexico, although the two latter invitations were declined. After exchanges a number of copies of the Journal were no longer available. Inevitably the question arose as to how many should be printed, and it was agreed to increase the annual publication to 250. Requests have since been received from the Smithsonian Institution, in 1913, the Cotswold Naturalists Field Club, 1914, Illinois University, 1915, the National Library of Wales, who asked that it be presented as a gift, in 1916; the list is endless. Annual publication is now in the region of 400.

In February of that year Sir Herewald Wake asked the Society to give its attention to exposure in Northampton Market of goldfinches for sale. Consequently the Society urged the Borough Council to exert its influence to ensure that all birds scheduled in an Act of 1880 be protected from exposure and sale, for whatever purpose. This was followed up in March, or in April 1925, when a letter to The Times was drafted in consultation with Sir Herewald.

'The Society had reached its age of discretion in 1897. It celebrated its Jubilee in 1926 for which year the Rt Hon the Earl Spencer was unanimously elected President; and a Committee meeting in May decided to hold a reception in the autumn and a conversation preceded by a dinner. Then would follow an exhibition to extend over jorne three or four days possibly in November at the Exhibition Room in Guildhall Road to illustrate progress over 50 years. Admission was to be free.'

It was clear that over a long period, the Society was glad to accept the hospitality of various friendly organisations. To browse through the Journals, and Minutes of the first 80 years, is, upon occasion to come across-'The Committee met for the first time in its new rooms at …', to try to sort out where, from one year to the next, nay, from one month to the next, is to become quite bemused. Thus, the first-ever meeting in 1876 at the Mechanics' Institute in Gold Street, was followed later in the year by one in the Council Chamber at the Guildhall. In 1878 there were meetings in the Architectural Society's rooms in Gold Street, and later at somewhere in Newland. Mr Parker Grey offered two rooms in College Street, in 1907, at an annual rental of £15. This was taken up, but apparently difficulties arose with Messrs Wallace Henderson were approached, and they found accommodation which consisted of two rooms with use of lavatory, for three years, at £3 pa; and so, on 4th October 1907, 'the committee met for the first time in its new rooms at 63 Abington Street'. By now they were used to being beset continually by one problem or another, even to the droll circumstance recorded in February 1909 –'Miss Timson, having expressed the wish to give up the keeping of the Society's keys, it was decided to make an offer of 5s a year, as an incentive to continue'! Then in the late '20s, a change was made to rooms in Bridge Street. Here it was necessary to climb a narrow staircase, from which, upon occasion, certain young people found it amusing to remove the electric light bulbs, and consequently the ascent was made in darkness. It all made for hazardous advemture.

Happily there was a change in fortune. In 1952 Mr and Mrs Humfrey provided a room free of charge, in Castilian Street, and this was followed in 1957 by the gift of the 'Humfrey Rooms', in Castilian Terrace. Both Mr and Mrs Humfrey had long been enthusiastic members she particularly in all matters relating to photography, and her husband in entomological studies. Entirely due to their generosity, the Society, at long last, had a home of its own. It had been 12 months previously that Mrs Humfrey first expressed a wish to provide suitable premises, or lecture hall, at the rear of 16 Castilian Street. The project was now an accomplished fact.

On Friday, 6th December 1957, a large assembly was addressed by the then President, Gordon Osborn, M.INST,M, who welcomed the Mayor, Councillor F P Saunders and the Mayoress of Northampton, and James Fisher, BA, MBOU. After Mrs Humfrey had spoken, she handed the key to Mr Fisher, who performed the opening ceremony. A prayer of dedication was offered by the Rev H E Ruddy, MA, FRAC; and his Worship the Mayor, followed by A E Tyrell, ACIS, AACCA, who was the Hon Secretary and Treasurer at that time, congratulated the Society on this memorable occasion, with every good wish for the future. After an interval for refreshments, James Fisher gave an illustrated lecture on St Kilda. He had long been captivated by the wildlife to be found in this island to the west of the Outer Hebrides, and his discourse outlined much of what it had to offer the naturalist. The Rt Hon Lord Henley, JP proposed a vote of thanks, seconded by Mr Humfrey. Both Mr and Mrs Humfrey were made life honorary vice-presidents.

There was now but one more need; a laboratory so that researches might be followed up and findings clarified and displayed in an attractive way.

Mr and Mrs Humfrey again generously offered to help, to transpose fancy to fact. The possibility of building an extension were investigated in 1966, with result that on 6th December 1967, exactly 10 years after the opening of the rooms, the Northamptonshire Natural History Society and Field Club found itself perhaps better equipped than any in the country. The rooms were packed that night. Amongst those present were the President Eric Robert, the President-Elect Vivian Leleux, and Vice-President Messrs E L Edens, Paul Chapman and H G James together with the Secretary Winifred Cowley, and the Treasurer F M Edwards. Also on the platform were James Fisher and Christopher Marler. An autograph book containing photographs of the occasion and the signatures of some 140 members, was presented to Mr and Mrs Humfrey, with sincere thanks and expressions of warm regards and esteem. After inspection of the laboratory, the keys were given to Mr N Pearce, Chairman of the Trustees. An interval for refreshments followed, and then Mr Christopher Marler exhibited a film 'In search of animals and birds'. The evening concluded with a vote of thanks by Mr Gordon Osborn.

