

THE SOCIETY

The principal event of 1997 was the celebration of the Society's Sesquicentennial. An exhibition was held from August to October in the County Museum, featuring selected items from our collections. Five lunchtime talks were held between 29 September and 3 October on selected facets of the Society's activities. The central event was the 150th Anniversary Lecture in St Mary's church, Aylesbury, on "The Impact of Archaeological Societies on Museums" by Max Hebditch and attended by more than one hundred members and guests. This was followed by a champagne and birthday cake reception in the Museum. 1997 also marked the 50th Anniversary of the Natural History Section, reported more fully below.

Membership

Numbers were maintained, with 549 members and 17 societies at the end of 1997 (cf. 557 and 15 at the end of 1996).

The Society was sad to lose three key members who died during the year: Ted Bull, who arranged the lecture programme for many years, and was active in researching the history of Little Horwood; Dr. Clive Rouse, Council member for forty-four years and President 1969-79; and Richard Millard, formerly Clerk to the County Council, and a longstanding member of this Society. We also mourned the loss of Christopher Hohler, latterly of Oslo, Vincent Blundell, and C.R. de Burgh Sidley.

Council

Council met five times, under the successive chairmanship of Lorna Head and Ted Legg. The Society commented on various planning issues, including the Local Plans for Wycombe and Aylesbury Vale Districts, Spittal Mill Aylesbury, and development at Wing. A plaque was erected recording the foundation of the Museum by the Society in 1858. Much appreciated gifts and bequests were received in memory of Joan Taylor,

and from the estates of Thelma Vernon and Clive Rouse.

In January 1997, Bob Hagerty announced his wish to relinquish the Secretaryship after thirteen distinguished years, which included production of the Newsletter. His service was marked by a presentation at the AGM. Graham Aylett took on the role of Hon. Secretary, and at the end of the year Council was pleased to welcome Ruth Allcock as Newsletter Editor.

The President gave a talk on 30 December to mark the bicentenary of the death of John Wilkes.

Lecture Series

The following lectures were held at the Museum in 1997:

- 18 Jan: *Dad's Army in Buckinghamshire*, by Ian Beckett
- 15 Feb: *Twenty-five Years of Current Archaeology*, by Andrew Selkirk
- 15 Mar: *Buckinghamshire Vernacular Architecture*, by Martin Andrew
- 1 Nov: *Development of the English Cottage Garden*, by Bob Miller
- 6 Dec: *Recent Archaeology in the Aylesbury Area*, by Dave Bonner

Outdoor Visits

The following visits took place during the year:

- 24 May: Bury St Edmunds and Ickworth, Suffolk
- 21 June: Squerries Court and Hever Castle, Kent
- 26 July: Herefordshire, including Hereford Cathedral and Kilpeck
- 4 Oct: 26th Bucks Church Crawl to Leckhampstead, the Lillingstones, Maids Moreton, Biddlesden, Hillesden, Twyford and Quainton.

G. Aylett

NATURAL HISTORY SECTION

Members have once again enjoyed a full programme of Lectures and Visits organised by the Section:

11 January: Environments of the past: clues from the rocks and fossils: by Dr. Jill Eyers. Beginning with examples of sediments and fossils from past environments and modern parallels from worldwide sources, Dr. Eyers then explained the evidence for estuarine conditions which exist in the 'brown' sand deposits of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire from some 115 million years ago. The most exciting part of her lecture, was an account of an expedition to Brazil where, in the Araripe Basin and particularly the Crato Lagoon, are found probably the best-preserved of all fossils. We had the rare opportunity of handling some specimens, including fossil fish from the Early Cretaceous which are so well preserved that even the stomach contents of the fish (small prawn-like creatures) can be studied.

22 February: Winter Birdwatch at Willen Lake, Milton Keynes, led by Diana and Peter Gulland. The main purpose of the Lake is to prevent local flooding but it has become a nationally important site for birds with over 200 species recorded. The group saw 27 species including Snipe and Ringed Plover, over 100 Lapwing and a colony of Black-headed Gull.

8 March: Roy Maycock, President of the Milton Keynes Natural History Society, and involved *inter alia* in the recent survey of Flora in Buckinghamshire Churchyards, came to talk about 'Mapping Plants for the Atlas 2000 Project'. Beginning with Gerard's Herbal published around 1600, he outlined the history of the recording of flora in this country. The last comprehensive survey was started in 1954, resulting in the still much used 1962 *Atlas of British Flora*, with

a supplement in 1968, followed by an *Atlas of Ferns* in 1978, all produced without the aid of computers! Roy is the record collector in Buckinghamshire for the new Atlas.

12 April: The GOLDEN JUBILEE Year of the Natural History Section began with the Annual General Meeting followed by a delightful video of one of our Badger Watches, by Marion Stanley. A Celebration cake was cut by our President, Sir Thomas Barlow, whose mother, Nora, Lady Barlow, founded the Section in 1947.

