

XII

The Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne

George Jobey

“Where but on THIS SPOT should such a society flourish. Its very soil is Romanized.” T. Dibdin, 1838¹

In 1912, when Council of the Society was considering what should be done to mark the centenary of the Society in the following year, the then President, Henry, seventh Duke of Northumberland, suggested in words of benevolent yet firm delegation that it should be the occasion for a history of the Society, “putting in and leaving out as much as you like”. Thus it happened that H. E. E. Craster, Fellow of All Souls, produced a memorandum on the material available for such a history,² and six other distinguished members of the Society complied by writing on various aspects of the Society’s activities from the time of its foundation in 1813.³ By and large, however, little comment was then offered on the manner of the Society’s formation and the subsequent development of its ordinary membership, so that some consideration of these topics may not be out of place at the time of its one hundred and seventy fifth anniversary.⁴

The First Hundred Years: Some Reflections

John Bell, the Newcastle bookseller, has already received well merited recognition as the founder of the Society, as it was he who was responsible for the issue of the invitations to seventy gentlemen of the area seeking their support for its formation. Nevertheless, it could well have been a slightly later invitation, extended to and accepted by Hugh, second Duke of Northumberland, that ensured a more successful final response and a healthier enrolment than had been enjoyed by Bell’s earlier but short-lived Numismatic Society. The Duke’s endorsement was helpful, not so much by the way of his accompanying donation of

fifty guineas—though this was indeed equal to fifty annual subscriptions—but rather because of his willingness to act as Patron and his promise to assist “all in his power.” To become an “interest” of the “Leviathan of the Castle”⁵ at that time could be just as advantageous to cultural, charitable and sporting activities as to political aspirations. As Bell himself undoubtedly recognized there were many gentlemen who had at first excused themselves from joining the Society, on such valid grounds as their distance from Newcastle or the presence of an already well established Literary and Philosophical Society, that now had a change of heart. In some instances, one suspects, they may even have had occasion to remember their earthly maker. David Smith (later Sir David), Commissioner for the Duke’s estates, having first declined because of distance from Newcastle and lack of time, was later to write—“As the Duke I understand has accepted the Presidency (*sic*) of your Society I feel it a duty to be incorporated in your original foundation . . . and beg that you will consider the first of the difficulties I stated are done away”. Negative evidence for a like conversion of others may also be deduced from an early and somewhat mysterious disappearance of a number of the original letters of refusal from the collected correspondence of the Society.⁶

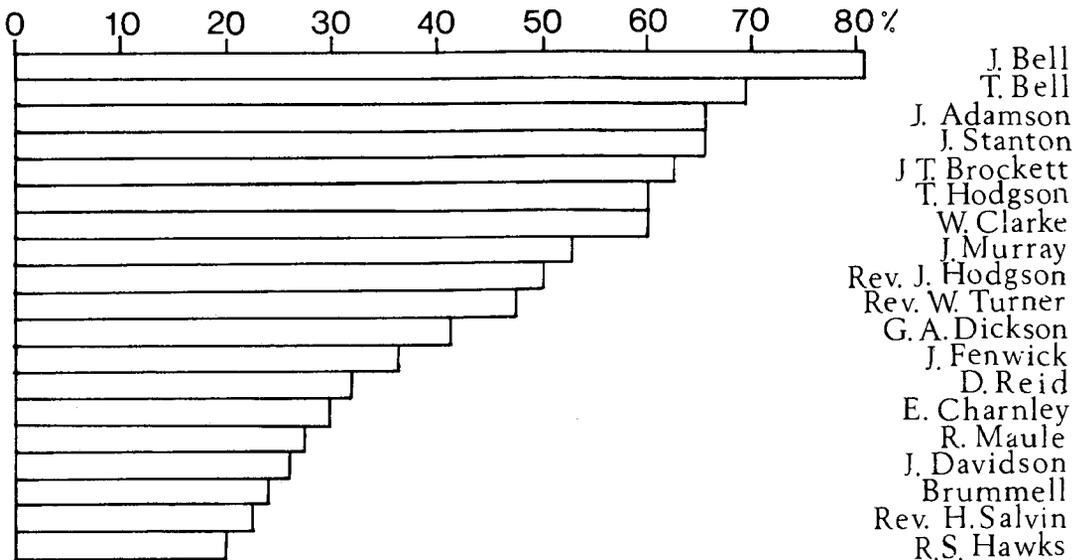
Recognition must also be given to the helpful contributions contained in the replies of a number of founder members of firm commitment who appear to have set their sights perhaps somewhat higher than Bell himself. For example, the Rev. John Hodgson, then the incumbent of Jarrow and Heworth, and John Adamson, lawyer and protagonist of many local societies, both had suggestions to make before the Society was formally inaugurated. Almost in unison, as befitted those who were

to become the first joint secretaries, they stressed a need "to keep the Society respectable . . . by some mode of refusal not calculated to give offence" as "one day or other the Society will become celebrated". They further recommended that a fund should be formed towards the publication of the Transactions of the Society and that all accessions should be properly recorded. In like manner, the attorney John Trotter Brockett expressed an earnest hope

that the proposed library of the Society would be widened in scope beyond the accession of the merely local; a suggestion which was hardly surprising in that his personal library was later to be said to be "upstairs, downstairs and in my lady's chamber" and to have contained a copy of Horsley's *Britannia Romana* only equalled in fineness by the quality of his hock. At least in general spirit, if not always in full realization, the suggestions of these founding mem-

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
1813		17	15	18	10	15	13	8	17	12	18	13
1814	22	12	18	6	13	13	10	14	12	4	8	14
1815	17	8	11	7	14	9	9	6	6	12	9	9
1816	15	9	13	10	11	4	6	6	7	8	9	5
1817	10	10	8	11	6	5	8	7	4	6	14	9
1818	13	6	5	4	1	4	6	3	0	6	3	0

1813 Constitution - 12 members ; 1815 - 8 members ; below no.



bers were some of the tenets which the Society attempted to maintain thereafter.

It might be thought that with a healthy total of 68 members enrolled from Northumberland and Durham by the end of 1813, and some 40 of these gentlemen resident in or very near to Newcastle, the young Society would have been able to muster a respectable attendance at its monthly meetings. Once the first flush had worn off, however, this was clearly not the case; the survival of the meetings appears to have depended upon a mere handful of members and adjournments were all too frequent (fig. 1). One might even suspect a plaintive note of complaint, if not despair, in the laconic minute relating to the abandoned meeting in June 1816: "After waiting in the Society's rooms for an hour and no other member appearing the meeting was adjourned". Imagine, too, the conceivably chilly vigil of Thomas Bell, brother of John, sitting alone in the Castle in anticipation of the May meeting in 1818. He could well have been driven to reflect that the Society's earlier decision to apply for a licence to hold debates and conversations, in compliance with the Seditious Meetings Act, even if prudent was nonetheless verging on the over-ambitious. In this same year, when ten meetings did not achieve the constitution or quorum, the image of the Society must have been further tarnished when the personal finances of John Bell, the Treasurer, became "deranged", and responsibility for the Society's finances passed to John Adamson, the Secretary. Such constantly small attendances at the meetings were no doubt mainly responsible for the progressive reduction of the Society's constitution from the original figure of 12 to 8 to 6 and even to as low as 4 members some thirty years after its formation. All told, the largest gathering of members and guests before 1848 probably took place in 1829, at the dinner which normally followed the anniversary meeting. On this occasion 31 gentlemen celebrated

in the Assembly Rooms with the energetic and seemingly comprehensive proposals of twenty seven toasts. Almost needless to say the dinner and wines gave great satisfaction and even some "renovated Golden Pippins", sent by the Rev. Edmundson of Newburn with his apology for absence, proved to be excellent.⁷

To some extent these small attendances at ordinary meetings may have been due to the rigours of the meeting places, particularly the Castle, though this is not a complaint which features frequently in the minutes or correspondence. There was certainly a strong recommendation in October 1818 to change the meeting place from the Castle, the apartment there being "cold and uncomfortable", and it is evident that the earlier temporary move to John Anderson's office in Westgate Street in November 1817 had brought a brief increase in attendance (fig. 1). By and large, however, subsequent meeting places, such as at Farrington's Yard from 1819 to 1824 and at the Literary and Philosophical Society in Ridley Court from 1825, whilst they may have eased the problem did not solve it.⁸ Restrictions imposed by travelling were obviously a further deterrent to attendance, whether it was simply a matter of distance or the inadequacies of a "fat gig horse". In addition there were the normal prohibiting physical disabilities, such as the gout of George Gibson of Stagshaw or the growing deafness of our first, long-serving President, Sir John Swinburne of Capheaton, who nonetheless survived in office until his death a few months before his one hundredth birthday. After all such allowances are made, however, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that in meetings which could consist mainly of discussion and conversation amongst a small group of members there was not sufficient of compelling interest for the possibly less ardent or less well informed subscribers. And yet this was probably the *modus operandi* which had been envisaged by some of the Society's founding members, as it had almost certainly been in the mind of one of them, the Rev. William Turner, when many years earlier he had first suggested the formation of a Literary and Philosophical Society.⁹ Be that as it may, as

Fig. 1. Attendances at monthly meetings, 1813-1818, and the main supporters with their attendances as a percentage of the maxima, 1813-1817 incl.

