

The History of the Society – Section Histories

ARCHAEOLOGICAL – P Goodfellow

During the early of the Society there was no Section representing archaeology, although there were frequent visits by members to houses and churches of antiquarian interest. It was not until 1897 that the formation of an Archaeological Section of was proposed, the first Secretary being Mr T J George, the Borough Librarian, but at first the activities of the Section were not published. Meetings were held in the rooms of the Archaeological Society, first at 8 Abington Street and later at 12 Sheep Street. There was a proposal that the two Societies should merge but this idea was turned down (perhaps a takeover was feared). One visit by the Society of Leicester must have been to the taste of Section members because after being shown some of the antiquities of that City they were entertained by their host (Canon Sanders, a former president) to strawberries and cream and other *recherché viands*'.

The most important report on archaeology at this time, is contained in Vol. 19 of the Journal which carries a lengthy account of excavations by the Northamptonshire Exploration Society, described as an offshoot of the Section. A committee of eight members was formed to 'examine barrows, tumuli and other prehistoric remains'. Digs were organised at the Anglo Saxon cemetery at Holdenby, the Roman Villa at Harpole and at other sites. The members of the committee who undertook to supervise, record and restore the sites, as far as possible, were: F Bostock, T George, C A Markham, F Shepherd, W R Shoosmith, B Thomson, T Turner and E Turner.

In June 1904 it is reported that the Section was reorganised (although unfortunately no details are given) and there is a report of a visit to Naseby by a group, some of whom cycled, while 52 others travelled in two large brakes provided my Messrs Bonham.

Membership evidently increased during this time as for the winter of 1904-5 cards of membership were printed with details of the programme, and these were to be used as a pass to meetings because of limited accommodation (in Reference Library, Guildhall Road). Apparently it was usual for a distinction to be drawn between Full members of the Society and Sectional members because at the AGM in 1905 a report listed 59 members of whom 17 belonged to the NNHS and 42 to the Section. This practice evidently continued because in 1908 the Laws were drawn up to permit Sectional members.

The familiar pattern of regular meetings in the winter months with visits or excursions in the summer was well established by 1909 under the leadership of Mr T J George as President and Mr W H Arlidge as Secretary (these two members were still in these offices in 1919, which could well be a record of combined service to the Society). A visit organised by these gentlemen to Tamworth and Lichfield was of some interest as a similar outing took place 60 years later. A break with custom was noted in 1912 because the Section held a meeting at which the speaker was Mrs Abbey, her subject was 'Samplers', but it was also reported that this was the first time that a lady had been invited to speak.

During the war years there were, naturally, fewer meetings, but a general meeting that was reported fully in the Journal was on the 'Fortifications of Northampton' when the speaker was Mr Reginald Brown who was then the Borough Librarian, having been appointed in 1912, Mr George continuing as Curator of the Museum until his death in 1920.

ASTRONOMICAL – H BRIERLEY

Astronomers embrace the whole universe, including every aspect of natural history; no Section's interest is foreign to us, so it is rather surprising that our own Section was conceived less than 20 years ago, although there had been an account of a solar eclipse in the Journal for 1905, and many members must have been skywatching throughout the Society's life.

In 1956 the Geological Section presented a lecture on astronomy by the Rev H E Ruddy, FRAS, and before that meeting was over I had proposed that we should have an Astronomical Section – to be immediately saddled with its Secretaryship for the next 15 years, Mr Ruddy becoming first president. He was a scholar of great gentleness and good humour, who played a ruthless game of croquet when he was not getting precision results from a telescope with sticky tape in its object glass to cover the chip. A fine observer, writer and lecturer, and full of childlike gratitude for any help we could give him as 'rude' workmen'.

During the first year we had firm support from the general membership, and some noteworthy viewing nights including one in Mr Ette's garden when 38 people watched a lunar eclipse. This first 12 months also saw the opening of the Humfrey Rooms, the beginning of the space age, and two naked-eye comets, while our own Dr Humfrey lectured us on the human eye, and told us our studies wouldn't hurt it unless we pointed it at the sun.

The summer of 1959 was the best season for observation we have ever had. Under Mr Lineham's Presidency the emphasis was on the practical. Many members acquired or made telescopes—we had been clouded off too often for collective viewing nights to be trusted—there was an occultation of Regulus by Venus, a hitherto unrecorded event; there were even a few naked-eye sunspots—but see previous paragraph! And Patrick Moore came to take us 'From Pinto to Mercury', but his watch stopped and after 75 minutes we had only got as far as Earth, so we stopped there for questions. That year too saw the great success of a new kind of meeting. 'Telescopic Topics', in which everyone could have a go, and the influx of a praetorian guard of juniors, some of whom have since gone to the ends of England and started or rejuvenated astronomical societies there. It was a vintage year.

