

The evolution of the Ashmolean Natural History Society 1880-1901

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Summary

In 1880, a new scientific society, the Oxfordshire Natural History and Field Club was formed in Oxford. In 1901 this Society was amalgamated, for expedient reasons, with an Oxford University based society, The Ashmolean Society, founded in 1828. In 1901 the two societies were integrated and re-named, to become the current Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire.

Introduction

This article will focus on the background of the formation of the Oxfordshire Natural History and Field Club between 1880 and 1901 and the diverse nature of the people who were involved with its activities throughout its independent existence. It begins with an overview of the gradual changes taking place in the social and intellectual climate of mid-nineteenth-century Oxford. This will be followed by a brief account of the academic climate in Oxford and the nature of the 'town and gown' divide within its local societies.

A prosopography of various individuals mentioned in the text will be found in Appendix 1. Further detail can be found in Price (2007).

The Ashmolean Society and the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society (formed in 1839 as the Oxford Society for the Promotion of Gothic Architecture) were predominantly for the benefit of elected University members and rarely accessible to those outside its milieu. The foundation of the Oxfordshire Natural History and Field Club was the means by which a new scientific society was able to meet the needs of many individuals in the way that existing intellectual societies did not.

Accounts of the intellectual, social and historical aspects of nineteenth century Oxford reveal a contrast in the amounts of information available. For the University, the gown, there is an abundant collection of official histories about the nineteenth century alone for example, *History of the University of Oxford*, volumes 6-7 (eds. Brock and Curthoys) and the *Victoria County History Series* as well as histories of particular Colleges, histories of departments, academic disciplines, architectural styles and an abundance of specific biographies and autobiographies.

In contrast, the informal networks of the social and intellectual relationships between the City and University in nineteenth century Oxford have, as yet, received little attention. For instance, an extensive amount of evidence is waiting to be analysed concerning Oxford individuals who were involved in the late nineteenth century drive for self-improvement, through education and the pursuit of knowledge, as either voluntary providers or consumers.

In Oxford, interests in the new natural sciences were being pursued independently by people who could be broadly classified as being either from the town or gown. Until late into the century, these social groups were often oblivious of the other. Before the formation of the Oxfordshire Natural History Society in 1880, and its revival in 1887,

it is likely that there were few opportunities for meetings of like-minded people, beyond the bounds of the University (Bellamy 1908: xiv).

To obtain an idea of the history of the variety of intellectual and social life in Oxford, the records of the local press *Jackson's Oxford Journal* and *The Oxford Chronicle*, from the 1840s are vital indicators of contemporary City life. Here, accounts of lectures, talks and exhibitions presented to the townspeople, reveal the education taking place outside the University.

From the middle of the nineteenth century, as Oxford expanded through industry and trade, a new social class began to emerge within its growing population. A wealthy middle class of professionals, business owners and managers in Oxford, together with the gradual changes in University regulations allowing the status of married dons and an increase in the student population began to create a new social class of people with academic aspirations.

As University teachers married and set up house, often in the new suburbs of North Oxford, this in turn created the need for a subordinate and support network from other classes. The tradesman, discussed below, such as Druce and Underhill and the museum assistants, such as Rowell and Bellamy began to thrive and in turn, became socially upwardly mobile, partly as their subordinate services were needed and partly because the intellectual and educational gaps were closing.

It was for these people that the new Oxfordshire Natural History and Field Club offered intellectual inspiration, rather than the Ashmolean Society.

The Ashmolean Society

The original Ashmolean Society was founded on December 11th 1828, at an inaugural dinner

instituted by some friends of science in Oxford and its vicinity, in order to promote an interchange of 'Natural History, Experimental Philosophy etc' [sic].

The founders included William Buckland, (1784–1856), Reader in Mineralogy and Geology from 1813, Baden Powell (1796–1860) and Samuel Wilberforce (1805–1873) who was Bishop of Oxford from 1844 to 1868.

From the 1850s to 1900 its members included many prominent University academics such as Charles Daubeny (1795-1867), Henry Acland (1815-1900), George Rolleston (1829-1881), Charles Dodgson (1832-1898) John Ruskin (1819-1900) and the Keepers of the Ashmolean Museum who included John Phillips (1800-1874), and J.H. Parker (1806-1884), who was succeeded by Arthur Evans (1851-1941).