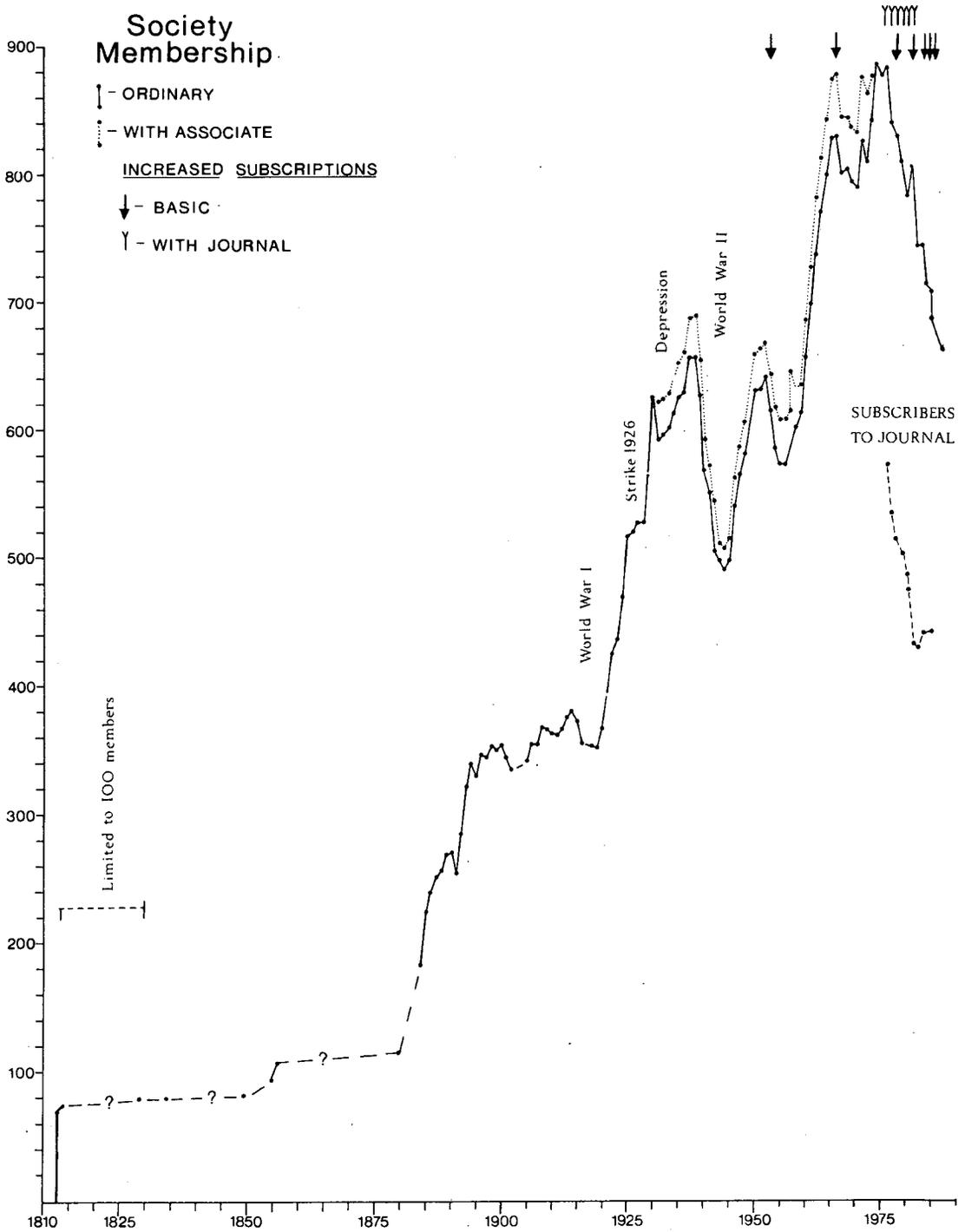


Fig. 2.

late as the thirtieth anniversary meeting of our own Society the officers were still reporting "a real want of papers to make the monthly meetings more interesting". In this instance there had been only one such paper during the preceding year, a discourse on "The mummies of crocodiles from Egypt", delivered, along with exhibits, by the surgeon Glasford Potter, an early excavator of the Roman fort at Bird-sowald and a co-founder of the Newcastle School of Medicine.

For some decades after 1813 it would seem that the number of annual enrolments was only sufficient to maintain the total ordinary membership already achieved in the first two years of the Society's existence, so that a decision to increase the statutory limitation from 100 to 150 members in 1830 was somewhat optimistic (fig. 2). Moreover, it has to be noted that the number of paid-up members at the end of any one year was invariably less than the total membership which was occasionally recorded. And at this time and for long afterwards an unpaid term of three years and three months was allowed before a member could be struck off the roll. In 1825, for example, arrears amounted to £72 9s, "but it would be misleading to members to hold out any prospect of £40 of them being available", whilst at the end of 1840 some 30 of the 78 members seem to have been in arrears to the extent of from one to three annual subscriptions.¹⁰

It is not easy to quantify the factors which may have governed the total membership figures in this early period. Such few letters of resignation as were written or have survived throw little light upon the reasons for wastage, other than by death, removal from the area, or simply a loss of interest in "the archaeological science". None are as specifically forthright, and indeed unforbearing, as that from the Rev. Joseph Cook, vicar of Shilbottle and Chatton, who as early as 1815 asked for his name to be removed from the roll "because of the horrid treatment received from John Wilson of Morpeth", another early member.¹¹

If, as has been claimed, an attempt to broadcast the existence of the Society lay partly behind the rapid and seemingly excessive elec-

tion of honorary members—by 1828 there were already 51 recipients—then this liberal though then not too costly dispensation cannot be shown to have attracted a larger ordinary membership.¹² The one factor which might well have encouraged a greater and geographically wider enrolment would have been regular publications, but John Hodgson's declared prerequisite for a healthy society was not being met. Although *Archaeologia Aeliana* was then and for long afterwards issued in parts, papers considered worthy of publication had amounted to no more than four quarto volumes in the first forty-two years of the Society's existence. The possible dangers of such a shortfall did not escape the notice of the eminent antiquary Roach Smith, founder of the Archaeological Association and first elected as one of our honorary members in 1847. In his long correspondence with John Bell he frequently stressed the need for the Newcastle Society to publish: "You will be ruined if you do not keep up with the Transactions".¹³

Even though the Society did not achieve any substantial growth during these early decades it did not fare badly in comparison with other local societies. The Natural History Society, which had been spawned from the Literary and Philosophical Society in 1830, started with over double the membership of the Antiquaries yet steadily declined during the following thirty years to approximately the same total membership of 100 or so (fig. 3).¹⁴ Over the same period the membership of the much larger Literary and Philosophical Society fluctuated, perhaps partly because of two inhibiting increases in the subscription rates (fig. 4).¹⁵ In addition, although its members had viewed the formation of the Society of Antiquaries "without the slightest tincture of jealousy"¹⁶—as well they might since in 1814 some 70% of the members of the Antiquaries were also members of the Lit. and Phil.—it is conceivable that over time the formation of these other societies, with their more specialized interests, could have adversely affected recruitment to the Literary and Philosophical Society itself.