The Society has been fortunate in receiving a number of valuable donations and bequests over the years. Some of these have been carefully recorded in the minutes of committee meetings while other donations just as valuable have been quietly donated and no records survive at all. Gifts in recent years of special scientific interest have included The J W Dickens bequest of £250 for the purchase of laboratory equipment, the collection of bird's eggs and also of Lepidotera from the late W R Spencer and the gift of a very good geological collection from Mr Harrison. A notable collection still being added to is the very fine collection of sands which are housed in a cabinet presented by Gordon Osborn in memory of his wife Dora.

It remains but to say that since composing this brief account, the Society has suffered the grievous death of Mr Stuart Humfrey, on 9th June 1975. To know Stuart was to be enriched. His unfailing good humour always put you at your ease, no matter how irrational your personal foibles. Doubless this bonhomie was largely due to two circumstances above all others: his lineage; there were five generations of Humfreys, rectors of Thorpe Mandeville, extending over some 200 years; and his chance meeting with the ophthalmic surgeon Mr E H Harries-Jones, whose practice he joined, and whose daughter Lysbeth, he married. It was a happy union. His prowess in sport, particularly cricket and golf, and his knowledge of entomology have been elsewhere. All members will wish to extend their sympathy to his widow and family; there are many who will feel a deep sense of personal loss.

The writer wishes to express their thanks to all those members, too numerous to mention by name, who have delved into records, the Journal and Minutes, and rendered so much assistance to make clear the Society's endeavours to show the infinite wonders of the Creator.

Early Years

The History of the Society – The Early Years

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JOAN WAKE FSA, FRHISTS.

'In 1876' wrote the late Mr George Claridge Druce, in the introduction of his Flora of Northamptonshire, 'we founded the Northamptonshire Natural History Society.' The banding of people together into clubs and societies in the pursuit of particular objects, be they of a practical, sporting, religious or academic nature, is certainly a widespread and deeply rooted habit in this country; whether it be equally so on the Continent I do not know. In the Middle Ages we in England had our religious and craft guilds, our city companies. In the reign of Charles II, with the dawn of scientific studies came the birth of the Royal Society. The Society of Antiquaries was found in 1717, the Linnaean Society in 1788, the Geological Society in 1807, the Zoological Society in 1828 and the Royal Geographical Society in 1830, but it was not until the 19th century that the widespread interest in science and the advancement of learning generally led to a great flowering of local Societies of all kinds. These, though sometimes regional, developed most naturally and most successfully on a county basis.

Before the 19th century the provincial amateur of science or history worked in complete or comparative isolation. He may have had friends, followers and helpers, as had the first Lord Hatton of Kirby Hall in the 17th century, the Rev. John Morton and John Bridges, the 18th century historians of Northamptonshire, but there was then no organised team-work, there were no periodical meetings for discussion, no journals of proceedings, as there were to be in later days. The first county scientific society seems to have been the Royal Geological Society of Cornwall, founded in 1814. The Yorkshire Philosophical Society was founded in 1822 and Worcestershire followed with a Natural History Society in 1833. In addition to these, 23 local societies were founded in the first half of the century. Of the total number, 19 were based on towns, one was regional and only six were on a county basis. In the second half of the century, there was a great increase in the number of county societies, owing largely to the real enthusiasm for knowledge which was such a prominent feature of the period. Other factors no doubt were the abundance of books and the cheapness of printing, the invention of photography and the coming of the railways, which last development favoured the enlargement of the activities of local organisations to the area of the county.

But the fundamental cause of all this ferment of activity was the rapid advance of science and, above all, perhaps, the work of Charles Darwin, his discoveries and his theories which caused a revolution in the attitude of man to nature. The atmosphere of enthusiasm and even excitement in the early days of the Northamptonshire Society is still reflected in the pages of its Journal. Science was not so highly specialised or so abstruse as it is today, and everyone was encouraged to lend a hand.

It was five years after the publication of The Descent of Man and 17 after The Origin of Species had appeared, that in 1876 the Northamptonshire Natural History Society was founded by George Claridge Druce, then a chemist's assistant in the still existing firm of Philadelphus Jeyes, Northampton. 'The Society' wrote Druce many years later (Flora of Northamptonshire p xxxii), 'did much to break down religious and class distinctions in the town and led to a considerable interest being taken in the Natural Sciences'. Druce had previously founded the Northampton Pharmaceutical Association, which had carried out some useful botanical work. The success of the latter body suggested the formation of a Society 'to develop the scientific investigation of the local fauna and flora, the geology, meterology, and even the antiquarian lore of the County'.

Mr Druce persuaded his friend Mr Charles Jecks, of Northampton, a gentleman of independent means', a Unitarian, a student of geology, and an enthusiastic follower of Darwin, to become the first honorary secretary. The promoters of the enterprise were up against difficulties which sound almost incredible to those of the present generation, and which certainly did not exist when the Northamptonshire Record Society was founded 40 years later. The acuteness of the political division between Conservatives and Liberals was intense; there was also great bitterness between orthodox

Christians on the one side and agnostics and downright atheists on the other, whereas inside the Christian fold sectarian antagonisms were fierce. The Victorians had convictions and held them with a moral fervour little to be observed today. In addition to these deep political and religious cleavages across the face of English society, almost unbridgeable class distinction held unquestioned sway……!