It was originally decided to limit membership to fifty individuals, of MA status and above. Membership was strictly restricted by election, a person's application would be proposed at one meeting and a ballot for those in favour taken at the next. Members could introduce interested guests at meetings, in order to broaden the scope of discussions and all Society officials were required to read papers. Part of the annual subscription of one guinea per head, (approximately £55 today) went towards the purchase of books and periodicals of scientific interest. By the beginning of the twentieth century, this collection was reported to be worth £300 (Bellamy 1908: 46). Today it would be about £18,000.

The society's first meeting was held on February 13th 1829 in the original Ashmolean Museum. Professor Baden Powell the Savilian Professor of Geometry presented a paper on Radiant Heat, and a member (not named) presented a model of the human foot to the Museum collections. This custom of individual donations of models, fossils, specimens of natural history and archaeological artefacts increased throughout the century and as such many members of the Ashmolean Society were central to the enrichment of the Museum's collections during the second quarter of the nineteenth century (Ovenell 1986, Parry-Jones 1983 and Simcock 1985).

Two or three meetings were held each term. The early talks covered scientific interests in the very widest sense and the subjects were truly multidisciplinary; they featured experimental philosophy (the early term for physics), chemistry, the natural sciences, natural history and later, the study of antiquities, art and archaeology. In 1845, for example Buckland, who had a penchant for animals and reptiles, exhibited a tree frog and a viper (it is not clear whether these were alive or dead) and Philip Duncan, then keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, gave a paper on the beauty of colour of birds, "given by the goodness of the Creator ... probably the great bond of attraction to females in the choice of mate" thus demonstrating the existing pre-Darwinian belief in Natural Theology.

In 1857 the Society Committee printed reports on investigations into the morality and public health of Oxford and an account of Anglo Saxon remains found at Standlake during gravel extraction, was given which noted that little interest had been shown in the many graves, pits and circular trenches at that time.

In March 1859 the Society voted in favour of the formation of a museum of British historical antiquities which would be displayed in the original Ashmolean Museum. Although some collections were formed and catalogues were started, by George Rowell, this proposed museum never materialised and the collections were absorbed with those of the later new Ashmolean Museum and the Pitt Rivers Museum.

During the course of the nineteenth century the Ashmolean Museum building, which had been founded in 1683, became the subject of transformation, repositioning, evolution and change. It is important to note the difference between the Old Ashmolean Museum in Broad Street Oxford, which is now the Museum of the History of Science, and the present Ashmolean Museum in Beaumont Street which was opened in 1894. In 1860 the new University Museum opened in Parks Road and was immediately host to one of the most notable debates on evolutionary theory at the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. In 1996 the museum was renamed the Oxford University Museum of Natural History and a statue to commemorate the debate has been placed at the entrance.

The effect of the transformation of the Ashmolean Museum in the latter half of the nineteenth century was not so much the physical move to its current position in Beaumont Street, as the separation of its subject and collecting areas. In 1860, the books and manuscripts from the Ashmolean Museum were transferred to the Bodleian Library, the natural history collections and scientific teaching activities went to the New Museum, and later in 1884, the ethnographic collections were sent to the Pitt Rivers Museum.

This act redefined not only the Ashmolean's territory, but also contributed towards the foundation of many of today's academic disciplines and the establishment of specific boundaries between the arts and the sciences. It is possible that these geographical, intellectual and disciplinary transitions contributed to the Ashmolean Society's gradual demise by the late nineteenth century as an influential scientific society.

Ashmolean Society Members

A vital element of any intellectual Society is its body of members. Many University members, like Ruskin (1819-1900) and Dodgson, as Lewis Carroll (1832-1898), became national literary figures; others like Buckland (Rumpke, 1983), Phillips (Morrell 2005) and Baden Powell (Corsi, 1988) were pioneers of the growth of science in nineteenth century Oxford.

Although the original membership was limited to fifty University gentlemen, the figure gradually increased and a "number of non-University gentlemen" with suitable backgrounds and interest were entitled to Honorary Membership. Oxford residents were admitted such as the antiquarian, J.Y. Akerman (1806-1873) in February 1858, Thomas Combe (1797-1872) of the Oxford University Press in November 1862, and the publisher John Henry Parker (1806-1884) in November 1864.

Another growing category of members of scientific societies during the nineteenth century is that of the artisan or autodidact. The Ashmolean Society did not usually admit the non-academic to its midst, owing to the strict rules of the election ballot.

One exception was the case of George Rowell (1804-1892) the handyman and later under keeper at the Ashmolean Museum between 1870 and 1890. His enthusiasm for science was supported by Baden Powell, who nominated him as a member and paid 5 guineas for his admittance to the society in 1856 (about £230.00 today).

