



Perthshire Society of Natural Science



The Library Room in Perth Museum and Art Gallery was included in the plans of the new Art Gallery by Perth architects, Smart, Stewart and Mitchell in the early 1930s. The Art Gallery was an extension of the Marshall Monument erected in 1824 in George Street to accommodate the Literary and Antiquarian Society of Perth. The plans included an Entrance Hall, a Lecture Hall, a Sculpture Court, Art Galleries, Museum Rooms and a Library Room that was designed to house the Library of the Perthshire Society of Natural Science.

The Society was founded by a small group of enthusiastic naturalists in March 1867, electing as their first President Dr. Francis Buchanan White. In his inaugural address he outlined the aims of the Society. The two main aims were to gain a full and detailed knowledge of and encourage research and recording of the natural sciences of Perth and Perthshire – the fauna, flora and geology – and to establish a Natural Science Museum to hold the Society's collections. Thanks to the generosity of an ever-increasing membership and generous benefactors such as Robert Pullar of North British Dyeworks the Society was able to erect a building in South TAY Street (No. 66) containing a meeting hall, a library/reading room and a spacious museum hall. The Moncreiffe Natural History Museum opened in 1883.

In 1867 the Society meetings were held in King James VI Golf Club (6, Charlotte Street) or in the Glovers' Hall in George Street. Members began to form collections for the proposed Museum and in 1869 a room was taken at Kirkside to store them. Very soon a larger room was based in St. Anne's Lane and served as museum, library and lecture room. At the A.G.M. there in 1877 Sir Thomas Moncreiffe, the then President of the Society suggested a plan of erecting a building in South TAY Street. Steps were taken to raise the necessary funds. Unfortunately Sir Thomas Moncreiffe died in 1879 before building operations began but Dr. James Geikie, who succeeded Sir Thomas as President, pushed forward with the project and opened the Natural History Museum dedicated to the memory of Sir Thomas Moncreiffe in 1883. All members helped to organise and set up displays of collected and donated items. Colonel Drummond Hay acted as Honorary Curator.

Soon it was obvious to all that more museum space was required. Dr. Francis Buchanan White made just such an observation at a meeting in 1885 and in 1892 the Council of the Society decided to embark on planning an extension to the museum hall. Generous support was given by members and once again Robert Pullar gave his generous financial help. In 1895 Sir William H. Flower, Director of the new Natural History Museum, London accepted the Society's invitation to open the new extended Perth Natural History Museum. As in the case of the original building so in the case of the extended building the opening was tinged with sadness. Dr. Francis Buchanan White died in 1894, prior to the opening of the extended museum hall.

Following the opening ceremony Sir Robert and Lady Pullar entertained 300 guests to dinner in the City Hall. As the company assembled Mr. Nicol played selections on City Hall organ.

By 1903 the Society had gifted its building in South TAY Street and its Museum collections to the Town Council of Perth and a salaried Museum Curator was appointed. Prior to the opening of the new Museum and Art Gallery in George Street on 10th August, 1935 the exhibits of the Museum and the Library of the Society were moved to George Street.

The Society achieved much in the last quarter of the 19th Century. It is interesting to note three other Societies founded about that time – the Cryptogrammic Society (1875), the East of Scotland Union of Naturalists Society (1884) and the Perth Mountain Club, initially founded by members of the Perthshire Society of Natural Science.

In 1891 a group of members interested in the art of photography formed a Photographic Section. The members of that Section had the use of the Lecture Hall and the Laboratory in the Natural History Museum on Saturday evenings. Many local groups and organisations hired the use of the

Lecture Room from the Society.

One of the Society's early members who worked with Dr. Buchanan White was Colonel Drummond Hay who acted as honorary Curator of the Museum. In 1931 Mrs. Drummond Hay presented to the Society the extensive botanical and zoological collections of her late father-in-law, Colonel H.M. Drummond Hay. Colonel Drummond Hay was born at Bath in 1814 and joined the 42nd Regiment – the Black Watch in 1832. Abroad he served in Bermuda, Halifax, the Ionian Islands and Malta. At home he was stationed at Edinburgh, Dumbarton and Dublin.

Colonel Drummond Hay retired from the army in 1852 and was appointed to the command of the Perthshire Militia, a post that he held with great acceptance for twenty years. He died in 1895. He was a good soldier, a great naturalist and a great gentleman. The love for and understanding of Nature were inborn in the man. Wherever he went from the very start of his career he noted, observed and collected alike bird, plant and beast, his fine athletic habits standing him in good stead in his wanderings. He was also a competent artist as a series of drawings of Bermudan fish that he produced confirms.

He made a collection of Mediterranean plants when serving in Malta but he was best known by his work on the birds of Perthshire. Colonel Drummond Hay had a fine collection of 'Books', volumes devoted to pressed specimens of certain species of plants, labelled and with data. His work and donations as Curator of the Society's Museum was of great value.

An interesting local family had connections with the Society over several years. Sir John Everett Millais and his wife Lady Millais (Effie Gray of Bowerswell) were members as was their son John Guille Millais. He was elected a Corresponding Member in 1917. As a young man he served in the Seaforths and during the 1914-18 War acted as British Consul in Northern Norway. With inherited gifts as an artist with pen and brush he was a naturalist and sportsman. He was a Wildfowler and produced a work on 'British Deer and their Horns'.

John Guille Millais died in March, 1931.

Mr. Edward Smart, B.A., B.Sc., died at his home, Tullyloss, Tullylumb Terrace, Perth in December 1939. He was a native of Angus, taught some time in Stirling High School before coming to Sharp's Institution in Perth as a mathematics master. He was later to become Rector of Perth Academy and after retiring wrote a history of the school. He also had a great interest in Natural History and was a member of PSNS. Indeed from 1931-1935 he served as its President.

Mr. James Menzies, one of Perth's most interesting personalities lived at Knowlea Terrace, Craigie. He was born at Ruthvenfield and as a young herdboyc he developed an interest in nature. He went as a boy to work in the bleachfields at Almondbank but while still a youth he came to Perth and entered the employment of J. Pullar & Sons Ltd. He was a dyer's finisher when he retired in December, 1923.

Botany and the study of fungi were his favourite pursuits. Mr. Menzies was the oldest member of the Society when he died in 1945 at the age of 91 years. On one occasion he found a new fungus which appeared unnamed in London and Paris. It was named after him. He served as President of the Society and was well-known as a lecturer. James Menzies was a dedicated naturalist.

Dr. W.H. Findlay was President from 1960-1970 during which time the Society celebrated its centenary. In 1967 the occasion was marked by the planting of a group of trees on Moncreiffe Island opposite the former Natural History Museum in Tay Street. In that year the PSNS Notice Board in the foyer of Perth Museum and Art Gallery was gifted to the Society by Dr. Findlay. His successor James Aitken of Orchardbank served as President 1970-1986 and holds the record length of term of sixteen years.

Now, in 2013, Mr Alan McKenzie has just completed his term of three years as President of the Society.