

Shropshire Observed

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SMITH, D.M. (1986). Shropshire Observed. *Proceedings of the Shropshire Geological Society*, **5**, 18. An account of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Shropshire and North Wales Natural History and Antiquarian Society. This was celebrated by a morning of talks and an afternoon of walks, organised to recreate the Victorian spirit of enquiry in the environment.

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On Sunday 14th July 1985 the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Shropshire and North Wales Natural History and Antiquarian Society was celebrated. A morning of talks and an afternoon of walks was organised to recreate the Victorian spirit of enquiry in the environment.

About seventy people attended the morning talks where the early 19th century industrial, scientific and social scene was set by Dr Barrie Trinder of the Ironbridge Gorge Museums Trust.

The Society was established on 26th June 1835 and the first donation on that day was eight specimens of minerals and fossils from Thomas du Gard. A large collection was rapidly amassed and the Society rented the building which is now the Borough rates office in Dogpole as a museum. In 1836 a Mr Gilbert was appointed curator and given accommodation in the building. Unfortunately Gilbert resigned within a year due to the consternation caused by his wife joining him in Shrewsbury. Gilbert emigrated to Australia where he made a very important contribution to natural history.

Between 1835 and 1845 several plans for a new building were proposed but were never built as sufficient funds were not available. The museum remained a private one until the early 1880's when the Society formed a joint committee with the Borough and a public museum opened in the Old School in Castle Gates in 1885, one hundred years ago. These early events in the history of the Society were outlined by Dr Hugh Torrens of Keele University.

James Lawson, librarian to Shrewsbury School, went on to describe how the Society developed from 1887 to 1985. The Society changed its name several times and, in 1887, it was known as the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society. Interest in natural history

was waning and being replaced by more enthusiasm for archaeology. By the 1940's the natural history responsibilities had been dropped from the constitution and the Society is now called the Shropshire Archaeological Society, with James Lawson as the present chairman.

The final speaker was Bruce Bennison of Rowley's House Museum, who summarised the development of the museums in Shrewsbury. From the first private one in Dogpole, to the joint Society and Borough one in the Old School, and now the Borough Museums including Rowley's House and Clive House. He pointed out that Gilbert, the first paid curator appointed in 1836, was never replaced except by honorary curators. The next paid curator was not appointed until the 1970's, a gap of about 130 years! Today there is no natural historian on the staff despite the very important botanical, zoological and geological collections.

In the afternoon about 120 people joined the organised walks based at Grinshill. Six leaders took groups off to look at the geology and quarrying, or the botany, local history, mining or landscape of the area. It was a very enjoyable and instructive afternoon which ended up with cream scones at the Elephant and Castle in Grinshill.

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Based on notes by Diana M Smith on Sunday 14th July 1985, the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Shropshire and North Wales Natural History and Antiquarian Society.

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