24 May: Coinciding with an original outing by the Society to the Hambleden area in 1947, Chris Mainstone of the Water Research Centre at Medmenham gave members a most interesting and enjoyable afternoon in the Nature Reserve, which was started some six years ago in an area of former rough grazing. As well as being of botanical interest, it is also rich in invertebrates, particularly damselflies and dragonflies. Distinguishing marks of the Common Blue, Azure and Blue-tailed Damselflies were demonstrated. Along the banks of a small tributary of the River Thames, whole families of Coots, the young with their curious red heads surrounded by an orange fringe, and juvenile Canada Geese, were among the 14 species of birds seen.

8 June: Geology of Local Buildings in the Princes Risborough area: led by Dr. Jill Eyers and Michael Henty. This trip celebrated the Jubilee by revisiting the Princes Risborough area exactly 50 years to the day. The relationship between Buckinghamshire landscape and townscape and the underlying geology was highlighted. Local stones were seen in St. Mary's Church. The Market Square is an interesting combination of Bucks. bricks, Denner stone, and green-grey slate. Barclay's Bank is built almost entirely of variegated Bucks. 'multis'. Moving south through the Risborough Gap

to Bradenham, St. Botolph's Church showed an attractive use of local materials: undressed flint (in the older parts of the church), knapped flint (for the 19th century porch), large blocks of Denner stone and smaller pieces of the Bradenham puddingstone. This last can be seen in the form of large erratics known as the Bradenham sarsens on the green and in adjacent fields. Finally, the Mausoleum at West Wycombe was viewed (flints and sarsens).

19 July: Beryl Hulbert gave us an outstanding day in Bernwood Forest and Sydlings Copse. Butterflies were the main reason for our visit and 17 different species were identified, plus two more in the second reserve. Bernwood is one of the most important sites in Britain for butterflies and the attractive meadows were a mass of colour – over 100 plant species have been recorded here. John Pitts, manager of Sydlings Copse, joined us in the afternoon and showed us round this varied habitat in Oxfordshire, where over 400 plants have been recorded.

9 August: Geological Field Trip to Munday's Hill Quarry, Heath & Reach, led by Dr. Jill Evers. These quarries are famous for the deposits of sand, which has even been exported to Saudi Arabia! They were laid down about 118 to 110 million years ago (early Cretaceous) representing a rapid incursion by the sea over the eroded Jurassic landscape. A narrow seaway was formed known as the Bedfordshire Strait and the deposits are collectively known as the Lower Greensand. The group spent the afternoon, in intense heat, looking for sedimentary structures and fossils. The Gault Clay at the top of the sands (110 to 95 million years ago) was absolutely full of Belemnites and remnants of Ammonites.

27 September: Merelene Davis, curator of the Priestfield Arboretum at Little Kingshill, gave members an extremely informative and unusual afternoon. The collection of Redwoods alone makes Priestfield important. Thomas Priest planted over 400 trees in the 1920's but of these only about

100 are alive today. Many new plantings are being added and we were pleased to be able to mark our visit by planting an Elm species *Zelkova serrata*.

25 October: The annual Fungus Foray with Victor Scott took place in Baker's Wood (SSSI) at Stockgrove Country Park. Owing to the recent extremely dry weather, expectation of finding many species was not high. Nevertheless, some 33 were identified, including three new ones for our records. Spectacular finds of the large white cups of *Clitocybe geotropa*, *Pleurotus cornucopiae* high up in a tree, and a particularly lurid example of *Fistulina hepatica* or Beefsteak Fungus, must be mentioned. This last is parasitic on oak, which renders the timber a darker richer colour than normal, and this 'brown oak' was much in demand for the furniture industry. Finally, we found some fine specimens of *Helvella crispa*, the white stipes hollow and deeply striated.

22 November: Our Winter season of indoor meetings began with a brilliant lecture by Maureen Southgate, entitled 'Murder, magic and medicine'. Opening with a quotation from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, there followed a fascinating account of the use of plants to procure both poisons and medicines, from the Ancient Egyptians right up to the contemporary development of drugs. Her final message was the regrettable loss worldwide of plant species and the need for preservation, as they may have valuable properties to contribute to modern research.

13 December: Combined effort by Christine and Victor Scott gave a large audience a colourful and exciting afternoon with superb slides of the flora and fauna to be seen in 'Springtime in the Cape, South Africa'. In Cape Province alone there are some 7,000 flora, compared with about 2,000 in the British Isles. Against a background of snow-capped mountain ranges, blue sea or verdant forest vegetation, we saw birds, exotic butterflies, animals such as Zebras, Giraffes, Lions, Rhinos, Squirrel Monkeys and some of the myriad strange and beautiful wild flowers.

A. V. C.