The next period saw much of interest, but all is recorded in the contemporary Journals. We recognised that the skies over Northampton were much worse than they had been 20 years before, and decided to build a small observatory outside the dome of pollution. Mr Cooks had taught us photography, and we wanted to use it on a sky free from illuminated dust and vapour.

A site at Wootton was made available to us by the Society's Secretary, Mr H G Allen, who was somewhat surprised when the building was erected in 1964 and he found that far from being just a little shed, it was rather a large one. That winter we proved photographically what a good sky we had then. But that was in the days before town expansion began to engulf that area.

The sudden death of Mr Allen at the beginning of 1965 was not only a personal tragedy for all of us, it ended, for the time being, all our hopes for the observatory. The legal eagles gave us two weekends to remove the building from the site. On one it rained solidly; on the other it snowed. We did the job. I worked with a piece of roofing-felt tied over my trilby. But we saved the bits and pieces. It was the Section's Dunkirk.

Turning to happier things, we continued to try for one 'big' speaker every year, and 1964 had seen the third visit of Dr David Dewhirst, when he gave the Humfrey Lecture. For an exceptionally busy professional to give us three talks in seven years is surely worthy of mention. And in defiance of the

horrible weather-197 nights of ten-tenths cloud during 1965-we began to record things for the Met Section.

1967 was a year of recovery; we had a nova in Delphinus, a brilliant Moonlight Walk with the Saturday Walkers, and Dr Ann Gower lectured us on 'Radio Astronomy', though some of us had a job to keep our minds on the subject.

In 1970 the observatory was re-erected at Gordon's Lodge, in the green belt between the New Northampton and Milton Keynes, on a site leased to us by Mr Oliver Ranson, our rent being one red rose per annum, theoretically payable on the summer solstice, though the weather does not always oblige. In spite of this incentive, and Mr Pretlove's strong and scholarly Presidency, it was becoming obvious that the Section was in danger of running out of steam because the Secretaryship lacked dynamism. (Nonsense-Ted.) So, after the success of the exhibition 'Astro '71', conceived and run by our young seniors, I stepped down in favour of George Bolland, surely the most good-humoured revolution in history. These events were followed by new members, many gifts of equipment, and the remoulding of the Section as it is today under the Secretaryship of Paul Berwick.

Looking back, we have moved from innocence to sophistication. We began with 'mainly ourselves' giving talks to kindly and uncritical general audiences. Now we leavened by a sizeable body of mature young seniors whose main Society work lies within our own subject. They have greatly improved one of the chief functions of the Section, which as I said way back in 1957, in educational. We continue to visit other societies and observatories, and to co-operate with other sections. WE always hope for the great discovery which the amateur may still achieve, and for which some of the members have searched for so long.

But we will let our founding father, Mr Ruddy, have the last word. Let him speak from the pages of the BAA Journal: 'I came to find that one of the pleasures of astronomy is in the friends it makes, with whom to exchange ideas, and whose instruments one can enjoy. To them one is always grateful.'

CONCHOLOGICAL – G OSBORN

When the Northamptonshire Natural History Society was formed in 1876 a section devoted to conchology was one of the first of the new Society. This continued until the First World War, during which it ceased to function. In this time it did much good work, which is recorded in the Society's Journal.

On 8th October 1966 the Conchological Section was reformed under the Secretaryship of Mrs List with Mr Crang as President. Many talks and excursions were held, and the Section got away to a good beginning. Unfortunately Mrs List had to resign for personal reasons. The Secretaryship was then taken by Mr Marriott who relinquished the post in 1973, when it was filled by the present secretary. A new start was made with speakers and fixtures for excursions and it began the recording of the mollusca of Northamptonshire on a tetrad basis. The recording maps were made for the Society by Dr John Dony to whom we are most grateful.

A great boost to the Conchological Section was arrival of Mr M Wallis who is in charge of the records and whose meticulous work is much appreciated. In February 1974 the Secretary was elected to the Council of Conchological Society of Great Britain and Ireland, and his appointment helps the section by reason of his wider contacts and access to experts.

With the help of members of the Conchological Society our Society in 1973 and 1974 held shell exhibitions in the Humfrey Rooms. Since 1967 joint meetings of the two Societies have been held locally each year. These meetings are most enjoyable and it is hoped they will continue.

Our collection of marine shells, which has been stored for many years, has been sorted and most of the shells named, and we hope soon to have proper labels printed. We have been fortunate with our gifts, our original collection was given by Mr Walter Crick, Mr Arnold and Mr W B Spencer, and in 1974 the Section received a further gift from Miss Sutton. Many of the shells are on display in the Rooms.

