



JAMES and HENRY COATES – Members of PSNS

Henry Coates served as President of the Perthshire Society of Natural Science 1892-1907. His father, Andrew, was a keen naturalist encouraging his family to share his interest. Henry too became a naturalist and made a large collection of shells of which he made a particular study. His collection was presented to the Society's Natural History Museum in Tay Street, which opened in 1883. Henry worked long and hard at setting up and indexing the exhibits and collections donated to the Society at that time.

The Society was overwhelmed by the success of that Museum. Great interest was awakened among the public of Perth and far afield. Patrick Geddes praised the founding of the Museum and advised the Dunfermline Naturalists' Society to copy the Perth Society's example. The Museum opened daily and usually two evenings weekly so that those working during the day could visit. The schools in Perth and the surrounding areas arranged visits for their pupils. After such educational visits teachers asked for a written account of the visit and what was seen. In this way a Children's Essay and Art Competition was established and an award made to the best entry. In this way, too, the Society established an Annual Essay Competition for pupils.

This Essay Competition is still held to this day. In 1912 Charles Mackintosh, of Inver, a local postman in the Dunkeld area, died. He was an outstanding botanist and a member of the Perthshire Society of Natural Science. He would happily take children of Dunkeld with him on his rambles, encouraging them to study the flora and fauna. After his death the Annual Children's Competition was named 'The Charles Mackintosh Memorial Essay Competition', as it is known today.

In the early days of the Museum it was members of the Society who took turns of being curator and guide. As the museum grew in size and popularity a permanent curator was employed. It was Henry Coates who devoted most of his time to the arrangements of the Museum in the last two decades of the 19th Century.

Henry Coates, born in Philadelphia in 1860 was younger than James, born 1857, and sister Margaret, born 1855. James was a skilled naturalist but also encouraged the development of the Boys Brigade Movement in Perth. He was President of the Perth battalion for twelve years. At first he attached to the 3rd Bridgend Company but for twenty-five years was Captain and friend to the 12th West Church Company. James Coates enjoyed music and was a talented 'cellist and pianist. During World War I he helped in giving refreshment to soldiers and sailors as they passed through Perth Station and indicated that such good work was not to stop through lack of funds. A member of the West United Free Church (now St. Matthew's) he gave several hundred pounds to pay off the debt on the larger West Church Hall.

James Coates died in September, 1919 having taken a drill session of the Boys' Brigade in the hall in the Watergate. James and Henry Coates lived at Coriander in the Glasgow Road having moved there from Bridgend House. Henry Coates left Perth and settled in the south of England where he died.



Henry Coates taken at Loch Earn about 1910