

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF THE FORTH NATURALIST AND HISTORIAN

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In 2015 one of the corner-stones of the region's cultural life celebrates its 40th anniversary. The Forth Naturalist and Historian (FNH) has since 1975 encouraged curiosity and supported individuals and groups wishing to undertake research on our beautiful, ever-changing region, given them a voice, shared a range of materials on the natural history and history of the area, created an invaluable archive for the future, provided public access to this and provided, each year, conferences and other outlets to engage everybody who is interested in our natural history and history.

In 1974 the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BA) met in Stirling (1). It brought the spotlight on to the natural history and history of the area and highlighted the lack of recently published material. The late Robert Innes, of the Department of Education at Stirling University, and Ian Collie, Director of Education for the newly formed Central Regional Council, were anxious to encourage joint working between their two organisations. They brought together a group of university and local authority staff to look at ways of promoting and supporting research into local natural history and history, together with the publication and dissemination of that research. The group were also tasked with encouraging interest in learning about and conserving local heritage in the area covered by Central Regional Council and the three District Councils of Clackmannan, Falkirk and Stirling.

Dr David Bryant, Mr Lindsay Corbett, Mr Robert Innes and Dr John Proctor of the University of Stirling joined Mr Murray Dickie and Dr Kenneth Mackay of Central Regional Council Education Department and Mr George Thomson, a graphic designer from Dunblane, who together constituted the first Forth Naturalist and Historian Editorial Board in 1975 (2). The aim of the group was summed up in the editorial of the first Volume of the Forth Naturalist and Historian (FNH), published in 1976: "The Transactions of the Stirling Natural History and Archaeological Society ceased at the outbreak of the Second World War and were never revived. The first widely available publication since 1939 that drew together a range of contributions from the Stirling region was the survey, edited by Professor Timms, which was produced for the visit of the British Association to Stirling University in 1974. This survey, despite its shortcomings, must represent a landmark in the study of our region. Its main message for many was that the Scottish Central Region is as interesting as any area of Britain and yet has received relatively little recent attention. There is a need to revive the type of local studies carried out in the late nineteenth century and first decades of the present century, when men of immense scientific standing, such as Harvie-Brown, Kidston and Buchanan White, as

well as many less famous authors, published papers concerned with our region. However, much has changed since their times, both in the region itself and in the range of new information and techniques available to the investigator. The missing ingredient has been the enthusiastic amateur naturalist and historian. There have been notable exceptions but, even for these, there has been no suitable local journal in which to publish in full their researches and observations. The University community reinforces these studies but it is pleasing to note that the band of amateurs is growing once more and they contribute the majority of papers in this first volume. Our aim in launching the *Forth Naturalist and Historian* is primarily to increase our knowledge of a neglected part of Scotland. We hope that by providing a vehicle for publication we will not only stimulate existing workers to present their results but also encourage others to take up new researches."

The first Journal of the Forth Naturalist and Historian included papers on the *Geomorphology of the Upper Forth Valley*, J.B. Sissons; *The Return of the Hen Harrier*, Edward A. Blake; *Habitat Selection in the Birds of Woodland and Open Woodland of the Stirling Area*, C.J. Henty; *Stirling and Clackmannan Bird Report (1974 & 1975)*, C.J. Henty; *The Golden Eagle Aquila chrysaetos in the West of Scotland*, D.H. Merrie; *Our 'Disappearing' Butterflies*, George Thomson; *Ecological Aspects of Some of the More Local Flowering Plants of the Western Ochil Hills*, Edward A. Blake; *The Red German Catchfly in the Western Ochil Hills*, Edward A. Blake, Peter R. Wallis and John Proctor; *Cultivation Terraces Along the Ochil Escarpment*, D.M. Dickie and *On First Looking Into Chapman's Ledger*, K.J.H. Mackay.