Now the Section is endeavouring to build up a reference collection of British terrestrial and freshwater shells. We are grateful to Miss Pirie and Mrs Blood for undertaking the work of curating and cataloguing this collection.

The Section has been responsible for many new vice County records, not only locally but in various parts of the country. This work is carried out with the help and co-operation of Dr M Kerney, the National Recorder.

The Centenary of the Conchological Society and our own Society coincide. We shall be holding a joint symposium in the Humfrey Rooms on the 16th and 17th October, when speakers from all over the country will talk on many aspects of the subject, and on the following day we shall be guests of Sir Hereward and Lady Wake at Courteenhall.

During the past two years the Conchological Section and the Microbiological Section have had their programme of field meetings, this has helped both sections and has led to the recording of other groups.

For the future it is hoped to do more specialised work, such as working out the biology of the species. There is plenty of scope here as for many species very little is known of their way of life.

In all our work we must thank especially Mr and Mrs T Palin, Mr and Mrs E B Rands and Dr June Chatfield of the National Museum of Wales. With the help of these good people and many others we feel the future of the Section is assured.

GEOLOGICAL – R A MARTIN AND G OSBORN

It is recorded that the first excursion of the Geological Section of the Northamptonshire Natural History Society took place on Thursday, 10th August 1876 – the year of the foundation of the Society. The Section President then was Mr W Hull and a party of 14 went by train to Blisworth.

During the early decades of this century the geological aspect of the Society's work was linked with important Northamptonshire authorities such as W D Crick and Beeby Thompson. However, very few of the Society's activities continued through the years of the last war.

On 8th October 1946 the Geological Section resumed its distinct existence under the Secretaryship of Hubert Hitchin and the Presidency of F W Carpenter, BA, ARIC. In March 1952 Mr Carpenter resigned and was replaced by Gordon Osborn. Then in 1956, after Mr Hitchin had moved to Lancashire, the Secretaryship was taken on, temporarily, by S V F Leleux. In fact he carried out these duties for five years until he was succeeded in 1961 by R A Martin. He and George Osborn, still as President, are the Section officers today.

Naturally the Section has always studied the County geology, and its summer field-meetings have examined all the Jurassic formations in Northamptonshire, from the Lower Lias to the Oxford Clay. The quarry workings in the economically important Northampton Sand Ironstone Field has been regularly visited. Quarry owners and works managers have always been very willing to help us and their continued co-operation has been greatly appreciated through the years.

From the Jurassic we have ranged forward and backward through geological time and given our members opportunities to see the richness and British geology through our annual coach excursions. These have visited, since 1959, pre-Cambrian rock at Charnwood, Malvern and the Longmynd; Cambrian in the Wrekin area; Silurian limestone on Wenlock Edge and at Dudley; carboniferous limestone in the Mendips and the Peak of Derbyshire; millstone grit near Ashover; coal measures at Radstock; Triassic sandstone at Bridgnorth; Jurassic limestones on the Cotswolds and at Upware; Kimmeridge clay at Roslyn; greensands at Leighton Buzzard and Loziate Heath; chalk at Sundon; Tertiary brick-earth at Sutton Ness; London clay at Sheppey; red crag at Walton-on-the Naze; and glacial sands at Chelford.

We also, through the personal experiences of visiting speakers, brought to our members first-hand information of foreign geology, notably of Norway (1965), Australia (1966), Godavari Valley in Southern India (1966), Arizona and the Great Canyon (1968), the Sahara (1970 and 1975), Sierra Leone and West Africa (1970), Antarctica (1970) and the Himalayas (1974).

The growth of new ideas in geology has also been reflected in our Section Programmes, especially North Sea Oil Exploration (1963?), Continental Drift (1964), Plate Tectonics (1974), the 'Moho' Drilling Project (1971), Moon Geology (1970), the Evolution of the Earth (1969), Geo-chronology (1972).

While we have thus endeavoured to keep up to date with geological developments we have made special efforts to introduce the basic concepts to newcomers and have organised beginners' course in 1965 and in 1974 and at other times have put on explanatory talks designed for those who are 'new to the game'.

At the other end of the scale, we introduced at the end of 1966 'Study Sessions' which were designed to permit more detailed study of specific topics by small groups of members. These have gone from strength to strength and have covered a very wide range.

Whilst the Section has expanded in both the range and the depth of its activities we have been mindful of the importance of co-operation between sections within the Society. As early as 1956 we sponsored the formation of an Astronomical Section by arranging a lecture on 'The Moon' by the Rev. H E Ruddy. On numerous occasions since then we have arranged or taken part in joint meetings with the Astronomical, Zoological, Meteorological, Archaeological, Botanical, Ornithological and Conchological Sections. In particular have our field excursions always have attended by botanical members. We have always stressed the links between geology and other disciplines and have invited other Sections to our non-specialized meetings. This inter-Section link-up continues to be our policy.