Towards the middle of the nineteenth cen-

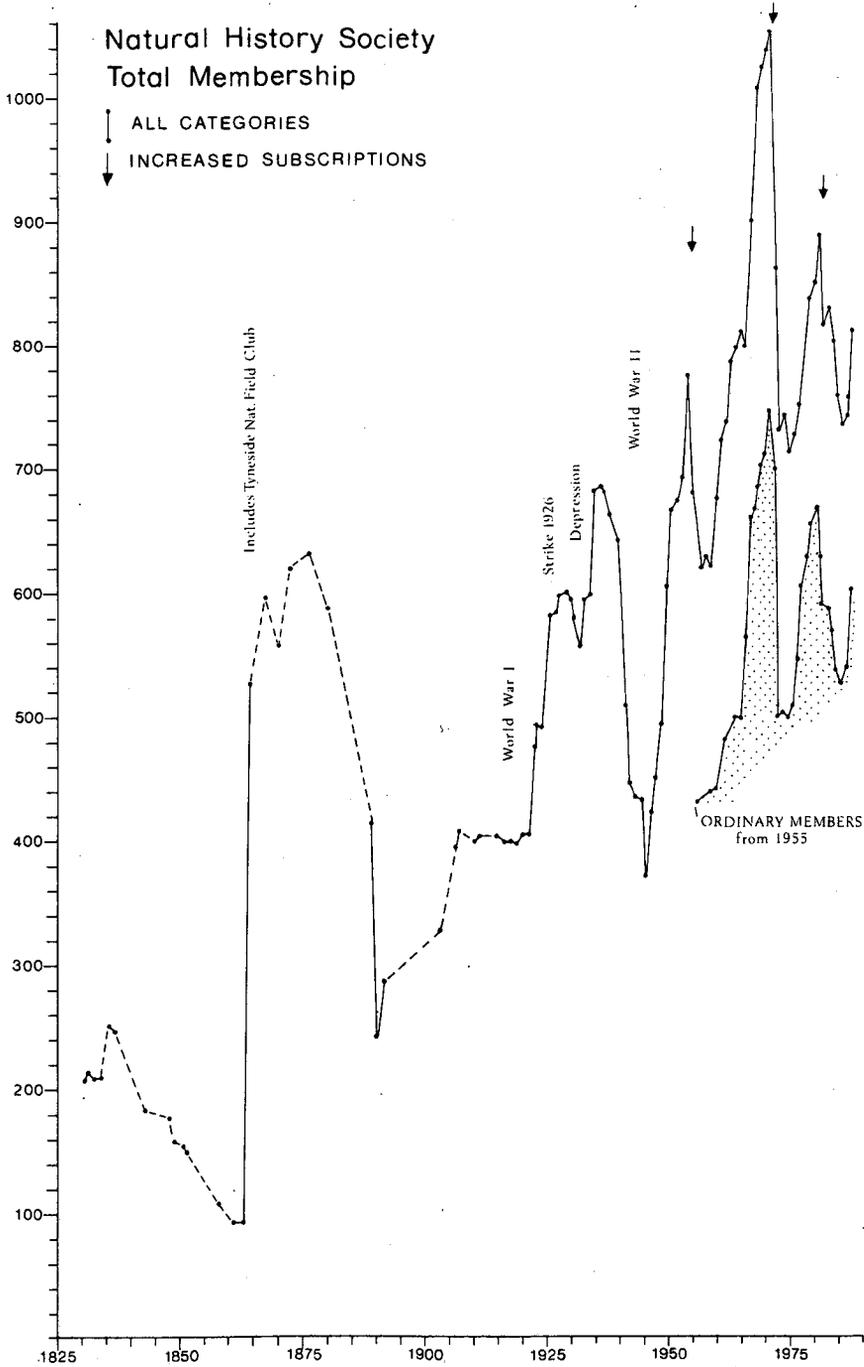


Fig. 3.

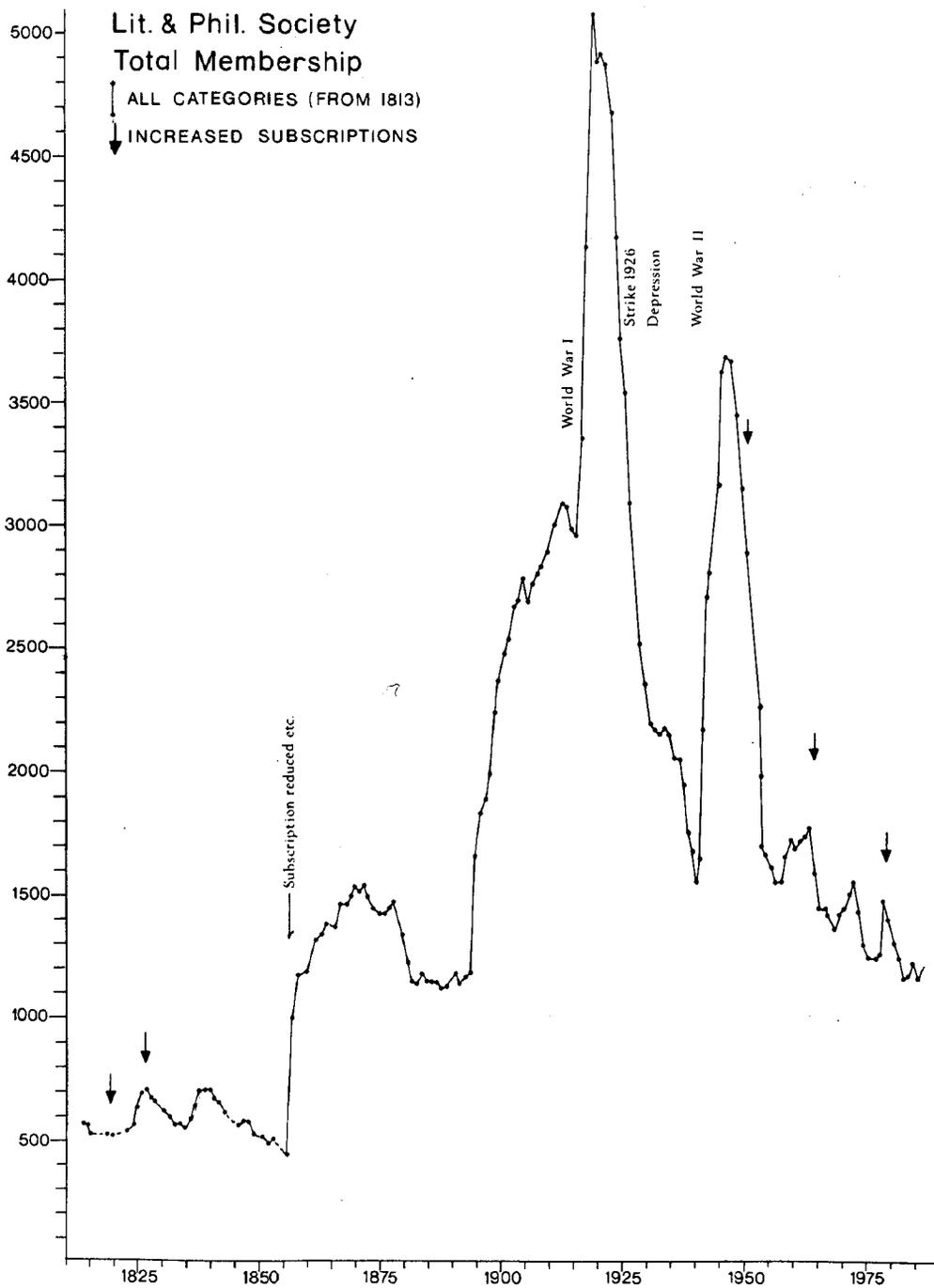


Fig. 4.

tury there was a slight increase in the annual enrolments to our Society and for the first time the recorded totals of ordinary members reached 100 or over, despite some transitory economic uncertainties particularly in local banking.¹⁷ There was also a corresponding if small increase in attendance at the Society's meetings; over the period 1850 to 1854, for example, an average of about 11 members attended monthly meetings and 23 the anniversary meetings, though no more than 16 members achieved an attendance record of 20% or over. This was a period of growing interest in antiquarian matters elsewhere, exemplified in the foundation of the British Archaeological Association in 1843, followed by the formation of a number of county and regional antiquarian and archaeological societies.¹⁸ Within our own Society the increased activity later allowed Collingwood Bruce, who was seldom over modest in attitude, to relate his own election as a member in 1846 to "the beginning of a new state of things".¹⁹ And indeed there was much to excite both local and wider interest, including the delivery of Bruce's popular public lectures, his first if somewhat restricted Wall Pilgrimage of 1849, and shortly afterwards his first monograph on the Roman Wall. In conjunction with an appeal for the Castle restoration fund the Society itself held a well publicised banquet in the Great Hall to celebrate its new tenancy, whilst the less affluent were also remembered in the proposals for soirées, to be held in the Castle "so that working chaps might be admitted at small charge" to the building. Amongst other events the Melodies Committee of the Society was formed and the Archaeological Institute was encouraged to visit Newcastle in 1852. This new ebullience which permeated the Society for a time is perhaps epitomized by Bruce's proposal in 1854 of a scheme for the erection of two Dobson designed monuments of pyramidal form, one to commemorate John Horsley and the other John Hodgson. These were to be located respectively on Winshields and Mucklebank Crag, so that every traveller by rail from Newcastle to Carlisle would be able to pick out the line of the Roman Wall.