The members of the Board produced and sought articles for future Journals. The journals were initially edited by Lindsay Corbett and graphic support was provided by George Thompson. Volumes 1 to 6 were typeset and printed by The Education Resources Unit, a Job Creation Scheme run by Central Regional Council Education Department and bound and finished by the print department of the University of Stirling (3). Since Volume 7, in 1983, the Journal has been typeset and printed by Meigle Colour Printers in Galasheils (4).

The Board was fortunate in obtaining generous grant support for the cost of producing and printing the cover of the Journal. From Volume 3 in 1979 to Volume 28 in 2005 British Petroleum provided an annual grant (5) and (6). This support was continued by INEOS from Volume 29 in 2006 to Volume 36 in 2013 (7). In 2014 the Stafford Trust helped fund the publication costs (8).

The collected editions of the Journal from 1976 onwards represent a large and significant data set, covering a wide range of natural and historical issues over a significant period of time. There is, for example, a regional bird report covering each of the last forty years and an annual climate report since 1980 (9). The publication of *Central Scotland, Land – Wildlife – People* in 1993 was undertaken by the FNH Board, supported by the University of Stirling, assisted by a wide range of individuals and local and national organisations (10) and

sponsored by the British Petroleum Companies in Grangemouth (11). It built on the work of the 1974 *Stirling Region* and still provides the most authoritative description of the region.

Responding to the growing demand for on-line research, the Board undertook a pilot study in 2010 to look at the best way of making the information in the Journal publically available. Meigle Colour Printers were able to supply files from Volume 21 onwards. Volumes 1 and 2 were scanned in and it was agreed that there was a need to make the information available in a searchable format. In 2011 a grant was obtained from Scottish Natural Heritage to enable Volumes 11 to 20 to be scanned (12). Volumes 1 and 2 and volumes 11 onwards (with the exception of the last three years, which are still being sold) are available on the FNH website. In 2015 grants have been obtained from the Mercer's Company and The Marc Fitch Fund (13) enabling Volumes 3 to 10 together with copies of the original *The Stirling Region, 1975*, (Stirling University) and *Central Scotland – Land, Wildlife, People, 1993*, (FNH) to be scanned and made available on-line. When this is completed, all of the volumes of the Journal, except the most recent three, and the two most significant regional publications will be available on line in an easily searchable format on the FNH web site and at <http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/>

During the past forty years, the FNH Board has produced and supported the publication of a number of other local books and booklets (14). These have included: *Alloa Tower and the Erskines of Mar* (Clackmannanshire Field Studies Society – CFSS); *Doone and Kilmadock – Historical Notes* (Mackay, K.); *Clackmannan and the Ochils – illustrated architecture heritage* (Swann, A.); *The Lure of Loch Lomond – the islands and environs* (McAllister); *The Making of Modern Stirling* (Lannon, J.); *Mines and Minerals of the Ochils* (CFSS); *The Ochil Hills – Landscape, Wildlife, Heritage, Walks* (CFSS/FNH) and *Woollen Mills of the Hillfoots* (Park, B.). The board has also supported a further 26 smaller publications.

The Forth Naturalist and Historian Editorial Board organised the first conference at the University of Stirling in November 1975 (15), entitled *The Forth Estuary, Carse and Moorlands*. Following the success of this venture, an annual conference has been held at the University of Stirling every year since then. From 1976 to 1989 the conferences covered a diverse range of topics. These included natural history topics such as: scenery; geology; fossils; earthquakes; climate, rainfall; the Forth; lochs; flowers; woodlands; Dutch Elm disease; Flanders Moss; birds of Central Scotland, the Devon Valley, Gartmorn Dam and Loch Lomond; sand martins; peregrine falcons; wildlife; butterflies; fish; conservation and recreation; country parks and Loch Lomond side. Historical topics have included: bronze and iron age sites; brochs; the Antonine Wall; run-rig systems; the Battle of Stirling Bridge; oral history; graveyards; waterpower; the coal industry; woollen mills; the Howieton fish farm; Robert Burns; Robert Louis Stevenson and historical studies of Bridge of Allan, Culross, Doone, Muckhart and Shieldhill.