During the past 14 years the Section has organised some 'special' events. Chief of these have been a symposium of Northamptonshire Geology in 1967, a National Nature Week Exhibition in 1963, The William Smith Bicentenary programme in 1969 with Professor Sylvester Bradley as guest speaker, an exhibition 'A Thousand Sands' in 1973 and a symposium to commemorate the centenary of the death of Sir Charles Lydell in 1975.

In 1962 the Geological Section proposed the establishment of an annual Society lecture to be called the 'Humphrey Lecture' and we arranged the inaugural lecture on 10th January 1963. This was on 'Crystals, Minerals and Gems' and was given by Cr R A Howie, then research mineralogist at Manchester University. Other sections followed in succeeding years and when our turn came again in 1972, Mr F M Broadhurst, also of Manchester University, spoke on 'Sexual Dimorphism in Fossils'.

In 1965 the Section held a 'Section Supper' as a social occasion. It was so successful that it has become an annual event and now is the social event of the Society, limited by the size of the Rooms.

Now, in our centenary year 1976, the Section officers have published an illustrated booklet, An Outline of the Geology of Northamptonshire, copies of which can be obtained from them.

The Section has, during its existence, acquired some valuable collections in addition to the rocks, fossils and minerals brought in by its members. The 'Crick' Collection was left to the Society by Mr W D Crick in the late 1920s and comprises Jurassic fossils from Gloucestershire and Lincolnshire. It has been cleaned and curated. In 1956 Mr Peter Smart presented us with a fine collection of Jurassic and Cretaceous fossils from Bedfordshire. In 1974 we acquired a mineral collection, over 100 years old, which belonged to the Rev. Harrison, grandfather of the Rector of Bugbrooke. This has now been cleaned and displayed as the Harrison Collection.

About 1966 we began a collection of sand specimens from various places in Britain. This now numbers over 1600 specimens and come from all over the world. The Section officers exhibited 460 specimens at the Geologists Association Reunion in Chelsea in 1972. In April 1973 a BBC film unit visited us to make recordings of material for the programme 'Nationwide', and in October of the same year we put on, in the Rooms, an exhibition entitled 'A Thousand Sands'.

We have accumulated a useful set of charts and maps, including a set of the County sheets of the One-Inch Geological Survey and a very fine Geological Column.

The growing activities of the Section have naturally built up many outside relationships. We are corporate members of the Geological Society of London and the Palaeontographical Society and our officers are members of the Geologists' Association. The Journals of these Societies are in our library, as are also many publications of the Geological Survey of the United States Department of the Interior. We have had great assistance from Members of the Universities of Leicester, Keele, Manchester, Reading, Birmingham, London, Bangor, Cambridge and Imperial College, for which we wish to record our thanks. We have also links with the Conchological Society of Great Britain and Ireland whose final year is the same as our own. In the 1960s we had several joint excursions with the Geological Section of the Leicester L & P Society, but transport difficulties proved too much. In the last three years we have had many joint meetings with our neighbouring Natural History Societies in Bedfordshire and in Milton Keynes. We feel that the Section should pursue its policies of internal co-operation and external contacts, and continue to provide help for the beginner and opportunity for the student. It will then carry on in good health.

METEOROLOGICAL – D J HAMMOND

It seems that this Society has always had a Meteorological Section in some form. The Section appears to have been formed at the same time as the Society. The first Section President was Mr H Terry, a long, serving Midland observer. His Secretary was Mr G Osborne, who was succeeded by Mr F Law in 1884. This team compiled very detailed weather records for the Journal. Mr Law also compiled were from some 30 plus observers and their figures were individually reproduced in the

Journal in quarterly instalments. The first Meteorological meeting on record was held in the Curator's Room, Guildhall, on 15th January 1880, when the Rev T C Beasley read a paper on Weather Forecasts.

Mr Terry was reluctantly obliged to withdraw from active work in 1885, though he did continue recording for a period. In 1890 Christopher A Markham became Section Secretary. He had for many years observed and recorded the weather, as well as being one of the Society's finest all-rounders. He wrote on a wide range of subjects in the Journal. At the turn of the century Mr Markham became Section President and in 1903 Mr B T Dean Smith became Secretary. He in turn was succeeded two years later by Mr R H Primavesi. This was to become without doubt the longest serving partnership in the Section. In 1912 Mr Markham served as President of the Society, and a few years later served his country in the First World War.

At the Society's Jubilee Exhibition in 1926, the Section displayed instruments and tables supplied by members who had made observations over long periods. Mr Primavesi gave a lecture entitled 'A Half Century's Development in Weather Forecasting'. This was the first meteorological lecture for many years and was also the last for a similar period. Major Markham died in 1936 and Society had lost one of its most valued members. Mr Primavesi's long range as Secretary ended during the Second World War.