It was deemed impossible to make a start with the new enterprise until the official approval of the churches had been obtained. Druce, who evidently had a way with him, was therefore commissioned to approach the clerical world. His first capture was the Rev S J W (afterwards Canon) Sanders, headmaster of Northampton Grammar School, and, according to Druce 'a most lovable man'. The Baptist minister, two Congregational ministers, and a Roman Catholic priest were then successfully landed by the artful chemist.

Having gathered all these very varied fish into his net, a preliminary meeting was held to draw up the rules of the new Society. There was some discussion as to what subjects were included under the term 'Natural History', and it was decided 'not to extend our researches into antiquarian and archaeological subjects'. It was also resolved, on the proposition of Mr Jecks, that the Society should be on a non-sectarian basis, but when he wished to exact from every member a declaration of belief in Darwin's theory of the descent of man, a shout of laughter greeted his proposal.

The question of the President then had to be settled. As one of the most distinguished ornithologists in the Country at that time was a Northamptonshire man, the choice was an obvious one. Lord Lilford accepted the invitation, and from that day until his death, took the liveliest interest in the Society and all its doings. Before the first meeting, Mr Druce, who was evidently a man of great initiative, had approached a number of the foremost scientists in the Country, and several of these agreed to become honorary members, so that when the first roll of membership was published, among the names were those of Sir Joseph Hooker and the Rev Miles Berkeley, the eminent botanists (Mr Berkeley was at that time Vicar of Sibbertoft in the County), Sir John Lubbook, Professors Owen and Huxley, and even that of the great Charles Darwin himself.

The opening meeting was held in the Council Chamber of the recently built Town Hall at Northampton (The birthplace also of the Record Society) Lord Lilford presided and remarked in his speech that he was glad to see the special rule encouraging working men to join. The Society in fact was an experiment in organised good fellowship in pursuit of a common cause.

For the first year or two the Society depended on the local press for reports of its proceedings, and well did it respond. In 1877 Mr Druce's first paper on the Flora of Northamptonshire was printed in extenso in the Northampton Mercury. The Journal of the Midland Union of Natural History Societies also circulated among the members. To this Union in 1880 there belonged 24 societies, some calling themselves philosophical, others literary and scientific, two brought ' Archaeological' into their titles and one 'Antiquarian', but the words 'Natural History' came into most of them. The counties represented were Bedfordshire, Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Derbyshire, Shropshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Northamptonshire, the last being represented also by the Peterborough Natural History and Scientific Society as well as Northants Natural History Society.

The first outstanding event in the History of the Society was the Annual Meeting of this Midland Union at Northampton in 1880. The thing was done in style; it was a two days event and must have created a considerable stir in the town. Twenty-four visiting Societies were represented. There was an official reception followed by a Great Meeting at the Town Hall and a Meat Tea at the Plough Hotel. A telegram, instigated, one suspects, by the resourceful Mr Druce, was received from the

Meterological Office, forecasting ‘easterly breezes, fine and warmer’. There were exhibitions of scientific objects including a phonograph (the precursor of the gramophone); and there were excursions for the geologists, botanists and the antiquaries, for, in spite of resolutions to the contrary, the Society could not restrain its interest in archaeological matters.

The proceedings, marked throughout by great zest and enthusiasm, ended with what some called a Soiree and others a Conversatione, again at the Town Hall, at which the sub-committee arranged for ‘Refreshments under the Organ’. This great reunion was enthusiastically reported by the Northampton Press. The chairman at the united meeting of all the Societies which was the central event of the occasion, was Sir Herewald Wake of Courteenhall, then a young man of 27 and a keen naturalist. Lord Lilford, some 20 years his senior, was also present. A romantically minded journalist, well versed no doubt, in his Charles Kingsley, observing them as they sat side by side, described by Sir Herewald as ‘a young stalwart man, with the square face, rounded head, and cool resolute expression of an old Saxon warrior’, and Lord Lilford as ‘with the longer features, quick nervous temperament, and genial countenance of the modern English nobleman’.

In 1879 the Society decided to embark on the publication of its own Journal. Never has a decision been more amply justified, for in the course of the next 20 years there appeared in its pages the first essays of several men whose later works have made a solid and by no means negligible contribution to the scientific literature of this country. Let us glance at the first number which appeared in 1881. The first article, ‘Notes on the Birds of Northamptonshire’, is appropriately by the President, Lord Lilford, who contributed regularly until his death 16 years later. Further articles by Beeby Thompson and G C Druce, both local men, compel one to the well-worn edict, ‘there were giants on the earth in those days’. Certainly it would be hard to find another County Society with a membership of such eminent authorities in the ornithological, geological and botanical fields. The volume is illustrated, not by half-tone blocks or lithographs, by incredibly beautiful photographic prints, stuck on to the pages from negatives made by members of the Society. The most beautiful of these perhaps, is the picture of ‘Queen Bess’s Lime Tree’ at Burghley House, which was blown down in the following year, from a negative by Mr R G Scriven. The sharpness, tone, and colour of these illustrations is still wonderfully preserved after more than 70 years. The lesser lights of the Society also had good things to contribute to this first number. There is, for example, a list of Northamptonshire butterflies by Sir Herewald Wake, and a delightful review of Miss Ormerod’s edition of Miss Moldsworth’s Cobham Journals by the Rev. T O Beasley, Rector of Dallington. Mr Beasley’s chief scientific interest was meteorology; in the article here it referred to, he was some striking remarks to make on the inter-relation of scientific studies. ‘The Cobham Journals’, he wrote, ‘show plainly that the noble science of meteorology is very closely allied to those of botany and entomology, and …..has many interesting points of contact with ornithology, geology and physical geography. And it will be admitted,’ he adds, ‘that to study ant branch of knowledge to any real purpose, we must make ourselves familiar with those which are allied to it’.