From 1989 the conferences have been themed, covering: Man and the Forth; Loch Lomond; Focus on Falkirk; The Environment – 25 Years of Change; Clackmannanshire, Environment and Heritage; The Waters of Central Scotland; Mountains, Muirs and Mosses; Environmental Awareness and Education; Transportation, People and the Environment; Woodlands Past and Present; a 25 year celebration of the FNH; Conserving Biodiversity and Heritage; Loch Lomond and the Trossachs; Scotland’s Weather and Climate – living with change; Water, Life and the Landscape; Landscapes of the Mines; Landscapes by Design; Stirling, Scotland’s Central City; Forth Valley’s Changing Countryside; Conservation in a Changing Climate; Maps for All Reasons; Trees, Woods and People; Geodiversity; How Green is My Valley – Environmental Health in the Forth Valley; The Changing Biodiversity of Central Scotland and, in 2014, The Inner Forth – formed by nature, shaped by people. The 2015 conference is entitled The Mountains of Central Scotland, Past, Present and Future.

During the 40 years since it was inaugurated the Board of the Forth Naturalist and Historian has been supported by 46 different individuals, who between them have given 412 years of voluntary service (16). Four Board Members have served for over 30 years, five over 20 years and ten over 10 years. While it is always difficult to mention specific individuals, the FNH owes a great debt to its two inspirational initiators, Ian Collie and the late Robert Innes, who also served as a Board Member for 13 years. Perhaps the greatest contribution was made by the late Lindsay Corbett who was secretary, treasurer and editor for over 30 years and who managed the original formation of the Board and its successful application to become a Scottish Registered Charity (Forth Naturalist and Historian) in 1992 (17). There are eight other individuals who have served more than twenty years as board members: Ken Mackay, Murray Dickie, John Proctor, David Bryant, Neville Dix, George Thomson, John Elliot and S. John Harrison. Special thanks are also due to Michael Thomas, Michael Usher and Richard Tipping, who have chaired the FNH Board through its last ten years, moving from an Editorial Board with Scottish Charitable Status to a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation; Neville Dix who has served as editor since 1997; Roy Sexton who is deputy editor and also manages the organisation and distribution of the Journal and Marilyn Scott who is the secretary and webmaster.

Grants from Scottish Natural Heritage in 2010 (18) greatly helped FNH adjust to the changing nature of charitable funding, encourage partnership working, adopt a new constitution, become a membership organisation, introduce an annual lecture at the Annual General Meeting and move towards becoming a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (incorporated in March, 2015 (19)).

The FNH has also recently sponsored a series of environmental fairs with support from Stirling Council (20), which encouraged local natural history groups in the area to meet, share information and encourage new members;

supported a NatureFest group in the Falkirk area with grant support from the Falkirk Environment Trust (21) and is seeking to encourage local history groups to meet on a regular basis. FNH organised a major volunteer research project in 2013 entitled “What’s Changed” with support from Scottish Natural Heritage (22) and collaborated with the Inner Forth Landscape Initiative to organise an extremely successful conference, “The Inner Forth – formed by nature, shaped by people” (23).

In celebrating 40 years of success, current Board members recognise the huge commitment of past members, the some three hundred contributors to the Journal and the nearly two hundred presenters who supported the annual conferences. In addition, the Journal owes its continued existence to the many hundreds of individuals and organisations who have purchased it and the annual conference has continued with the support of thousands of attendees.

FNH looks forward to the future, continuing to encourage and support individuals and groups who wish to undertake research and make available information of the natural history and history of the area, provide public access to this information and support conferences and fora which enable the wider public to engage.

Details of journals, publications, events and membership are available on the Forth Naturalist and Historian website <http://www.fnh.stir.ac.uk/>

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Minutes of 155th, meeting of the FNH Board on Wednesday 21st May 2014.

Associate Editors: Neville Dix; FNH Editorial Board.