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Mr Boddington retired in 1954 after 13 years, due to ill health, and although he continued to record, the job of compiling the weather records fell to Mr H G Allen, Journal editor. In 1956 when the Section was probably at its lowest ebb, an initial meeting was held to determine future activities. However, there was a great deal of ebb, an initial meeting was held to development until the AGM in 1958 when Miss Crossen offered to act for the Section.

During 1961 a serious attempt was made to get the section really going, with the aim for more Society members to make observations. In 1962 Mr E Nobles became Section Secretary and the Section became more active than it has probably ever been. Several meetings were held and it was stressed that there was a need for weather data on all field notes. The Section took part in an exhibition to mark National Nature Week in April 1966. The main feature of the Section's display was a daily weather chart designed and kept up-to-date by Mr Nobles. In 1967 Mr Nobles introduced a weather code in which weather conditions could be recorded simply by the use of a few capital letters. Unfortunately this code was not widely used. After 11 years as Secretary Mr Nobles found that he had insufficient time to devote to the Section and in 1973 he resigned as Secretary of the Section, he was, however, pleased to accept the Section Presidency. At the same I offered to act as Secretary.

The Section has for the last few years held meetings regularly, if not very frequently. As in the early years of the Society, observations of phenological events are now being recorded. The weather records that appear in, the Journal are not as detailed as in years gone by, due to limited space,

although detailed, information is always available on request. General interest in meteorology over the years has always seemed rather low, with sudden bursts of interest during abnormal weather periods, such as long dry summers and long very cold winters. The Section may have failed over the years to be the active concern that many of the other Sections have been, but it can surely be proud of the painstaking records of the observations of so many people, extending over such a long period.

MICROBIOLOGICAL – G OSBORN, FLS

This Section which started as the Microscopical Section soon after the Society was formed, has, during its long history had various fortunes. Never extremely popular, it has kept going and contributed much in the way of biological records, often as the work of individual members.

It was before the Second World War that the writer became a member of the Society with an interest in this section. A monthly meeting was held, and at these meetings somebody, often Mr Paul Chapman read a paper, sometimes it was an article he had written in his neat handwriting, at other times it was an article from a newspaper or magazine. A small audience usually about half a dozen members, would on a cold winters' evening sit round the small gas fire. Paul Chapman always sat on the left-hand side of the fire, the rest of us would sort out the chairs to find one that was not too rickety and had four legs.

This small gathering would discuss the article, sometimes specimens would be produced, or use made of the blackboard to, draw diagrams on. Much natural history was learnt. Before the evening finished the kettle, (sixpence at Woolworths) would be put in the gas ring, and a cup of tea was made. The meeting would then draw to a close we would lock up and creep down the dark and dirty stairs and make our way home.

In those days the President of the Section was Mr W B Shoosmith. He was Secretary from 1905 to 1917 and President from 1917 to 1953 when he died at the age of 91, having been a member of the Society for over 50 years.

During the Second World War the Section ceased to function. It was restarted on 1st November 1945 with Mr H G James as the Secretary, at the same time the name was changed to the Microbiological Section, when, under the leadership of Mr James it became an active section again and continued until 1953 when Mr A W Leftwich took over as President and the name changed again to the Microbiological-Zoology Section. The Section was split in 1956 the two parts becoming Sections in their own right, Mr Chapman taking the President's chair for the Microbiological Section. From 1961 to 1964 Mr Twistleton was Secretary of both Sections.

About this time Mr Chapman then found his domestic problems were such that he could no longer attend the Rooms due to the fact he was looking after his father, who lived with him and died at the age of 97. During much of this time there would have been no meetings if the late Harry Allen had not demanded the writer to give a talk during the autumn and spring sessions, just to keep the Section in being.

In 1964 Mr Chapman resumed his work for the Section until his death in 1971.

In 1969 Mr A Cooks undertook to help Mr Chapman who found it too much to run the Section on his own, and since the death of Mr Chapman he has maintained the Section single-handed. There is still no President.

In 1974 the Section combined with the Conchological Section for field meetings, this has been to the benefit of both, much recording of the mollusca has been done and it seems that recording of other groups will be undertaken by the microbiologists.

As the Society enters into its second century the members of the Microbiological Section feel it is time to give it a new look, and to widen the scope of its activities. At the time of writing this report (August 1975) arrangements are being made for a meeting to be held later in the year to discuss the future of the Section. It is hoped to get on with the recording of the various groups that have been neglected. One must remember the main objective of natural history societies is to record the flora and fauna in their area. This is most important in these days of development and the swallowing up of so much of the countryside.