But the Society had already realised the truth of these remarks and there were in being by 1879, ornithological, entomological, geological, meteorological and botanical sections with microscopic and photographic sections added, to aid the work of others.

At the end of the first 20 years of its existence, much valuable work had been accomplished. Lord Lilford had contributed over 50 papers on the birds of Northamptonshire, Mr Druce 55 papers on its flora, Mr H N Dixon, also an eminent botanist, had made 40 contributions especially on his own subject of mosses, and Mr Beeby Thompson 42 articles on geology. Lord Lilford’s series of articles were eventually published in two handsome illustrated volumes as The Birds of Northamptonshire, and Mr Druce’s appeared in revised form and as late as 1930 in that most delightful and unusual of

scientific volumes, The Flora of Northamptonshire. Sad to say, Mr Beeby Thompson's papers have never appeared in a separate volume. After his death all his notes and memoranda were sent under the terms of his will, to the Public Library at Northampton, where they have since been used as a mine of information by generations of students. To the uninitiated his early articles are somewhat dry reading, but his interests broadened considerably as life went on, and his later articles on the Springs and Rivers of Northamptonshire are full of folklore and local history, and as interesting as anything could be. When the plans were laid out for the Victoria History of the County, Mr Beeby Thompson was entrusted with the geological section, while Mr Druce and Mr Dixon took charge of the botany. This volume appeared just half a century ago.

Excellent friends as the members of the Society were with one another, controversy arose at times. Mr Dixon had read a paper in defence of the dowser; Mr Beeby Thompson made a very polite but devastating reply. The folly of the expert who attempts to dogmatise in fields other than his own, was well illustrated by this amusing little passage of arms.

Though the early vigour and sustained quality of the Society's work undoubtedly depended chiefly on these four men, Lord Lilford, G C Druce, Beeby Thompson and H N Dixon, there were others in the inner circle who gave notable help in laying its foundations. Mr W D Crick, for example, a Fellow of the Geological Society, who corresponded with Darwin, contributed papers on our molluscs. From 1884, Major C A Markham was in charge of the meteorological section; MR R O Scriven of Castle Ashby and Mr Harry Manfield, son of Sir Philip Manfield, founder of the famous firm of Manfield and Sons, Northampton, were both photographers of great distinction, using the craft as the hand-maid of science and showing that, while scouring valuable scientific records, artistic results of the highest quality could be achieved. Mr Scriven's photographs of famous trees of the County with the accompanying notes are among the most attractive contributions to the early journals. Mr Scriven was head of the forestry department on the Castle Ashby estate were his father and grandfather had been agents.

In addition to those above-mentioned, members of the well-known local families of Eunson, Terry Bostock, Shoosmith, Cooper, Brice, Hensman, Holding, Hall, Law, Tomalin, Birdsall, Wells, Knight, Phipps, Pettit and Rodhouse wore a great strength to the Society in that early period. Mr T C George, for many years curator of Northampton Museum, who comes into the picture towards the end of it, was for long one of the most active spirits of the archaeological section, eventually founded in 1897. The medical profession was well represented by Doctors Barr and Buszard. Other honoured names from the County, too, are to be found on the early roll, including Mr Valentine Cary-Elwes, Squire of Great Billing, the Duke of Grafton, Sir Charles Isham of Lamport, Sir Rainald (afterwards Lord) Knightley of Fawsley and Mr H O Nethercote of Moulton Grange.

Except for Lord Lilford, who was 43m the original founders of the Society were all in their 20s – Druce was 26, Beeby Thompson, 27, Wake and Dixon about the same age. Now they have all passed away. Lord Lilford died in 1895, my father in 1916, Mr Beeby Thompson in 1931 at the age of 82, Mr Druce a year later at 81, Mr Dixon at the age of 83, in 1944. What were these men like who certainly did something for the advancement of knowledge, and much for the increase of a general interest in science among the Northamptonshire public? It may be of interest if I conclude this paper with some biological details and a few personal reminiscences of these men, of whom all except one were personally known to me.