Twilight of the Ashmolean Society

Throughout its history, the Ashmolean Society, like the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society, suffered from a lack of fixed premises. The need for a permanent base was possibly another of the factors that contributed to the Society's gradual decline. Until the end of the century the society continued to meet in the Old Museum, but lack of space and the cold and damp in winter were disadvantages (Ovenell 1986: 198).

By the 1870s the strength of the Ashmolean Society and that of its surviving members was increasingly on the wane. It may be that, to use an evolutionary metaphor, it had failed to adapt organically in order to survive. Having initially encouraged and nurtured the sciences, urging their recognition alongside the more ancient and acceptable disciplines, the society and the sciences it had promoted, were outliving their usefulness.

Table 1: Number of Ashmolean Society members

Date	Number of Members	Source
1835	200	
1840-1850	300	Brock and Curthoys, 1997, 547-8
1895	34	Bellamy, 1908

By 1895 serious concern was voiced about the viability of the Ashmolean Society, there were only 34 members and most of those were in arrears with their subscriptions (Bellamy 1908: 45). Although initial attempts were made to amalgamate the society within the University's Junior Scientific Club, founded in 1882, this proposal was not accepted by their members because despite their similar interests, they were reluctant to admit senior members of the University to what was an undergraduate society (Bellamy 1908 45–56). It was, therefore, to the Oxfordshire Natural History Society and Field Club that the committee members of the Ashmolean Society then directed their attention.

A new Oxford society

OXFORDSHIRE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY AND FIELD CLUB 1880

A Preliminary meeting, to form the above Society, will be held in the Lecture Room, Botanical Gardens, on Thursday next, May 27th at Eight pm.

Professor Lawson, MA will preside.

All persons interested in Natural Sciences are invited to attend as the Society is intended to include all branches of Natural History.

Further particulars may be had by applying to

G.C.DRUCE

118 High Street Oxford,

Secretary, pro.tem

In 1880 this information appeared in all the local Oxford papers. Approximately 60 people from the University, the City and the surrounding area immediately expressed an interest and a new scientific society was established. Prospective members came from various walks of life; town and gown, clergymen and clerks, academics and shopkeepers and the Duke of Marlborough offered his support.

The inaugural meeting of the Oxfordshire Natural History Society and Field Club (ONHS), attended by 40 members, took place on May 27th 1880 in the Lecture Room of the Botanical Gardens. The Society was to hold monthly meetings at which the county's flora and fauna would be discussed, examined and visited and was intended for "all persons interested in Natural Science and all branches of Natural History" (Bellamy 1908: 6).

The enthusiasm for the society seemed to lose momentum however as various members left Oxford or became involved with other matters. Between 1883 and 1887

the Society suffered from what was described a dormant period. This was probably because the responsibility for the organization and administration of the society fell solely on George Druce (1850-1932), who, between 1880 and 1886 was compiling his major work, *The Flora of Oxfordshire*. This required “botany in the field, work in the herbarium and the libraries” (Bellamy 1908: 15). During this time he was probably also involved in the management of the Chemist’s shop, Druce & Co. which he set up in June 1897 at 118, High St. Oxford.

In spite of this hiatus, the society was rejuvenated in 1887, in connection with the “first Jubilee of our revered and beloved Queen Victoria” (Bellamy 15: 1908). The revival meeting was held on the Queen’s Birthday, May 24, 1887. During the second phase of the society it began to thrive, drawing members from both town and gown, offering membership to many people who, though resident in a University City, were, at that time excluded from much of its intellectual and social activity.

From the beginning, women were encouraged to join, and the membership fee was deliberately kept at 5 shillings per annum (about £12).

Although called the Oxfordshire Natural History Society and Field Club, like many new scientific societies formed in the late nineteenth century, its intellectual scope was broad and the Gentlemen and Players who were members of the ONHS make an interesting team. For example, in 1887, the interests of the first President of the society, E.B. Poulton, who became Hope Professor of Zoology in 1893, included geology and archaeology and those of the secretary, Henry Underhill, embraced natural history, folklore and archaeology.

In 1887 the sections of the ONHS were as follows (Bellamy 1908: 16):

Section I Zoology: a) microscopical b) ornithology, c) entomology

Section II Botany: a) microscopical) phanerogams, c) cryptogams

Section III Geology

Section IV Photography

Town and gown

Frank Bellamy (1863–1936), Hon. M.A. Oxon. was a prominent member of the ONHS. In 1908 he compiled an account of the ONHS from its formation in 1880 to 1905. He had this account privately published to commemorate the first 25 years of the Society. The preface of his *Historical Account of the Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire* (1908) contains a dedication to its founder “To my friend in the field and herbarium, George Claridge Druce”.