As we start the next century we appeal to all those members who are not heavily committed with Society work to come forward and help with the recording. There are two things to be done, the first is to keep the records, for which no knowledge of the subject is required, and secondly to cover the County looking for the specimens to be recorded.

The Section still needs a President, will not somebody please come forward? We have a fine laboratory and equipment, the micro projector has been restored by Mr Chris Osborne. We have more and better facilities than any other comparable society. Let us then during this next century prove ourselves worthy of them and worthy of the good people who provided them for us.

Lastly, thanks are due to those who have kept the Section going during this difficult time.

ORNITHOLOGICAL – R FELTON, MBOU

There has been an Ornithological Section in the Society since the very beginning but for so many of the early bird men it was a matter of shooting anything unusual or the taking of eggs and nests of the more uncommon species. Considerable write-ups were also given on rare species and a lot of foreign birds were also written about by our eminent bird watchers who travelled widely throughout the world.

It was, however, not until the 1930s that bird records of the County were sent in to the Section Secretary for inclusion in the Journal. In 1935 the first dawn chorus was held and they were each year until the outbreak of war.

Like so many Societies practically nothing was done during hostilities but many servicemen did travel and a considerable amount of knowledge was obtained of the visiting birds to the County. 1946 showed a great improvement to County records and a comprehensive list of species was printed in the Journal.

A year later showed special duplicated graphs of waders, etc., seen at Ecton Sewage Farm, this was, of course, one of the finest areas for bird watching in the Midlands and members carried out an almost daily watch on this area. Special write-ups were prepared of the great number of rare and semi-rare birds that turned up at the Sewage Farm. The large number of eminent ornithologists who also turned up was also remarkable.

In 1950 under the guidance of the late James Fisher, who was a Society member, a County Report was launched, this covered the whole of the County and not just the Northampton area. This County Report has continued since then though responsibility for it has now been taken over by the Northamptonshire Bird Club.

The present day Ornithological Section are now taking part in yearly census reports. This entails a week by week census of all the birds in a particular area over the period of one year. To date such areas have been: Harlestone Heath, Ecton Sewage Farm, Sywell Reservoir, Salcey Forest, Yardley Chase, Althorp Park.

The census for Althorp Park appears elsewhere in this Journal. The census currently under way is on farm land near Bozenham Mill. Since 1946 the Section had held an indoor meeting each month during the winter and a field meeting each month during the summer. Many eminent ornithologists have been speakers at our indoor meetings. The Section has always been a strong one and still is one of the most popular in the Society.

Finally, I would like to thank all members of the committee and bird sub-committee for their loyalty and help in keeping up such a good programme.

PHOTOGRAPHIC – C GRIERSON

Photography has always played an important role in the life of the Society. From the Society's foundation, its Journal has contained photographs showing the subjects of various studies conducted members. In fact the very first Journal paid tribute to the valuable album of local scenery and buildings provided by the Section. In particular, at the end of the 19th century, Members of the Section were encouraged to photograph the County's famous trees, e.g. the oak at Lowick, photographed by Mr S J Newman.

The Photographic Section started life as an adjunct to the main studies conducted by members. The methods used by the members in the 1890s now seem very crude and indeed photography was not a pastime lightly undertaken as it is today. The photographs produced were mainly illustrative of the other work of the Society. However, over the years, and as photography has progressed the Section has become an independent photographic society within the aegis of the main Society and has acquired a very high reputation for the standard of work produced which is now mainly pictorial in nature.

There was much interest in photography when the Section was formed and by 1893 there had been a rapid increase in the Section membership. There were many photographic outings – as many as 12 in one summer. In the evenings, members would show their lantern slides and read papers on processes and techniques. In the Journal for 1898-1900, the Section was pleased to announce photographic competitions for lantern slides and prints, run annually and judged by a committee.

Members of the Section always had a close association with the Photographic Society of the YMCA and when, in 1899 that Society was disbanded, its members joined the Photographic Section of the NNHS. It was at this time that the Section acquired its status as a separate Society whereby persons could join the Section without having to join the main Society. Outings continued and indeed some when as far as Bruges, Brussels and Antwerp. Outside lecturers became evening features and one distinguished visitor in December 1902 was Lumiere N A Co London, which demonstrated its new system for making coloured slide lanterns.

A portfolio was started in 1907 and this continued to comparatively recent times. It is hoped to resurrect this in the near future.

By 1908, the membership of the Section had risen to 110 and this figure remained fairly constant throughout the years since. If any change has taken place, the numbers have dropped somewhat – a

surprising occurrence bearing in mind the great scientific developments which have served to make the hobby an easier one to practise.