LORD LILFORD

My father rented Cotterstock Hall for the winter of 1893-94, which bought us within reach of Lilford. One memorable day he took my small sister and myself over there in our one-horse brougham. We were taken up to Lord Lilford's room in a lift (the first I had ever been in), and there, in his wheeled chair, for he had long been a cripple from rheumatic gout, sat an old man, as I thought him, with fluffy white hair and beard. On his writing table beside him, wore two black and white birds in a cage. He spoke to us kindly, but we were almost speechless with shyness, and relieved when my father then took us to see the aviaries and the Spanish bear in the backyard. Then, to his great delight, the Lammergeier eagle or Bearded Vulture, flew over our heads, and settling on a chimney pot, spread out its wings at full stretch for our especial benefit. Lord Lilford wrote about these vultures in the Natural History Society Journal for 1894. (Vol. VIII, p.88.) 'The sight of these huge birds' he said, 'soaring about the place, generally pursued by a cloud of rooks, was certainly unique in England, and afforded to me, who am well-acquainted with the Lammargeier in its native haunts, a constant source of interest and pleasant memories of localities that are still to a great extent unspoiled by man. These birds of mine were very tame and perfectly harmless, indeed, with the exception of a few playful attacks on trousers, gaiters, petticoats and boots, I have never heard of any malice on their part towards any living creature.'

Lord Lilford was born in 1833, and educated at Harrow and Oxford, at both of which places he kept a private menagerie. His devotion to ornithology lasted for the rest of his life, and he paid many visits to Spain and the Mediterranean in pursuit of his favourite study. His aviaries at Lilford were far famed, both in his lifetime and in that of his son. In addition to many papers in the scientific journals and his two volume book on Northamptonshire birds he was the author of a work on Birds of the British Islands, which was published after his death in seven volumes.

Lord Lilford wrote as a sportsman as well as a naturalist and his leisurely discursive accounts of our commonest birds are full of interest and incidentally throw light on the social habits and conditions at the time. In his first article for the Society he deprecated 'the mania for the indiscriminate slaughter of every so called rare bird', and welcomed the new taste for ornithological observation, but had many sad murders to record in the following 16 years. He had correspondents who sent him the results of their observations from all over the County. In Volume VIII of the Journal (p.89) he wrote of the Little Owl, now common to many counties, which he introduced into this country:

'Whilst on the subject of owls, I may add that for several years past I have annually set at liberty a considerable number of the Little Owl, properly so called, Athene noctua, from Holland, and that several pairs of these most amusing birds have nested and reared broods in the neighbourhood of Lilford…..I trust that I have now fully succeeded in establishing it as a Northamptonshire bird, and earnestly entreated all present who may have an excellent mouse-catchers, and very bad neighbours to young sparrows in their nests, therefore valuable friends to farmers and gardeners…..Beside their taste for mice, they are very efficient in the destruction of cockroaches and other beetles'.

The owls, as he says in the same paper, were his favourite birds. Whether the Little Owl has been a good friend to the nightingale is a controversial matter which it would be inappropriate to pursue here.

Lord Lilford on several occasions entertained the members of the Natural History Society at Lilford. On his death (17th June 1896) he was described in the obituary notice of him in the Journal as 'its best friend' (IX, 53).

MR BEEBY THOMPSON

Beeby Thompson, who was described after his death (on 12th December 1931) as 'Northamptonshire's most distinguished scientist and the oldest and most assiduous member of the Natural History Society', was never accorded the honour really due to him in his own county. He was, in truth, a great scientist, and it perhaps not too late to hope that his collected papers and unprinted material on the geology of Northamptonshire will be published in volume form.

Thompson was born in 1849. His parents apprenticed him to a music store; he then tried his hand at journalism, but it was not until he had attended an evening science class at Northampton that he discovered his true vocation. After working as an assistant master there, he became a science master at Truro, returning later to Northampton as the first head master of the Northampton School of Science and Technology (since developed into a College). Here he was a brilliant success and with far-sighted vision started classes in the Principles of Agriculture and in Boot and Shoe Manufacture, thus laying the foundations of 'the fine edifice of scientific technical instruction the youth of our County enjoy today'.

He resigned in 1894 to become a professional geologist of worldwide reputation. He did much work for oil prospecting firms in many countries, and for local authorities at home in search of water supplies. His interest in the Society never diminished and for many years the Journal had the inestimable advantage of his editorship. His knowledge of the County was profound; much of it had explored with his wife in a tandem bicycle. I saw him last in his old age at home – a most modest and unassuming home, it struck me, for such an eminent man-when ill health compelled him to stay indoors. I had gone to discuss with him a pamphlet I had just written on why the main line of the railway missed Northampton; he was kindness itself, and gave me helpful criticism. The topic led him to speak-rather sadly, as I thought of the mass of his own unpublished work, now at the Public Library. The visit of mine cannot have been long before his death. 'At the last,' says the writer of his obituary notice, 'conscious that his life's work was finished, he gladly welcomed the call….He was a great hearted man.'

MR HUGH NEVILLE DIXON

Early in the 1880s MR H N Dixon came to Northampton as an Assistant Master at the School for the Deaf and Dumb, of which he subsequently became Headmaster. He was the son of the Rev R W Dixon and was born in 1861 at Wickham Bishops in Essex. He joined the Natural History Society in 1883 and soon began to write for the Journal; he was President of the Botanical Section for over 50 years and from 1888 to 1933 was Hon. Secretary of the Society.

Dixon was the author of The Student's Handbook on British Mosses (1896) which ran into several editions. He also wrote on British, European and New Zealand mosses, and became an authority of worldwide reputation on his subject. For many years the naming of new varieties collected by botanical expeditions was entrusted to him. He was a cultivated man of charming character and was always ready to make his knowledge accessible in the friendliest way to all how came to consult him. He died on 9th May 1944, and his collection of mosses is now at the Natural History Museum in London.