Such an early venture towards a heritage industry, agreed to by Council, remained no more than an intention, although tumbled stone suitable for the construction of the monuments was seen to be both economically and appropriately at hand, and no pecuniary responsibility of the Society was envisaged.²⁰

No doubt equally important in sustaining a higher membership at this time was the presence of the fourth estate at monthly meetings in the person of James Clephan. Initially he attended only as a reporter for the *Gateshead Observer*, but in the affairs of the Society provided a notable vindication of the old adage that if one wished to learn about Newcastle one had to go to Gateshead. From his press reports there followed in 1854 a decision to publish monthly a *Proceedings* of the Society. As a result of a greater number of papers now being read at the monthly meetings six volumes of *Archaeologia Aeliana* were also published in parts between 1857 and 1865. Amongst these volumes, moreover, that for 1856-57, containing Bruce's catalogue of inscribed and sculptured stones, especially demonstrated the growing wealth and importance of the Society's museum accessions. Indeed, the accumulation had been such that Bruce felt able to quip at the anniversary dinner that he often went to the British Museum "for the pleasure of beholding its poverty in all things relating to British antiquities", only to return to Newcastle Museum "to make himself proud in beholding the difference". Dr. Charlton, a co-secretary with Bruce, was also quick to point out that in the same year at least half of the newly elected members were "resident at such a distance that they had no doubt become members mainly on account of the Society's *Transactions*", namely *Archaeologia Aeliana*.

All told, however, the relatively small increase in the Society's membership at this time might appear to have been disappointing by comparison with the more spectacular leaps in the figures relating to the Literary and Philosophical Society and the Natural History Society (figs. 3 & 4). But in the case of the former society the sharp reversal in the earlier downward trend followed only upon the repayment

of that society's mortgage by Robert Stephenson and the reduction of the annual subscription by half in 1856. Moreover, the figures now also included the lady and reading members as well as the ordinary members. The equally notable rise in the total membership figures of the Natural History Society, some years later in 1863–64, was due almost entirely to the incorporation of the members of the Tyneside Field Club as associate members.

After 1865 the Society once again appears to have fallen into a period of repose and, as an indication of this, parts for only two volumes of *Archaeologia Aeliana* were produced in the following seventeen years. This was also a period when additional societies, capable of providing alternatives for prospective members, were being established in the professed geographical area of interest of our Society: the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland was founded in 1861 and the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society in 1866. By 1878 Dr. Bruce reported that some members of the Society were undoubtedly "putting on the sear and yellow leaf but exhibiting no falling off". Be that as it may, there was by then no new growth and the average rate of new enrolments to the Society was actually in decline, a fate also shared by the Literary and Philosophical and the Natural History societies. During the years 1878 to the end of 1882 the nature of the minutes of our Society's meetings, and sometimes their absence, must lead one to suspect a lack of administrative attention on the part of the joint secretaries, Collingwood Bruce and William Longstaffe. There were certainly some meetings when both secretaries were absent, so that their joint letter to the Council of the Society in December 1882 must have come as no surprise, and perhaps says all: "In consequence of the pressure of our private literary engagements we are reluctantly reduced to tender our resignations of the office of honorary secretaries". Statutes were altered accordingly, so as to accommodate two additional vice-presidents, and in 1883 the secretaryships were assumed by the banker and historian Thomas Hodgkin and

the solicitor Robert Blair, whose energy and enthusiasm had already made him an obvious choice for the office.²¹ From then on the minutes in the hand of Blair are immaculate, with many of the museum accessions illustrated. Of greater moment in the present context, however, this change of officers was accompanied by the election of 81 new members in 1883, the largest annual enrolment in the history of the Society, followed by a further 50 in 1884. The admission of new members in these two years amounted to approximately the same total as the combined new enrolments over the previous twenty three years. Furthermore, this was followed by a rapid increase in total ordinary membership over the following decade (fig. 2).

At the time of this remarkable increase in membership economic conditions in the region if not continuously encouraging were at least generally favourable to growth. Despite some economic recessions in the 1870s and early 1880s the economy of the North East was expanding, whilst population too was continuing to increase.²² In addition, scientific and archaeological enquiry was in the ascendant, bringing with it names and works to excite the antiquarian and archaeological imagination. A growing interest in ancient monuments themselves was also evident in the passing of the first Ancient Monuments Act in 1882. In brief, this was a period when archaeology has been said to have come of age.²³ Even so, it is doubtful if such contributory factors alone could have accounted for the sudden spate of new elections during 1883. In this phenomenon we must also surely see the effectiveness of Robert Blair in particular as one of the secretaries. The resurgence was likewise manifest in the renewed publication of our *Proceedings*, which had lapsed for some time, and in the regular appearance of the annual volumes of *Archaeologia Aeliana* after this date. Both publications were then and for the following forty years under the editorship of Robert Blair. At the same time country meetings were also restarted, serving as a fitting prelude to the second Wall Pilgrimage of 1886. In 1883 the Black Gate too was first leased from the Cor-

poration of Newcastle upon Tyne to serve as a museum, to be followed in 1884 by a visit of the Royal Institute of Archaeology.

The Society continued to prosper in membership until its centenary in 1913 and, shortly afterwards, the outbreak of the First World War (fig. 2). It did so, moreover, with an assurance which was demonstrated in more than simple numerical fashion. In the annual report for 1888, for example, Thomas Hodgkin found it necessary to rebuke no less an august body than the Society of Antiquaries of London, for "not having previously been zealous and enthusiastic for the advancement of archaeological science, as the British Association had been for the physical sciences". In a somewhat heady atmosphere it is also not surprising to find that in the following year a motion was put to members of our Society, albeit quite unsuccessfully, that the word "Fellow(s)" should be substituted for "Member(s)" in the Society's statutes. Moreover, not for the last time in the Society's history, when membership has flourished and finances have not been strained, there were some who thought that it could become too popular an institution. In September 1904 F. W. Dendy argued that it would be better "to have a smaller society with a larger number of members occupied in research . . . there being too many ornamental members and too few antiquaries". This written vice-presidential broadside, which was aimed against the suggested delivery of some popular lectures as a means of advancing the work of the Society, was successfully countered on this occasion by a fortuitous visit of the Channel Fleet to the River Tyne, an event which so reduced attendance at the meeting when the matter was to be discussed that the proceedings had to be adjourned.

Except for this unusual lapse in attendance, no doubt engendered by patriotism and a strong local interest in all things maritime, both the indoor and the country meetings of the Society were now attended by up to 30 or more members. Moreover, the improvements in communications had to some extent widened the boundaries from within which attendance at monthly meetings became feasible. In 1909

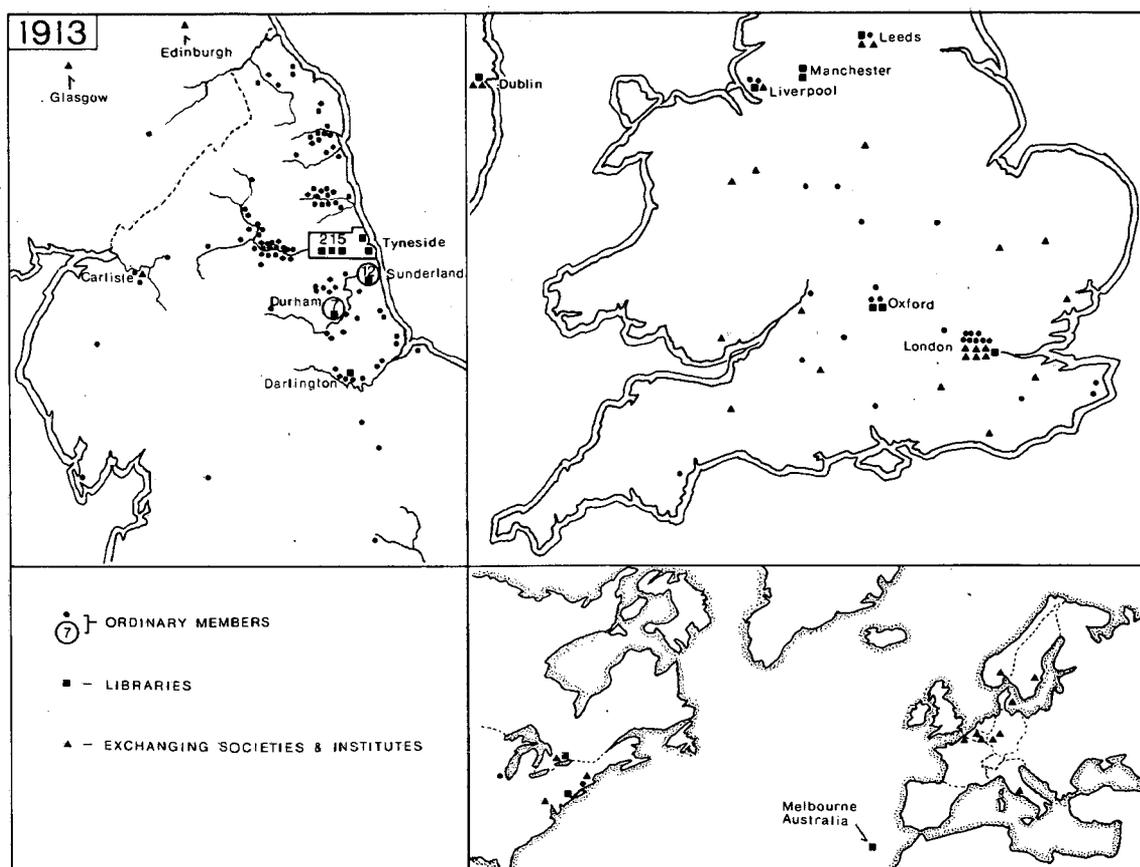
even the President himself, the seventh Duke, admitted to having "rather foolishly" invested in a motor car, by which venture he hoped to free himself from the restrictions which had been imposed upon his attendance by the rail journey from Alnwick.²⁴ By 1913 the total ordinary membership had also risen to about 380, still being drawn preponderantly from Northumberland and Durham with well over half located in Newcastle, Gateshead and the fashionable later Victorian developments in the seaside borough of Tynemouth (fig. 5). Elsewhere in the country, expatriates from the North East and those with northern family, commercial, or political connections continued to form the majority of the personal membership, together with a few academics with no such relationships. Because of the now regular Society publications, combined with the development of the public library services in the later nineteenth century, libraries and institutions already constituted some 6% of the ordinary membership. It may be worthy of passing note that the Free Library in South Shields, the home town of Robert Blair, was in the vanguard of local public library enrolments in 1883. In like manner, by 1913, the societies with which publications were exchanged had risen to 40 at home and overseas, thus greatly enhancing a library which as early as 1864 had been described with some pride as "superior in all probability to that of any provincial archaeological association in the kingdom". Perhaps appropriately, in view of the long and unbroken patronage of the Society by the Dukes of Northumberland, the earliest of the American exchanges had been with the Smithsonian Institution (fig. 5).