In 1914, the Section acquired a horizontal enlarger and this was in great demand by the members. The Section continued to work in conjunction with the main Society and in 1916 embarked on a survey and record for the whole County. Thus the war had only a slight effect on the programme.

In 1921, the Secretary, in his annual report, was pleased to announce a drop in the price of photographic materials, and that more people seemed to have taken up the hobby. In 1924, the membership had risen to 133, of whom 95 were members of the main Society also.

In 1926 many discoveries and inventions made photography much easier and the section even boasted some active lady members. In 1929 there were 150 entries for annual exhibition which had by now been run since the turn of the century. In 1931 the Secretary reported a keen interest in cinematography, and even in colour!

The 1930s brought the perfection of the miniature camera (i.e. 35mm) and thus, yet again, this relatively young science was opened to wider circles. Curiously, this was not reflected in an increase in membership. The number of club competitions was increased and in 1936 the Section was given a modern vertical enlarger.

The Second World War did quite seriously affect the Section's activities, but the mood of female emancipation brought forth the Section's first lady President, Mrs Betty Humfrey, ARPS (now FRPS).

Since the war the Section flourished and has formed strong ties with other clubs through the Photographic Alliance and the Midland Counties Photographic Federation. The very sweeping changes in material and equipment have made it possible for the determined amateur to accomplish even the most difficult photographic tasks. There has been a growing interest in graphic arts photography and many members are successful colour workers.

As remarked before, however, the membership has not risen indeed it has dropped slightly since the early days. It is thought that would be serious amateurs are frightened of joining societies in case they should find themselves out of their depth in the technicalities of the hobby. The Photographic Section, though, has always been pleased to welcome beginners and its members are ever ready to give help and advice.

SATURDAY WALKS – MAY GREEN

For very many years in the past, members of the Natural History Society journeyed into the countryside to study many aspects of natural history on Saturday afternoons. This was done under the able leadership of Mr H G Allen, Secretary of the Society. After his sudden death those members who had been used to rambling with him wished to continue their walks in the countryside and so permission was given by the General Committee of the Society for a new Section to be formed with its own President and Secretary. At its first meeting on 4th December 1965 the members agreed that the name of the Section should be Saturday Walks. Miss Dora Wilson was elected President and Miss May Green, Secretary; offices which they still hold. Walks are arranged on about 48 Saturdays each year when they take note of the changes in the seasons, listen to bird songs and take note of the various wild flowers, berries as fruits. Also during the walks churches are visited and details of architecture, etc, noted. Notice is also taken of whether footpaths are being kept open.

While the Section has only a recently formed history it has been operating in fact from the earliest days.

Life in 1876 and the succeeding years, as we all know, was very different from what it is today; so also was the mode of travel. In the Northampton Mercury of 18th May 1878 I found this item of news.

‘The first evening walk was on Thursday last, the route proposed being by rail to Brampton Station, thence to Harlestone Furze and Dallington, but the unsettled state of the weather marred to a great extent the pleasure of the excursion as it also prevented a great many from being present. However, a party of 20 including some ladies ventured on the rather hazardous adventure. After leaving Brampton Station a drizzling rain began which, upon reaching Church Brampton increased to a sharp shower. This afforded an excuse for visiting the village church, perhaps one of the prettiest in the neighbourhood and kept in such order as reflects the greatest praise upon the rector’s family, whose taste in floral decorations was so pleasantly manifest. The walls of the churchyard used to yield the peculiar plant, the *Amaranthus blitum* which strayed by some means from the rectory garden.

‘On account of the wet it was decided to leave the walk through the Furze until another occasion so the road to Kingsthorpe was chosen, the narrow lane yielding the crozier like young fronds of the male fern, the pretty pink flowers of the Herb Robert and plenty of yellow broom.’

On 23rd August 1880 members of the Society did this walk again, travelling by the 5pm train from Northampton to Brampton Station, returning via the little stream that runs beside the new railway embankment, through Harlestone Heath and home through the village of Dallington.’

Railway travel was a new experience in those days and there were plenty of stations, although they were not very near to the villages whose name they took. Today, with the closure of most stations we always travel by bus, but in 1974 we did, as a unique experience, return by train from Long Buckby.

Another popular mode of travel was by horse drawn ‘brake’. On Monday, 3rd July 1882, about 20 members of the Society had a very pleasant excursion. The party started from the Town Hall between 9 and 10am and proceeded by brake to Newnham, via Flore and Weedon. From here the journey was continued on foot through Fawsley Park and Badby Wood to Badby, where a halt was made for luncheon. Catesby was the next rendezvous and on the way Arbery Hills were visited. The party once more alighted and enjoyed an interesting ramble amongst the ruins of Catesby church, thence to the Abbey, Day Knowl, and on to Hellidon. Being picked up here by the brake, Staverton was soon reached, and after a short stay at Staverton Glen a move was made to Daventry, where full justice was done to a meat tea provided at the Wheatsheaf Inn; the return journey being made through Norton And Nobottle.’