In the preface Bellamy states that the book was “largely composed of facts and unstinted care was bestowed upon ensuring accuracy in dates and names, both personal and scientific” (Bellamy 1908: xi). This unique record of the philosophy and organization of the ONHS contains Bellamy’s personal experience of a society that was to link the social and intellectual contacts between the University and Town in latter part of the nineteenth century.

Although he claimed that his account was “largely composed of facts”, his personal recollections and often polemic opinions cannot disguise certain inner tensions and prejudices which inevitably arose from a society consisting of members from diverse

backgrounds and occupations. What seems have to united Bellamy's diverse fields of activity was his passion for cataloguing minutiae.

Much can be learnt from his research about the way emerging academic disciplines, such as archaeology, anthropology and branches of the natural sciences developed and were taking shape at the University before the advent of professionalism. Bellamy's account also draws attention to the role played by local amateurs. Many Oxford citizens, although not extensively educated at this time, shared the same degree of knowledge on their specialist subject as their university educated counterparts. This was particularly true of the new sciences such as natural history, anthropology and prehistoric archaeology, subjects that until the 1900s were studied and explored by both amateurs and emergent professionals (Levine 1986, Allen 1994 and Price 2007).

Bellamy's account makes it possible to identify contributions and specific interests of individuals from both town and gown - amateurs and academics who shared information at the meetings of the Society. In 1887, for example, the interests of the President of the rejuvenated society, Edward Poulton (1855-1943), included geology and archaeology whilst those of the Secretary, Henry Underhill, embraced natural history and folklore. It is clear that three names stand out prominently in connection with the Society; they are E.B. Poulton, H.M.J. Underhill and G.C. Druce (Bellamy 1908: 94).

Between 1887 and 1901, Poulton became an intellectual bridge between town and gown. He was a strong supporter and regular contributor to many of the ONHS activities. His involvement brought together academics and lay people, not only of Oxford, but from other towns and cities to advance the mutual sharing of scientific discoveries (see below).

As Bellamy recorded all the events of the society in minute detail in his book, it becomes possible to trace the manner in which specific subject areas were introduced by the society between 1887 and 1901. This was the period just before academic professionalisation and although the ONHS adhered to its title and brief of Natural History, in the late nineteenth century the programme of events included a broad spectrum of activities; talks on botany, physiology, geology, anthropology, folklore and prehistoric archaeology.

From Bellamy's observations it becomes clear that he was very much aware of the transformation of scientific knowledge that had occurred between the 1850s and the 1880s. This was due in part to the continuing research into Darwin's theories of evolution and descent by natural selection, and influenced no doubt by Poulton's academic leanings.

By 1887 Bellamy noted that the ONHS had benefited from a number of reports or addresses on subjects which were "either almost in their infancy as regards scientific investigation, or had received new light; or were the result of original investigation by members of the society". He included abstracts of papers read by Underhill on *Spiders and their Construction*, and *The Inherited Colour of Insects* by Poulton on protective camouflage; both of these were illustrated with coloured lantern slides (Bellamy 1908: 218-229).

Conversaciones and Field Trips

The *Conversazione* was the high point in the annual programme of a Victorian intellectual society (Alberti 2003a). In order to legitimise these events, formality was extremely important and they entailed a great deal of planning. Often a *Conversazione* took the form of a soiree where evening dress was *de rigueur*, light refreshments were served and music was played by local musicians as various society members displayed their expertise.

Programmes of various *Conversaciones* held in Oxford during 1880s and 1890s, show that University members such as Edward Tylor, Arthur Evans and Edward Poulton played a prominent part in these events (Bellamy 1908). An important factor is that at these occasions, non-University individuals were also involved. At a *Conversazione* in 1895 Henry Underhill gave one of his hand-painted lantern slide lectures on the archaeology of Stonesfield and North Leigh Roman Villa (see below), Frank Bellamy exhibited botanical specimens and George Druce displayed local flora (Bellamy 1908: 337). This provides evidence for the fluidity of mutual intellectual interests before the advent of specialisation.



Figure 1. An example of Henry Underhill's lantern slides. (Reproduced courtesy of the Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford.)

The Field Trip

A regular feature of the ONHS was a programme of excursions to local places of scientific interest, The Field Trip. This was an innovative feature of new scientific societies; in 1873, a survey disclosed that out of 169 societies in Britain, 104 described themselves also as Field Clubs (Allen 1994: 155). These societies usually included visits that would interest geologists, naturalists and historians.