For the greater part of the nineteenth century the Society had remained a male preserve, despite the bestowal of an honorary membership in 1813 upon Mrs. Bridget Atkinson, the mother-in-law of Nathaniel Clayton, Town Clerk of Newcastle and a founder member of our Society as well as an oligarchy in

Fig. 5. Distribution of members and exchanging societies, 1913.

local government. Although by 1856 the members of the Literary and Philosophical Society were seeking to admit the entry of ladies to the full ordinary rather than reading membership, "by some method less revolting to their delicacy than the usual nomination",²⁵ no such consideration appears to have been entertained by the same gentlemen when wearing their antiquarian hats. Our first lady member, Miss Julia Boyd of Moorhouse, Leamside, who hailed appropriately from a family well established in the coal-mining industry, was not elected until 1877 and then unheralded except by the normal method of election. By 1913, when Emily Davidson of Morpeth had wittingly or unwittingly submitted herself to martyrdom in pursuance of female equality, lady members num-

bered 24 or just over 6% of the total ordinary membership. In the main these ladies came from the families of the landed gentry or those already eminent in local commerce and industry, such as the Misses Eleanor and Florence Cruddas of Haughton Castle. There were also a few, however, who had already sought and were finally granted academic or professional qualifications, a notable example being Miss Ethel Williams M.D., another ardent fighter for the recognition of women in public life. But whilst ladies continued to adorn the country meetings, either as members or guests, they remained only notable for their absence from indoor meetings. The intrepid Miss Boyd appears to have attended just one such meeting, that in her tenth year of membership,



before moving from the immediate area. The medical practitioner Miss Williams, who had driven a motor car in the streets of Newcastle some years before the noble President was to make his own rash purchase, had certainly not attended any of the Society's indoor meetings before the First World War. And, for whatever reasons, the early papers of the historian Miss Madeleine Hope Dodds were delivered to the Society by her father or a secretary.

In common with some other societies clerics quickly came to form a fairly important numerical element in the nineteenth century membership. Although no more than 5 of the 33 ministers listed in the Newcastle and Gateshead Directories had enrolled in the Society in 1813, the clerical membership as a whole was then already 9% of the total, and by the middle of the nineteenth century this proportion had increased to over 15%. Unlike the neighbouring Berwickshire Naturalists Club, however, which had been founded in 1831 with a proportionately stronger clerical representation, our own Society never seems to have been troubled by "finding the Book of Nature at variance with the Book of Revelation".²⁶ Whether our own clerics were bishops, parish priests, or the occasional but influential schoolmaster, and whether they were active in the Society's affairs or not, they undoubtedly served to widen the geographical base of the membership, as at times up to three quarters of them were resident away from Newcastle itself. But by 1904, when an eighty four year old but still active Canon William Greenwell last took the chair at a meeting of the Society, the relative proportion of the clerical membership was already in decline, so that by 1913 it accounted for only 6% of the greatly increased total membership.

Lawyers, whether in private practice, the judiciary, or local government, were by far the most numerous of the professionally engaged members. Of the 47 barristers and solicitors listed in Newcastle and Gateshead in 1821,²⁷ 13 were already members of the Society. As a group they formed 16% of the membership in 1813, a proportion which rose to 20% by the 1850s. Although the latter proved to be a

proportional maximum, any relative decline thereafter was met by their increasing contribution to the literature of the Society. For example, the prolific papers of the lawyer William Longstaffe undoubtedly vied in quantity with those from the pen of the schoolmaster the Rev. Dr. Collingwood Bruce; Horatio Adamson, Town Clerk of Tynemouth, found time to research his native borough, as did William Woodman, Town Clerk of Morpeth; and Frederick Dendy, "that admirable Crichton of the north", had his many academic contributions and professional activities recognized by the award of a doctorate of the University of Durham some years before the Society achieved its centenary. It remains to add that over this first one hundred years, and indeed well beyond, there were some legal firms in the city of Newcastle which were never without at least one representative in the ranks of the Society, as well as some with generations of unbroken family membership.

The remainder of the professional groups within the Society were very much smaller and generally less influential in the Society's activities. Surgeons and physicians at first appeared only spasmodically amongst the newly elected, and by the mid-nineteenth century, for example, only 2 out of the 91 practitioners listed in Newcastle and Gateshead²⁸ were members. Although enrolments from the medical profession as a whole were increasing by the early 1880s, after which seldom a year passed without at least one such election to the Society, they hardly ever accounted for more than about 3% of the rapidly increasing total membership. Nevertheless, at least passing reference should be made to the distinguished local physician Dennis Embleton, a vice-president of the Society from 1895 to 1900, who at one time assisted Canon Greenwell in his barrow digging and identification of skeletal material. He did not join the Society until 1886, but as the first Professor of Medicine in the Newcastle School of Medicine, after it had become more closely allied with the University of Durham in 1870, he provided one of those early links between the Society and the University which were being forged by a small yet steady enrol-

ment of university staff from Durham and Newcastle in the years leading up to the Society's centenary.

The Society was seldom lacking in architects from the time of the election of John Dobson in 1815, though some of these might be more aptly described as builders. Taken together, however, they too were small in number and, despite the eminence of some of them, their contributions to the publications of the Society were surprisingly slender.

By and large the retail trades of the period were not particularly well represented and perhaps the city booksellers were more prominent than other tradesmen. Their market stalls and shops not only catered for the needs of fellow members but at times during the nineteenth century provided them with additional, informal venues. Most of these booksellers were more successful in their businesses than John Bell, who after his bankruptcy in 1818 reverted to land surveying and collecting. Emerson Charnley, another founder member of the Society and one of the more frequent attenders at its monthly meetings (fig. 1), inherited a business which dominated the book trade in Newcastle for a century and eventually passed into the ownership of a former apprentice of the firm, William Dodd, who served as the Society's Treasurer from 1865 to 1890. In the later nineteenth and early twentieth century the membership lists generally contained at least six or seven well known Newcastle booksellers. Not surprisingly the interest of the book trade elsewhere lay primarily in the possibility of the sale and distribution of the Society's regular publications; as it so happens, the earliest surviving typewritten letter amongst the Society's correspondence was received from Asher & Co., booksellers and publishers of Covent Garden, offering their services as agents in 1892.