We can picture the scene. Quiet country lanes with the horses clop clapping along, and what a finish to the excursion-a ‘meat tea’. I myself can remember what a thrill it was to me as a child going on a Sunday school outing by brake to Heyford; also going by ‘barge’ on the River Nene to Clifford Hill, and the awful smell that came from the Paper Mills when we passed them. The Natural History Society members do not appear to have travelled by barge, although some older members of the Society tell me they used to go by bicycle.

Following are details of some of the outings mentioned in our Journals.

‘It was not a large party that represented the Northamptonshire Natural History Society in their excursion on 6th June 1881. We will suggest that the quality made up for any deficiency otherwise.

There were represented geology, botany and “other studies and sciences”. If now, all these excellent representatives had been silent, there would certainly not have been that animated if not brilliant conversation and repartee that was manifested. There was not too much work set down for our party. The good spirit of charity had prompted those who drew up the programme of the day’s operations. We were to visit “Hornstock Wood”, the home of the lilies of the valley; the old quarries of Collyweston, and the oaks at Morehay Lawn and Woods. The Hornstock Woods were full of deep and gloomy solitudes, the undergrowth was abundant and the lilies crowding under every tree; but alas, we were too late for the flowers. Continuing our journey we came to Collyweston quarries where it was thought we might make some notable finds in fossils. We did not, however, find anything of particular value. Our time was limited, however, as a storm that had been descending upon the opposite hills warned us that danger was at hand and that we had better turn our attention to Kings Cliffs where there was a comfortable room and a refreshing tea.’

‘On 21st July 1881, a number of members and friends enjoyed a pleasant excursion to Yardley Chase. Going by rail to Olney station, they had a most enjoyable ramble through the Chase, enlivened by several good “finds” by the botanists and “catches” by the entomologists. Tea was provided under the chestnuts at Chase Park Farm.’

‘On 8th September 1881, a small number of members went with the botanical excursion to Wansford. The excursionists, after leaving Wansford village, proceeded down a lane where the hedges were draped with the clematis, and the wayside liberally sprinkled with majoram and rockrose, and wild mignonette and harebells. Thence to Bedford Purlieus. The return was made to Wansford by road.’

‘On 21st June 1883, there was an afternoon excursion to Althorp Park, etc. About 18 members went, the unfavourable weather preventing a large attendance. Althorp House was visited and the party then proceeded to Brington to inspect the church with its memorials of the Washington family; and after tea at Mr Parnell’s Inn, returned home – some by road and others by rail.’

In June 1880, the Northampton Society was host to the Midland Union of Natural History Societies for their Third Annual Meeting, and arranged a botanical excursion as follows:

‘This party, 40 in number, including several ladies, was conducted by Mr R G Scriven, who had made every arrangement for the comfort and enjoyment of the visitors, who warmly recognised and expressed their sense, of indebtedness to their leader. The weather (as foretold by a telegram from the Meteorological Office received the previous evening) was splendid and everything propitious.

‘Leaving the Town Hall shortly before 9.30, the party proceeded in brakes through exceedingly pretty country, gently undulating and well wooded, via Cogenhoe and Whiston, where a short halt was made to enable the visit to be paid to the church. Again entering the brakes, they were conveyed to Castle Ashby, the seat of the Marquis of Northampton. Here an hour was spent in viewing the mansion and grounds. Leaving Castle Ashby the party were driven in the carriages to Yardley Chase Farm where an excellent luncheon was provided. Close to the farm two remarkably fine old oak trees called “Gog” and “Magog” were inspected with great interest. From thence the party walked to Cowpers Oak, beneath the shadow of which the poet is said to have written many of his works. The rest of the afternoon was spent in botanising and insect collecting in Yardley Chase. At 3.30 the members re-entered the carriages and returned to Northampton via Denton and Brafield, and a meat tea at the Plough Hotel concluded a most delightful excursion.’

I like the bit about how they got the weather forecast. Of course telegrams were much cheaper in those days. Today we just tune into Radio 4 or switch on the 'telly' at news time if we want to know what weather is going to be like tomorrow.

One thing I have noticed in the old reports-they seem to be surprised that some ladies should be in the party. Evidently the majority were men. Today we have a majority of ladies.

As the reports tell us, the walk in the 'old days' were very much enjoyed. As one of the Saturday Walkers I can say that they most certainly are enjoyed today, although meat teas are out and we each take our own tea with us. We travel by bus and timetables are continually being cut owing to lack of passengers.

I wonder what the secretary will be able to report in 2076?