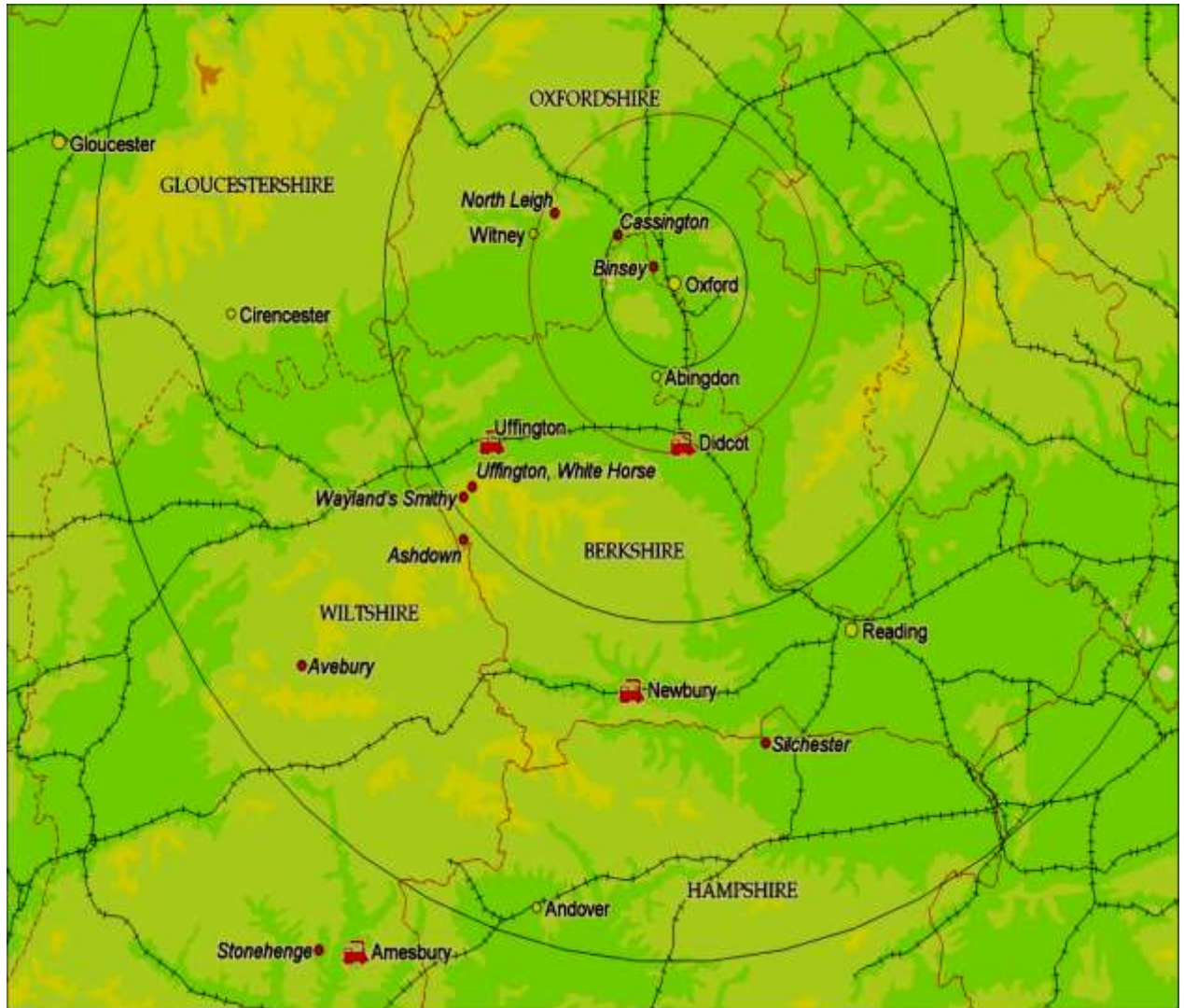


Figure 2. Field Trip visits by road, rail and bicycle 1880-1901. Some of the places visited by members of the Oxfordshire Natural History Society between 1880 and 1901, on a day Excursion (Price 2007).

Such excursions to local places of scientific interest were a regular feature of the ONHS programme. They typically included places within easy reach of Oxford such as Shotover, Bagley Wood, Stonesfield, Otmoor, the White Horse and Uffington. A suitable speaker or guide for each subject accompanied the group, these included Poulton speaking on zoology and geology, Druce on botany and Underhill on prehistory (Bellamy 1908: Chapter VII).