Without prejudice as to the social station or estate of individuals in the foregoing groups, however, it was to the "landed gentry" and the "wealthy of the area" that the Society looked for a substantial number of its members during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And at times it was not slow to voice its

disapproval when enrolment from these quarters appeared to be insufficient. In 1883, when an additional sum of £600 was being sought to add to a building fund of about £1,000 for work on the Black Gate, the then President, the Earl of Ravensworth, remarked that this "was a great deal of money to raise". Richard Cail's reported reply was that they had "immensely rich men in the Antiquarian Society", an observation which was conceivably undiplomatic but certainly not an exaggeration. Even in the early twentieth century "Castles", "Halls", "Parks", "Granges" "Manors", and "Houses" of some pretension continued to account for as many as 15% of the members' addresses. In like manner, particularly after the middle of the nineteenth century, the commercial, industrial and the science history of the North East, if not at times the nation, could well be written around the names of the many men of stature and some financial substance in these fields who were members of the Society.²⁹ It is true that a number of them were self-made men who did not join the Society until after they had made their marks and formed their libraries; thus, for example, George Elliott who progressed from having been a young trapper in the mines to becoming a major, countrywide coal owner and a baronet. There were also a few who may have been much more at home with the pages of their ledgers than the pages of *Archaeologia Aeliana*, if a combination of personal book plates and uncut pages can be taken as indicative of this. And yet others, such as Nicholas Wood or Sir W. G. Armstrong, seem to have been happier to attend and to speak at various scientific gatherings³⁰ or the Literary and Philosophical Society than at the Antiquaries. But, whatever the extent of their personal involvement in the affairs of the Society, many of these members were from an influential network of North East families which provided a substantial component of the membership of many local societies during this period. In the circumstances, it may appear paradoxical that although the Society had been for long the repository for much of the portable heritage of the area, it never received benefactions or legacies of such magnitude as to allow

it the mixed blessing of owning its own premises, after the manner of the Literary and Philosophical Society and the Natural History Society. On the other hand, the membership as a whole appears to have been reasonably content to seek no more than the tenancies of the Castle and the Black Gate, which from time to time were not without their own financial burdens.

The Ebb and Flow of Membership 1913 to 1988

At the onset of World War I the Society appealed vigorously against the German government's barbarous treatment of ancient buildings in Belgium and France. The exchanges of publications with some German societies were also formally ended, though at the time it was thought that the members of these societies were themselves blameless for the events, "the recent conduct of the Germans being due to the propaganda of the Emperor and the professors and writers on the General Staff of Empire". As a matter of the "utmost importance" the publications of our own Society were continued without a break during the period of hostilities, and the chief interference to normal activities was seen as being the cessation of the country meetings. In common with other societies in the area our membership figures were not greatly affected by the war (figs. 2, 3 & 4). As the members were of relatively high average age, any temporary decline in the totals was caused not so much by a loss of members on active service as by a decline in the rate of new enrolments. Moreover, almost before hostilities had ended new elections were quickly on the increase again. Indeed, it was probably this speedy revival which helped to avert an increase in the original annual subscription of one guinea, a possibility which was considered for the first time in the Society's history in 1919 and not again for a good many years thereafter.

The General Strike of 1926, being short-lived, can be associated with no more than a slight plateau in the otherwise rising membership of our own Society and the Natural History Society (figs. 2 & 3). In like manner, the depression of the 1930s, notwithstanding its

extremely sombre portrayal in some though not all historical accounts, led to no more than a minor and temporary setback in the Society's fortunes. And even this trough in the ordinary membership was filled to some extent by the introduction of an associate membership, albeit a somewhat discriminatory concession as at that time it extended only to wives and unmarried daughters! The year 1931 also saw a change in meeting place from the Black Gate to a more commodious and convenient lecture theatre in the Mining Institute, a move which was not without some opposition from those diehards who thought that "people had lost the art of walking and climbing stairs". Nevertheless, this change of meeting place for the monthly meetings was entirely justified. Despite a passing reference to "hard times" in the Society's minute book the membership was rising steadily again before the mid 1930s, even to the extent that the more optimistic were encouraged to think that a total of one thousand members could be within reach in the not too distant future.

In 1939, however, any hopes of achieving such a target were clearly dashed by the outbreak of war, at which time a total of 700 members, including associates, had been attained. The subsequent adverse effects of World War II upon the Society were far more telling in numerical terms than those of World War I, the maximum fall in the total ordinary membership being about 25% as compared with only 7% during the earlier hostilities. By 1941, when Rommel was only sixty miles from Cairo, new elections to the Society were as low as they had ever been since 1881. Even so, although the basement of the Castle now served as an air-raid shelter and valuable coins and manuscripts had been transferred from the Black Gate to a place of safer custody, the programme of monthly meetings was not interrupted and the publication of *Archaeologia Aeliana* and the more frequent *Proceedings* continued throughout the war years. Furthermore, 1942 brought a welcome and sustained recovery in the number of newly elected members, though this did not begin to show itself immediately in a larger total membership.

Such an early wartime improvement in membership was not unusual. A more spectacular change in fortune also attended the Literary and Philosophical Society, where an increase in total membership in 1942 not only reversed a generally persistent decline from 1919 onwards but also initiated a continuously rapid increase in membership throughout the war years until 1948³¹ (fig. 4). In this instance such a notable growth must be ascribed to the enhanced recognition and appreciation of that society's large and catholic library, during a period when some changes in habits and forms of entertainment were being imposed upon the home population by restrictions such as the black-out and petrol-rationing. A similar if not always so remarkable increase in use was also experienced at this time by some public libraries³² in addition to other subscription libraries.

The post-war membership figures of our own Society continued their upward course, aided now by a burgeoning of popular interest in archaeology, sometimes media encouraged, and its wider acceptance as a subject in the educational spectrum. Indeed, an appreciable number of new members came to the Society at this time by way of adult education classes in archaeology and local history, many of them seeking active or even vigorous participation. In like manner, the Natural History Society gained from a parallel growth of popular interest in various aspects of the natural environment (fig. 3). For both societies, however, there also occurred temporary yet portentous reversals in recruitment and total membership because of increases in the annual subscription rates. In 1952, for the first time in the history of the Society, the annual subscription for ordinary members was increased, from one to two guineas, and despite the abandonment of the publication of *Proceedings* in 1956³³ a second increase was again necessary in 1965 (fig. 2, arrows). Nevertheless, enrolments remained resilient for the time being, so that an apex in total membership was reached during the years 1973 to 1975 when there were almost 900 members. It then began to look as if the optimistic assessment of the 1930s might be

finally achieved and that the lecture theatre in the Mining Institute, already filled beyond its seating capacity at some monthly meetings, would in turn prove to be too small for our purposes. In such apparently halcyon times it is not surprising to find that a number of national societies, such as the Prehistoric Society, the Society for Roman Studies, or the Society for Mediaeval Archaeology, also reached apogees in their total membership figures during the early 1970s.³⁴

During the sixty years which had elapsed since the Society's centenary there had been many changes in the composition of its membership, though the records do not allow these to be easily quantified in any detail at this juncture. Nevertheless, selective attention might be drawn in the first place to the increased prominence which had been assumed by subscribing libraries and institutions. Having formed no more than 5½% of the ordinary membership in 1913 they accounted for almost 17% of the total when the membership peaked in the early 1970s. This much enlarged proportion was all the more significant in that it had been fostered by the regular publication of our journal at a reasonable, inclusive, subscription rate, and undoubtedly depended upon this for its continuance.

A second, not unexpected development had been in the increasing number of lady members. Between 1913 and the beginning of World War II their representation had almost doubled to some 15% of the ordinary membership. It was not until 1971, however, that they achieved anything approaching equal numbers on the annual roll of newly elected members, by when they also accounted for about 25% of the total ordinary membership, or slightly more if associate members are included. Nevertheless, despite their steadily increasing presence, they had been slow to assume office within the Society, a tardiness which only very doubtfully can be ascribed to excessively shy and retiring dispositions. With the exception of two ladies who had served in the honorary posts of Librarian and Curator for a time during World War II, the officers and members of the Council of the Society

remained exclusively male until 1957, when two ladies were first elected to Council. All told, it was possibly only with the election of our present Honorary Secretary to office in 1971 that the long period of male dominance could be seen to be in certain retreat. At the very least, although the election of a lady president was still some years in the offing, the recognition of the importance of the female membership had progressed well beyond what Collingwood Bruce would have envisaged in 1885 as "providing a mark of loyalty to the fair sex", a virtue which at that time he attributed to the early fathers of the Society for having bestowed honorary membership upon Mrs. Bridget Atkinson in 1813.

It is only to be expected that by the early 1970s there had also been a manifest change in the balance and variety of the occupations of the Society's members. For example, although it can be only from personal knowledge rather than recorded information,³⁵ school teachers by then certainly outnumbered lawyers; in some years the elections of registered nurses also exceeded those of doctors; and the enrolment of undergraduate and post-graduate students, even though they were sometimes transitory members, could account for up to 10% of the new elections annually. Moreover, one is led to suspect that in this greatly enlarged Society there were a number of members for whom there existed a finely balanced relationship between the financial demands of the Society and their other commitments and interests—an equation maybe not without some significance for the years ahead.