SIR HEREWALD WAKE

My father was born at Southampton in 1852. He was an ardent naturalist from boyhood. His schooldays were before the cult of organised games had come in, and while he was at Eton he used

to wander off by himself, sometimes for the whole day, collecting butterflies or watching birds. In spite of his flair for natural history, he lacked the staying power to do the arduous work of a Druce or a Lilford, or to ground himself deeply in the science of his subject, but he had a keen intelligence, highly-developed powers of observation, a wonderful joy and delight in the works of nature and a profoundly religious attitude towards them. He was above all a countryman and was never really happy away from Courteenhall where he went to live in 1875, the year of his marriage.

A walk or a drive in the country with him, or, above all, a day's canoeing as children on a fine day in May or early June along the River Ouse or its tributary the Tove, was a wonderful experience. No notice was given; he would march into the schoolroom and tell us to get ready. Bang would go the lesson books and out we would rush. I can see his broad-shouldered figure now, with light grey flannel coat and trousers; instead of a waistcoat a broad red cummerbund; and on his head, a grey pith sun-helmet. Equipped with a luncheon basket, off we used to drive in the dog-cart, my father, my younger sister and myself, starting operations at either Bozenham or Cosgrove Mill. Then down the stream we would quietly paddle, between the rushes and the meadow-sweet and yellow flags, the ragged robin and the pollard willows, watching the flight of a distant heron or listening to the song of the warblers, the splash of a water-rat, or the scuffle of a frightened moorhen as we rounded a bend. For we stopped chattering on these occasions, when we saw the world from an entirely different point of view, richly enjoying every moment of the happy day. One year we happened for our expedition on the day on which peace was declared after the haymakers were abroad, and as we slowly made our way along the Tove, from every church tower and bells were pealing across the summer meadows.

My father could recognise the song or flight of every bird, he knew the name of every plant and insect, and he delighted in awakening in his children something of his own interest in the teeming life of the country. He would not allow us to shudder or be frightened at spiders or noxious insects, but would catch a specimen and show us how marvellously it was made. One day while we were having tea in the library, he casually pulled out of his pocket a grass snake, quite two foot long, which he had picked up while out shooting that day. The reptile was kept as a pet in the conservatory, and it ainuabd. Him to put it on the dining room table after luncheon, to the horror of some of our guests. He shred Lord Lilford's dislike of the fashion then prevalent of decorating ladies' hats with feathers, and woo to any lady who came to the house adorned with osprey plumes. He had been and never forgotten a flight of osprey in Florida as a young man.

Though he bought all Charles Darwin's works, had them beautifully bound by Messrs. Birdsall and put them on his library shelves, my father did not, like Mr Ketch, accept the Darwinian theory of the descent of man from the ape. He wrote satirical verses about it, and composed and illustrated in watercolour, a story called 'Mr Walker's Tour through Central Africa' – a sort of skit on Livingstone's journeys which culminated in the discovery of a quite revolting half man, half monkey which turned out to be the Missing Link in the chain of evidence. His library was well furnished with the works of Sowerby, Anne Pratt, the Rev J Wood, and other writers on his favourite subject.

Sir Herewald went further in the study of entomology than in any other branch of natural history, and was President of the Entomological Section from the beginning in 1876, and on Lord Lilford's death in 1895, succeeded him as President of the Society. The papers which he contributed to the Journal dealt with other subjects in addition to entomology If not, as he admitted, deeply scientific, his lecturer was always, I venture to think, interesting, original and usually amusing.

There is a record in the local newspaper of his first paper to the Society, read at the beginning of the winter session of 1879. It was the disastrous summer of that year which started the agricultural

depression and the ruin of the landowners. The Hymenoptera, he said, had a bad time. After touching on the Coleoptera he settled down to a discussion of the Diptera, illustrated by his own drawings, and ended by saying:

'The more one knew of the science of entomology, which he recommended to the botanists because botany and entomology, like bread and butter, went well together, the more he would come to appreciate the wonderful greatness of the Creator, and to feel himself but dabbler on the shores of the vast ocean of knowledge.'

That reverent, attitude to the works of nature he maintained throughout his life.

In subsequent years he read on 'Flowers' (Journal, Vol III, p.325), 'Instinct and Reason' (IV, 153), 'Our Friends the Wasps' (VII, 272), 'On the Wing' (on the flight of birds and insects)(X, 1115), and 'Foxes' (XIV, 182)-ME; last paper.

In 'Instinct and Reason' he attacked the materialism to which, in his view, Darwin's theory of Evolution inevitably led. 'The dividing line between instinct and reason, 'he concluded, 'sets a wide chasm between man and the lower animals which no theory yet advanced has been able to bridge.' In his short paper on 'Flowers', he drew attention to the aesthetic faculty as evidence of the existence of the Creator and of the soul of man. In 'On the Wing' written in 1898, he discussed the possibility of human flight. 'Last year, said he, 'Herr Andree mounted into the air in his balloon to go in search of the North Pole. Now, alas! as was expected would be the case, fruitless searches are being made for Herr Andree…. I do not myself think that any of us now alive will ever be able to make return tickets to let us say, Timbuctoo, by an aerial liner.' Yet he firmly believed in the possibility of flying, and lived to see the early stages of the aeroplane.