The first excursion of the revived Society was in June 1887, when 23 members visited the quarries at Stonesfield, which had been examined in the past “by Professor Phillips for extinct fish and fossils” (Bellamy 1908: 275). Henry Underhill made all the arrangements for this excursion which concluded with a visit to the Roman Villa and the tessellated pavement at Combe “which has been disinterred for some sixty years and is in a fair state of preservation” (*Jackson’s Oxford Journal* June 1887: 5).

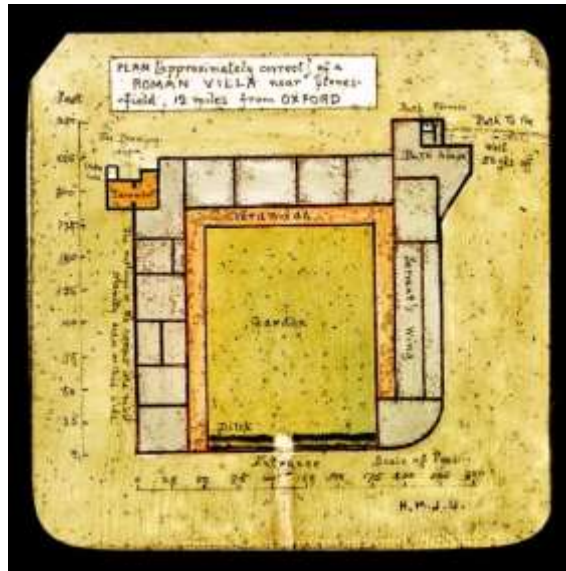


Figure 3. Lantern slide prepared by Henry Underhill for a visit to Stonesfield (Underhill Archive Reproduced courtesy of the Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford).

Another excursion made nearly ten years later illustrates not only the advances in travel but also the advances in photography. In May 1896, Henry Underhill organized an excursion to The White Horse, Uffington, Wayland's Smithy, and Ashdown. The instructions for the Train Party were to

Meet the President at the G.W.R. to take the train at 8.42 and arrive in Uffington at 10.12. The cyclists are to meet Mr. H.M.J. Underhill at the Martyr's Memorial at 8.30am punctually. The distance to Uffington is 21 miles.

The group was to walk to the White Horse, Wayland's Smithy and Cave, and (if possible) the Sarsen Stones (Ashdown) and back to Uffington, total extent of walk about eight miles. Tea was to be taken at The White Horse Inn, Uffington. According to Bellamy's comment, the tea provided could have been better (Bellamy 1908: 284).



Figure 4. Excursion to the White Horse and Uffington, 1896 (Underhill Archive, Reproduced courtesy of the Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford.)

Midland Union of Natural History Societies

Following a suggestion made by Druce during the establishment of the ONHS, in 1880, all members were encouraged to become active in the Midland Union of Natural History Societies. This gave an opportunity for those interested in the natural sciences to combine with the similar activities of those further afield. Between 1878 and 1895 these joint events were made possible by the increased rail networks and mutual scientific curiosity. This Society covered a large area of the Midland counties including Leicestershire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Northamptonshire and Birmingham and had its own journal, the *Midland Naturalist*.

Representatives from the Midland Union Societies regularly travelled distances extending as far as 90 miles to give talks on their specific subjects and every society organised its annual *Conversazione*.

A joint *Conversazione* of the Midland Union of Natural History Societies was held in Oxford at the University Museum in 1889. An extensive variety of displays demonstrated the latest research which ranged from microscopic organisms, to chemical and acoustical experiments. A programme of visits was organised for the delegates where they were offered a tour of the Botanical Gardens and a lunch at Christ Church. In 1895 another *Conversazione* was attended by 400 delegates at the University Museum where exhibits of natural history, entomology chemistry and archaeology were demonstrated. The following day about 50 people drove to Blenheim Palace for lunch at the Bear and tea in Long Hanborough.

The Amalgamation of the Ashmolean Society and the Oxfordshire Natural History Society and Field Club

By April 28 1901, it had become clear, in the words of G.C. Bourne, the secretary of the Committee Members of the Ashmolean Society, in a letter to the Secretary of the ONHS, Mrs. Veley, that “the Society had reached a state of suspended animation and that a proposal of amalgamation would be forthcoming” (Bellamy 1908: 45).