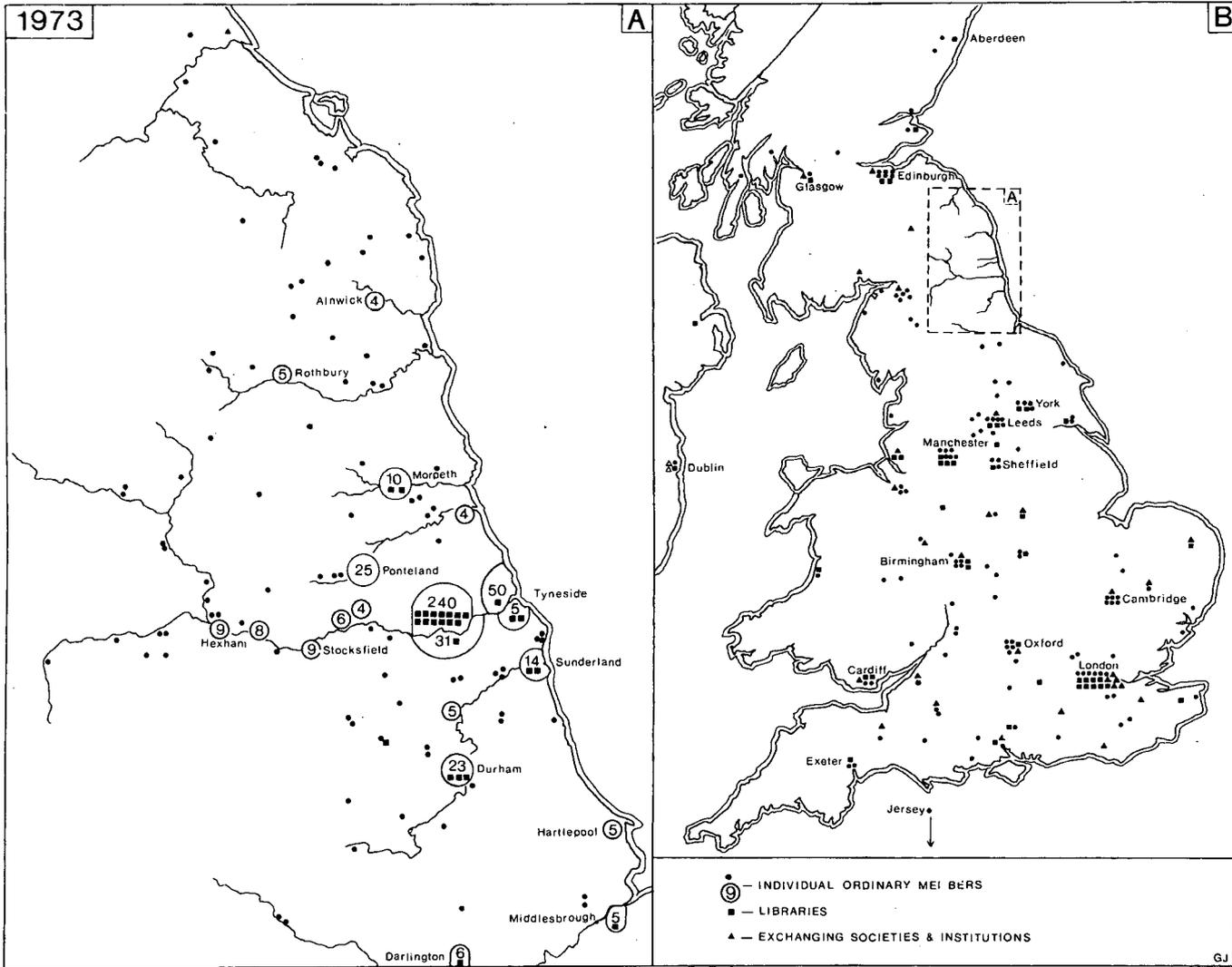
The geographical distribution of the membership at this time of maximum numbers was still centred upon Newcastle and the north bank of the Tyne rather than the south bank (fig. 6). There had been a thickening of representation in the Tyne valley to the west of Newcastle, generally within the acceptable commuting distance, and a notable growth in what was conceivably the more expensive of the new residential developments to the north of the city in the area of Ponteland. Elsewhere in the country those subscribers with some roots in the North East had been joined by an

increased number of academics and professional archaeologists, as well as by additional libraries and institutions. By far the most important element overseas continued to be libraries and institutions, now with a notable growth in North America (fig. 7).

From the mid 1970s onwards the Society has experienced a prolonged fall in membership. This reversal has occurred in the face of successive increases in the rates of the annual subscription, imposed in order to contend with monetary inflation, and against a background of economic depression and some decrease in population in the Society's heartland. It is a decline, however, which has not been without parallels amongst a number of national³⁶ and local societies during the same period (fig. 3).³⁷ In our own case the downward trend was in no way halted, though its progress may have been slowed down, by the creation in 1976 of a much less costly ordinary membership which did not carry with it the obligation to take the annual publication. As it happened, such a reduced rate was a little more closely related to the annual subscriptions sought by the many local history societies which now existed in the area, but because of our Society's additional commitments to library and museums there could never be parity. Even in this revised form our total ordinary membership had already undergone a 25% reduction by 1985, a proportion equal to that experienced in the early years of World War II. Moreover, the real magnitude of the decline may be seen to be even greater if one takes into account the corresponding decrease in the number of individual members who continued to take the annual volume (fig. 2),³⁸ a reverse which could have been the more telling but for the more buoyant figures for libraries and institutions.

In the circumstances it was as well that the Society was able to establish a fortunately derived Endowment Fund by the sale of some assets in the early 1980s. This fund has not only alleviated some of the unwelcome financial consequences of falling numbers but has also

Fig. 6. Distribution of members and exchanging societies, 1973.



encouraged the Society to return to the more costly subscription, which includes the purchase of *Archaeologia Aeliana*, as being obligatory for all newly elected ordinary members from 1985. In this, the Society's one hundred and seventy fifth anniversary year, it is still too early to judge what might be the final result of this return to the old order. Whatever the future, however, there can be no doubt but that John Hodgson would have given this measure his fervent nod of approval.

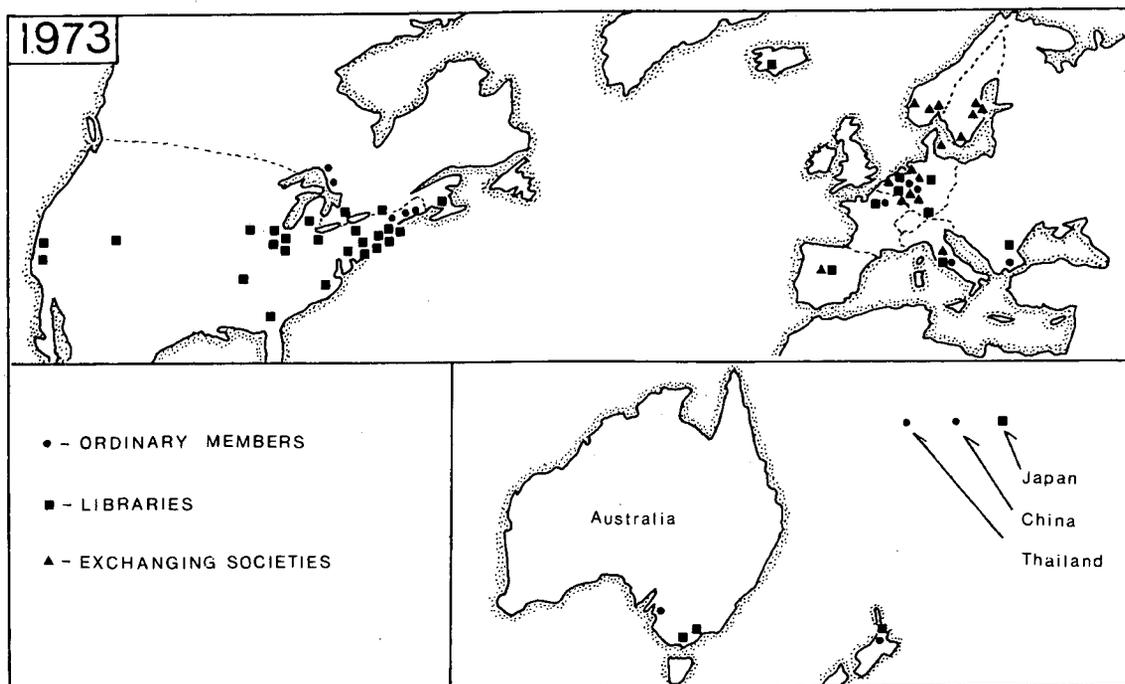
Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the Secretaries of the Literary and Philosophical Society and the Natural History Society for allowing access to the annual reports and other records of these societies, and to the staffs of the Local Records Section in the Newcastle Central Library and the Northumberland Records Office for their helpful co-operation.