In Sir Herewald the naturalist and the sportsman were continually at war, as I think they must have been also in Lord Lilford. But custom, convention, and the hunting instincts in homo-sapiens are very strong. Not long before his death, my father told me he then got little or no enjoyment out of killing birds and animals, and I think if he had been born 50 years later he would have pursued his game with a camera instead of a gun. However, in early life before ill-health prevented, he had been a great devotee of the chase, and no one in the Grafton or Pytchley Hunts rode straighter to hounds than he. It was therefore inevitable that in his paper on 'Foxes', the last read to the Society (1908), he should touch on his favourite sport. Before doing this, as indicated in the title of his address, he pointed out that each fox was as distinct from all other foxes as is every individual human being from all others; he then proceeded to give some very interesting results of his first-hand observation of their habits. Then he came to fox-hunting, and of course the question of cruelty could be avoided. He contented himself with quoting Frank Beers, the famous Grafton huntsman, who remarked, when challenged on this question:

'We know we like it, And we know the hounds like it, And we know the horses like it, And we don't, know the fox don't like it!' Sir Herewald then proceeded to defend on economic hunting and other grounds, and concluded:

'Hunting gives more healthy amusement and more' pleasure, both directly and indirectly, than any other sport……Those who abuse fox-hunting remind one of the fox who said the grapes were sour because they were out of his reach. Talking of the foxes of fable, I am rather like the fox who lost his brush, myself, because I have not been able to hunt for years past; but unlike him, so far from decrying the sport, I still maintain that a good day's fox-hunting is a foretaste of heaven.'

He then broke into verse.

'Tis pitiable to contemplate

Our poor successors' future fate

What time the foolish human race

Have finally thrown up the chase.

For they will never realise

True worth of hands and cars and eyes,

Nor will they know how well a steed

Can answer call on pluck and speed.

When at such pass they have arrived

'Twere best for them they ne'er had lived.

I think my stars sincerely that

I've lived ere times had fall'n so flat,

When every fox has gone to ground

The world may cease to whirl around,

Yet memory of life for me

Will brighten all eternity.'

DR GEORGE CLARIDGE DRUCE

It is my regret that I never met G C Druce, one of the greatest if not greatest figure in the history of the Society. He came of a family of farmers in a small way in the south of the County and was born at Potterspury on 23rd May 1850. The first six years of his life were spent two miles away at Old Stratford on the River Ouse, which here forms the County boundary. (Journal, XXVI, 124). In 1866 he went to live at Yardley Gobion, a hamlet of Potterspury. In the same year that he moved to Yardley he became apprenticed to the firm of Philadelphus Jeyes, Northampton, of which he became manager less than three years later. He passed all his professional examinations with brilliant success, and, in 1879, seeing no prospects before him in Northampton, 'left town in which he knew "everyone" and a county which he dearly loved, and like Coelebs went in quest not of a wife, but of a business'. This he found in the High Street at Oxford, and here he remained for the rest of his long and busy life. In addition to his professional work as a chemist he joined the City Council, becoming subsequently Mayor of Oxford, and pursued his botanical studies with immense vigour and application. By 1926 he had written and published works on the flora of Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire. He was Fielding Curator of the University, which bestowed on him the honorary degree of MA, and was the author of several botanical works besides those above-mentioned. In 1880 he founded the Natural History Society of Oxfordshire. In 1926 he 'determined to complete his first love, the Flora of Northamptonshire', which was published in 1930, not two years before his death. *

*In his introduction to this work Druce gives biographical notes of all our County botanists, 31 in number, beginning with John Gerard (1545-1612), and ending very sensibly with full autobiographical details of his life. The most important names of his list are those of the Rev John Morton (1671-1726), 'the one to whom Natural Science in Northamptonshire owes most', and to whom he devotes 25 pages, John Hill (1716-75) and the Rev Miles Joseph Berkeley (1803-89). The Countess of Huntingdon, of Orton Hall, near Peterborough, a disciple of Berkeley, is also mentioned. Her daughter, Lady Ethel Wickham of Cotterstock Hall, Northants, has inherited her mother's botanical interest. She has this year succeeded in growing, from three cuttings flown from California, several specimens of Metasequola Glyptostroboides, a tree, which, until recently found growing in China, had been known only in fossilized form. *

Thus Druce, according to his own account was a happy and successful man in all that he set himself to do. But he was also a man of the widest culture and aesthetic appreciation. The particular charm of his papers lies in his skilful use of the English poets to supplement his scientific description of plants. He accorded to our Northamptonshire poet, John Clare, his rightful place among the botanists, and in his Flora of Northamptonshire quotes all the references to wild flowers to be found in the poet's works. These are given, though in poetical language, with such minute precision that Druce was able to append the correct botanical name to each flower described by Clare.

Druce gave a list with biographical sketches of all of Northamptonshire botanists, beginning with John Morton and ending, very sensibly and with profit to posterity with himself.