On May 2 1901, Henry Balfour wrote to the ONHS Secretary expressing his support of the proposed amalgamation of the two societies as he observed that the Ashmolean Society was “dying of atrophy” and that “something would have to be done”. He emphasized that in his own experience as member of both the Ashmolean Society and the ONHS, he would be in favour of retaining the ONHS commitment to “a more or less popular treatment of scientific subjects”, and that “with the death of the Ashmolean Society, the more serious aspects of science could be taken over by numerous special Societies and Clubs devoted to different branches of science”.

He suggested that “grafting upon a robustly living stem, a suspendedly animate organism, organization”, the Ashmolean Society would benefit from the popularization of science for a wider public audience. He proposed that the new society should be known as The Ashmolean Natural History Society and Field Club of Oxfordshire (Bellamy 1908: 47-48).

The finalisation of the amalgamation of the Ashmolean Society and the Oxfordshire Natural History Society was mutually agreed at a meeting of the joint committees on May 7, 1901. Representatives from both societies included Edward Poulton, by then Hope Professor of Zoology and Henry Balfour, the Curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum who were University members and G.C. Druce from the town.

This amalgamation was described by the committee as a “betrothal of a man of threescore years and ten marrying a young lady” with the valuable assets of the Ashmolean Society Library, some items dating back to its original foundation in 1823, valued at over £300 in 1901, forming the dowry. Druce and Bellamy later removed the books from the Radcliffe Library as a labour of love to the Glastonbury Kitchen of the University Museum.

The “marriage feast” was later celebrated with a *Conversazione* at Oxford Town Hall on July 8 1901 hosted and financed by the Society Treasurer, George Claridge Druce, who was Mayor of Oxford at the time, and Henry Balfour became the first President of the new Ashmolean Natural History Society.

By 1901 the total membership of the new society had increased to 315. An analysis of the addresses of the membership shows that only forty-one original members from the ONHS remained after the amalgamation. The majority of these were Oxford citizens, councillors, tradesmen and technical assistants who had supported the society since its inception. These included George Druce, Henry Underhill, Frank Bellamy and University members Professors Halford, E.B. Poulton and E.B. Tylor.

Although these new scientific societies, such as the Junior Scientific Club founded in 1882, mentioned by Balfour were indeed founded to support the “more serious aspects

of science”, they were exclusive University societies and non-University members from the town would, in essence, not gain automatic membership.

From 1908, without Bellamy’s meticulous analysis, it becomes difficult to continue an interpretation of the membership numbers of the society. It might be interesting for his work to be continued but it also may be that society today has become both diverse and egalitarian and such research is not necessary.

In 1902, Henry Underhill resigned from the Society. He had taken a very energetic interest in the ONHS since its revival in 1887 and had acted as lecturer, secretary and became President from 1893 to 1894. He had also organised many field trips and Conversaciones. His interest in natural history and the Society apparently had waned (Bellamy 1908: 116), but it is possible that he was averse to the change in structure of the Society.

Conclusion

By the end of the nineteenth century local scientific societies had become more than a mere pastime for gentlemen and antiquarians. The Ashmolean Society, founded by prominent Oxford scientists of the 1830s had provided a foundation for many of today’s disciplines but by the 1880s it had lost most of its founding members and was failing to attract enough new ones.

In the 1880s the formation of the ONHS where membership was announced specifically to be open to male and female members from the City and the University, provided a significant opportunity for a new type of intellectual pursuit. For some, membership of ONHS became almost a vocation as it opened up an opportunity to become part of a growing middle-class sophistication. For the first time, the foundation of the Oxfordshire Natural History Society and Field Club acted as a vehicle for ordinary citizens of the town to become associated with those of the gown and provided undreamed of occasions for social and scientific interaction. By being present at lectures, field trips and Conversaciones members were visibly participating in an intellectual society that was becoming more egalitarian.

Between 1880 and 1900, membership and patronage of a local scientific society was a crucial part of the passion for knowledge. Bellamy, Druce and Underhill joined the University ranks as members of the Oxfordshire Natural History Society and Field Club and became leading participators in this corner of Oxford’s intellectual life, leaving an intellectual heritage for us to enjoy.

References

Most of the information on the early history of the Ashmolean Natural History Society is held in the Bodleian Library (Ashmolean Society Papers, GA Oxon 4 to 164/1 1876–1905)

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Appendix 1: Oxford People

Today the names of some of the prominent founder members of the Oxfordshire Natural History Society and Field Club are still found within the university; some have buildings and libraries named after them, or are associated with various museum collections.