NOTES

¹Dibdin, Rev. T. F., *Bibliographical Antiquarian and Picturesque Tours in the Northern Counties of England and Scotland* (1838), 350ff. He had good reason to remember the Society, having been conducted around the area and entertained by a number of long-standing and influential members, including Adamson, Bigge, Brockett, Charnley, Clayton, Fenwick and Hodgson, and for a time he stayed in the Rev. Collinson's rectory at Gateshead. He had also been elected an honorary member in 1836. The description of all at Newcastle being "necessarily Horsley mad" is attributable to him.

²Craster, H. E. E., *PSAN*³, V (1911-12), 158-161. Except for some missing records already noted by Craster the material which was then in the Society's library is now lodged in the Northumberland Records Office, together with some more recent items. Relevant newspaper files are to be found in the Newcastle Central Library. For the limited purposes of this paper no attempt has been made to trace missing documents.



³ The Centenary Volume, *AA*³, X (1913), includes A history of the Society 1813–1913, by J. Crawford Hodgson; The Society's Museum, by R. O. Heslop; The Society's Library, by C. Hunter Blair; Patrons, Presidents and Officers and lists of Ordinary Members, by J. Crawford Hodgson; Biographies of Contributors to the Society's Literature, by R. Welford and J. Crawford Hodgson. v. also Oswald, J., The Honorary members of the Society, *AA*³, XVI (1919), 1–40.

⁴ A number of illustrative graphs and tables prepared for this paper but not printed will be deposited in the Northumberland Records Office.

⁵ An appellation which, together with "Old Fox" and "Old Rogue", was sometimes used by the election agents and correspondents of Sir Charles Monck, then an M.P. for Northumberland; v. Halcrow, E. M., "The Election Campaigns of Sir Charles Miles Lambert Monck", *AA*⁴, XXVI (1958), 101–122. As it so happened Sir Charles presided over the meeting at which the Society was formed and was one of its vice-presidents!

⁶ David Smith's letter survives, but for the disappearance of some of the other letters we must rely mainly upon Bell's own record; v. e.g. J. Collingwood Bruce, "A few jottings respecting early members of the Society", *AA*², XI (1886), 155–179.

⁷ Perhaps the stamina of the chairmen was also tested. Sir Charles Monck retired from the chair at 9.30 p.m. after which it "was filled ably by Mr. Losh and then by Mr. Cookson".

⁸ Not many years passed without some monthly meetings being adjourned or business waived because of the continuing low attendances; e.g. 5 meetings in 1826, 3 in 1830 and 7 in 1834. The best attended meetings were invariably the anniversary meetings.

⁹ Spence Watson, R., *History of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1793–1896*, 134.

¹⁰ At least according to an account book, *N.R.O.*, ZAN M22/48, which for a number of decades after 1835 gives some lists of members with "paid" against the names where subscriptions had been received. It seems possible that John Bell was not asked to pay after his bankruptcy.

¹¹ There were of course the normal incompatibilities which can be found in most societies from time to time, but sensibly they did not lead to resignations. For example, George Burnett junr., writing to

Thomas Crawhall of Benwell Tower very shortly after both were elected members in February 1829, refers to "a few old women calling themselves the 'Antiquarian Society'". *Society of Antiquaries Miscellaneous Papers 1813–1851*, which is not listed by Craster, but contains only a little manuscript material amongst the printed notices and press cuttings, and is housed in the Local Records Section, Newcastle Central Library.

¹² A suggestion made by Oswald, J., *op. cit.*, 1. Some honorary members may have expressed a sincere desire to help, as did Walter Scott by letter when elected in April 1813, but direct evidence of their contribution to enrolment is difficult to prove. There are some later instances, however, where circumstantial evidence suggests that this may have been the case, as with the membership of the University of Toronto and Toronto Public Library, in which city (Sir) Daniel Wilson, the Scottish antiquary who was elected an honorary member in 1852, had eventually become Principal of the university. On the other hand, some honorary members had made gifts to the Society and only a few appear to have received free copies of the Society's publications.

¹³ Extracts from this correspondence are published in *PSAN*³, VII (1915–16), 238, 257; VIII (1917–18), 35f, 53ff, 71f, 78ff, 82ff, 96, 117ff, 130ff, 142ff, 148, 161f, 177f. They also give an insight into some of the personal differences existing amongst members of our own Society, as well as some information about the rupture between the Archaeological Association and the Archaeological Institute.

¹⁴ Figures taken from the annual reports of the society.

¹⁵ Figures taken from the annual reports of the society, but only from 1813 onwards.

¹⁶ *Twentieth Year Report, Lit. and Phil. Soc.*, 5. Originally the society had considered that the investigation of antiquities would be a subject likely to engage its attention, but later acknowledged that this did not appear to have been done "in any considerable degree".

¹⁷ McCord, N., *North East England* (London, 1979), 61–64.

¹⁸ E.g. Norfolk 1845, Sussex 1846, Cambrian 1846, Wiltshire 1853.

¹⁹ Collingwood Bruce, *op. cit.*, 173.

²⁰ There appears to have been only one person to urge some objections to the motion when it was put to the Society, namely Henry Turner a co-secretary of the Society from 1835–1846. Formerly a land agent for the Riddleys at Blagdon he was also a

colliery owner and a brick and tile manufacturer.

²¹ There would seem to be some entries in the Society's minutes book in the hand of Blair some time before he became secretary in 1883. He had also already played an active part in the excavation of the Roman fort at South Shields.

²² McCord, N., *op. cit.*, 112–153.

²³ Daniel, G. E., *A Hundred Years of Archaeology* (London, 1950), 122–151.

²⁴ At that time the train journey and service to and from Alnwick would have involved an overnight stay in Newcastle in order to attend Society meetings.

²⁵ Spence Watson, R., *op. cit.*, 56. The Lit. and Phil. was reputedly the first English society of this nature to open its doors to full female membership. Many ladies joined after 1856 when the subscription was also reduced to one guinea.

²⁶ *Hist. Berwick. Nat. Club* I (1831–41), 165. By 1835 clerics accounted for 33% of its total membership. Initially the club was to exact no fees of admission.

²⁷ *The Commercial Directory 1821–23*.

²⁸ *Whellan's Directory 1855*.

²⁹ A cursory and merely illustrative selection from the annual enrolments after 1850 gives Joseph Cowen (1852), William Hawthorn (1859), Joseph Pease and Nicholas Wood (1860), George Crawshay (1861), G. W. Rendell and George Luckley (1862), Robert and Charles James Spence (1863 & 1866), George Elliott (1875), W. S. Dalglish (1876), Henry Swan (1877), James Tennant and James Joicey (1883), John Hall (1883), F. C. Marshall and Christopher T. Maling (1884), W. G. Armstrong (1885), Jonathan Priestman (1887), Charles Mitchell and Walter Runciman (1893).

³⁰ V. e.g. Campbell, W. A., "Men of Science in nineteenth century Newcastle", *AA*⁵, VIII (1980), 57–64.

³¹ The total circulation of books rose from 125,056

in 1941 to 220,475 in 1948.

³² The Newcastle upon Tyne Library book issues after suffering a 12% fall during curtailed opening hours in 1939–40 had risen by 24% in 1946–47, according to the figures given in the Annual Library Reports.

³³ *Proceedings* had also contained notes and smaller papers in addition to the record of the Society's activities. As there were a number of issues during the year it was a useful means of maintaining contact with members who could not attend monthly meetings. By 1956, however, Council decided that it could only be allocated a sum not exceeding £130 per annum, including postage, which at the very best would only have supported two small issues a year. The architect Herbert Honeyman, for many years Secretary of the Society and Editor of *Proceedings*, died in the same year.

³⁴ Chapman, R., "The Prehistoric Society, Prehistory and Society", *PPS*, 51 (1985), 15–29.

³⁵ The Society does not ask for the occupations of members. These observations arise partly from the other particulars submitted on the nomination forms and the personal knowledge of the writer.

³⁶ Chapman, *op. cit.* On the other hand, those societies granting fellowships, such as the Society of Antiquaries of London and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, have not been subject to falling numbers. And some national societies have now begun to show some indications of recovery.

³⁷ The local Natural History Society, however, may already have made good some of its lost membership, possibly benefiting from increased public concern about the environment, aided also by greater coverage of natural history in the media.

³⁸ I am indebted to Mrs. Rose Armour, Membership Secretary, for these figures which do not appear in the Society's published reports or in the minute books.