His appreciation of Clare is one of the best things in the Flora of Northamptonshire. After giving a few particulars of the 'piteous story' of the poet's life, he describes (p. xcvi) how in the last 22 years at St Andrew's Hospital Clare was occasionally allowed to go into the town, where he would sit under the portico of All Saints' Church, watching the children play, or, as Druce himself remembered him 'as a little, pathetic, distraught figure, gazing into the sky'. (Clare was under five feet in height).

How right Druce was, even from the strictly scientific point of view, to call Clare to his aid! The 'qualitative' approach of the poet guides us to the living heart of nature more surely than the microscopic precision of the scientist could ever hope to do. Yet, as Druce was perhaps the first to point out, Clare the poet had much of the scientist in him.

Listen for a moment to his description, quoted in Druce's book, of the first appearance of the willow blossom in the February woods:

'Pendant o'er rude old ponds, or leaning o'er

The Woodland's mossy rails, the Sallows now

Put on their golden liveries, and restore

The Spring to splendid memories, ere a bough

Of whitethorn shows a leaf to say it's come;

And through the leafless underwood rich stains

Of sunny gold show where the Sallows bloom,

Like sunshine in dark places, and gold veins

Mapping the russet landscape into smiles

At Spring's approach: nor hath the Sallow palms

A peer for richness: ploughmen on their toils

Will crop a branch, smit with its golden charms'

or of the scarlet pimpernel:

'And with eye of gold

And scarlet-starry points of flowers,

Pimpernel dreading nights and showers

Oft called the "Shepher'd Weather Glass".'

or the water lily:

'While water-lilies in their glory come

And spread green isles of beauty round their home.'

Clare saw so much that most of us pass blindly by and do not even care to see. What wealth is spread before every Northamptonshire farm labourer walking to his work on a June morning! It is, perhaps, in the following lines, also quoted by Druce, that Clare demonstrates to the highest perfection, the exquisite delicacy of his vision:

'Met not the noise of brawling pleasure cheers

In nightly revels or in city streets;

But joys that soothe and not distract the cars

That one at leisure meets

In the green woods, and meadows summer-shorn,

Or fields were bee-fly greets

The ear with merry horn.

The green-swathed grasshopper, on trebled pipe,

Sings there, and dances, in mad-hearted pranks,

There bees go courting every flower that's ripe,

On baulks and sunny banks;

And droning dragonfly on rude bassoon,

Attempts to give God thanks in no discordant tune.

I love at early morn, from new mown swath,

To see the startled frog his route pursue;

To mark, while leaping o'er the dripping path,

His bright sides scatter dew;

The early lark that from its bustle flies

To hale his matin new, And watch him to the skies.

To note, on hedge-row baulks, in moisture sprent,

The jetty snail creep from the mossy thorn

With earnest head, and tremulous intent,

Frail brother of the morn,

That from the tiny bent's dew-misted leaves

Withdraws his timid horn,

And fearful vision weaves.'

In his papers for the Natural History Society's Journal, Druce did not confine himself to illustrations from Clare, but quoted freely from the English poets from Spenser to Tennyson. For this reason alone the volumes are worth taking down from the shelf and re-reading. In an early paper (I, 179) he tells the story of the Swedish botanist, Linnacus, who, when he first saw the gorse in full bloom in England, knelt down and gave thanks to God for creating so beautiful a display; he then rounded off his description of this plant with a quotation from Cowper:

'Rough with prickly gorse that shapeless and deformed, and dangerous to the touch has yet its bloom, and decks itself with ornaments of gold.'

Druce's death in his 82nd year (on 29th February 1932) occurred less than three months after that of Beeby Thompson. 'Rarely,' as Mr H N Dixon wrote in the Jounal (XXVI, 124), 'does a Society such as ours lose within such a brief space of time, two members of such outstanding position in the scientific world.' He relates that on Druce's 80th birthday 'a brilliant society of scientists gathered in London to do him honour and convey their affectionate greetings'. The fact is that Druce and Beeby Thompson, like Clare, were men 'possessed' by a spirit of impelling devotion to their life's work which they could hardly have resisted, if they had wanted to.

Druce was under 30 when he went to Oxford, but he had already wrought a great and lasting work for his native County. The Natural History Society still flourishes. The Journal, though less frequently, continues be published. In addition to the evening meetings at which papers were read and discussed, informal walks or rambles have been perhaps the most consistent feature of the Society's life from the start. The first took place on 22nd May 1876, when the members walked over to Harlestone and back. 'Thus,' said Mr Druce, 'a meeting was held which first brought close contact

people of varying shades of religious and political thought, and resulted in friendships being made which lasted many years.' On special occasions visits were made to the individual members, as to Fawsley, Lilford or Courteenhall. But behind the social activities, which kept the Society together, much solid work was being done by the really keen and serious members at the centre. A curious fact about these curious spirits, in those early days is that, with the exception of Beeby Thompson, all of them were amateurs.

The Society today can surely look back with Pride on the first 20 years of its history, and find much inspiration in the work of those pioneers who so well and truly laid the foundations of scientific studies in Northamptonshire. Their lives afford plenty of evidence, if any were needed, that to those who commit themselves with single minded integrity to the pursuit of truth for its own sake, life will always be worth living; for such there is never a dull moment, and they will soon discover, as a New Zealand friend once said to me in a similar context, that they have 'brothers and sisters all over the world'.