Henry Balfour 1863- 1939

Balfour graduated from Trinity College in 1885. In 1884 the University of Oxford accepted the collection of ethnological and archaeological specimens made and arranged by General Augustus Pitt Rivers and Balfour assisted in the installation of the collection in the new museum building. Balfour was appointed Curator in 1893 and continued in that position until his death.

Frank Bellamy 1863-1936

Bellamy was born in Oxford in 1863. Bellamy became a British astronomer who worked on *Astrographic Catalogue* with his niece, Ethel Bellamy. Together they catalogued over 1,000,000 stars using photographic techniques. He was also an employee of the University as the Observatory Assistant at the Radcliffe Observatory for over 46 years

He was the voluntary archivist of the activities of the Ashmolean Natural History Society.

George Claridge Druce 1850-1932

In 1886, Druce published the *Flora of Oxfordshire*, which established him firmly in the botanical community and in 1895 he was appointed Fielding Curator in the Department of Botany. This appointment gave him official access to the University and herbarium and in 1889 he was awarded the degree of honorary MA, and then full MA by decree in 1919.

Arthur Evans 1851-1941

As the son of the wealthy businessman and archaeologist, John Evans, Arthur was able to travel widely from an early age, and shared many of his father's interests meeting his distinguished friends and fellow archaeologists. Until the late 1890s Evans' archaeological interests focussed mainly on the growing evidence of British

prehistoric sites and artefacts. Between 1885 and 1888 he gave a series of lectures in Oxford including one on Megalithic Monuments and in 1885 he excavated a Roman Villa at Frilford.

John Phillips 1800-1874

John Phillips was Oxford University's Deputy Reader in Geology from 1854. From 1861, he had the task of overseeing the development of the new Natural Science Museum in Parks Road and was appointed its first Keeper, a position he held together with his office as Keeper of the Ashmolean. Despite lacking a university education, he rose to hold a number of highly prestigious posts within the British academic and scientific community.

Edward Bagnall Poulton 1855-1943

Edward Bagnall Poulton was a prolific writer and lecturer during his career at Oxford. Between 1873 and 1876, Poulton studied at Jesus College, Oxford under George Rolleston. He was a member of the growing scientific academic community and a colleague and friend of Edward Tylor, George Rolleston and Henry Moseley. His principle interest was the theory of natural selection and he lectured in the Hope Department of the University Museum Oxford in 1894 and 1895 on Darwinian principles.

Baden Powell 1796-1860

Baden Powell died in Oxford in June 1860 aged 63, a week before the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. He had been ordained in Holy Orders, and is credited with having broad and liberal views and was part of a “small band at Oxford in the mid nineteenth century who supported the study of the physical sciences, and as one of the University Commissioners introduced them as a system of study” (Obituary, Proceedings of the Geological Society 1861).

George Rowell 1805-1892

He was Assistant Keeper at the Ashmolean Museum and University Museum, serving under Museum Keepers John Phillips (1800–1874) and J. H. Parker (1806–1884).

Rowell had begun his career at the Ashmolean Museum in 1823, originally employed as a handyman (Ovenell 1986: 203). His subsequent move to under keeper suggests that he advanced to more intellectual tasks, such as compiling catalogues and repairing objects. In 1870 Rowell was asked to prepare a summary list of donations to the Ashmolean Museum between 1836 and 1868. His interest in natural science was stimulated by the Reverend Baden Powell (see above), when in 1838, aged thirty, he attended a lecture in Oxford by Baden Powell on Light.

Sir Edward Burnett Tylor 1832-1917

In 1884 Edward Tylor was appointed Keeper of the University Museum when General Pitt Rivers offered his ethnological collection to the University of Oxford. Part of the deed of gift stipulated that Tylor was to be offered the post of Keeper to the whole of the University Museum and supervise the organisation of the Pitt Rivers

collection. The Pitt Rivers Museum was officially opened in April 1891 and the first curator was Henry Balfour (1863-1939).

The programme of supervising the transfer of objects from the Ashmolean Museum in Broad Street to the University Galleries in Beaumont Street and to the University Museum caused many administrative problems for Tylor.

Henry Michael John Underhill 1855-1920

Henry Underhill was a member of an established family of Oxford grocers. From 1880 he became involved with the new scientific society The Oxfordshire Natural History Society and Field Club which was supported by members drawn from both town and gown. Henry Underhill was a devoted member of the society and supported its social and intellectual pursuits for over twenty years. During his lifetime, Underhill was locally renowned for the quality of his hand illustrated lanternslide lectures that he gave regularly to various groups in Oxford and beyond.