

**Centenary talk to the King's Lynn Society of Arts & Sciences  
Friday, 25 October, 2013. AGM 7.30pm. Talk 8.15pm**

**Whose grit was in the oyster?**

Good evening everyone. In case you have not read the programme and noted the subtle inclusion of the word 'light-hearted', let me reassure you that this will *not* be a Reithian-style lecture. And if you want someone like the artist, Grayson Perry, who is delivering the Reith Lectures this year, you will have to pay considerably more! (And very good he is, too - worth every penny.)

The word picture *I* am painting for you tonight is with the help of a sketchbook in which I have recorded some of the fragments of names and characters, as well as the random vignettes of incident, humour and history that I observed in my long hours of trawling the Minutes of the Meetings of the King's Lynn Society of Arts and Sciences. In the next 45 minutes, I hope to give you both something of an artist's impression of the life of the Society during *some* of the past 100 years and an attempt to answer the question I have posed for the title of this talk: 'Whose grit was in the oyster?'

First, we should remember that something *similar* existed from 1842 to 1883: the Lynn Conversazione and Society of Arts, formed to promote a taste for literature as well as science and art. Why it lasted only 41 years, I do not know, but 30 years later, in 1913, another attempt was made to bring a little culture and conversation into the lives of the inhabitants of Lynn. Little did the founders know that the ghastly Great War was about to burst into everyone's lives and it is to their credit that the new Society did not die a premature death as so many men did at the Front.

So, who were these founder members? Alas, I can identify only a few beyond their name. But a future historian with a sharper spade might like to take on the job and discover their backgrounds in greater detail. The first president was Sir Somerville Gurney KCVO, banker, Justice of the Peace, Treasurer of Walsingham RDC and probably much else besides. He lived in North Runcton Hall and died in 1917 aged 82. From a painting by Hugh Goldwin Riviere held by the Town Hall, we see a good-looking serious gentleman, well-dressed in his brown tweed three-piece suit, wearing spectacles on his aquiline nose above a tidy moustache. He sits on an imposing chair holding his tweed hat and walking stick. A man of substance whose name would look well on the letterhead.

Mr Holcombe Ingleby MP. Founder member and Vice-president of the Society. From a newspaper clipping, Mr Ingleby looks just like the product of the life of fine-club-dining that he enjoyed, be it at the House of Commons or clubs, like Boodle's, the Carlton and the Athenaeum. He was the son of a Shakespearian scholar and himself gave one of the Society's early lectures on the subject of Shakespeare versus Bacon. He was a practising solicitor for several years before becoming an MP. He was also Mayor of King's Lynn twice and High Sheriff of Norfolk. In 1918, he made some controversial remarks about *'the dreary monotony of rows of similar houses lined up like soldiers. How anyone found their way home in the dark when all these houses looked the same is a mystery. After the war, are new houses going to be like Tennyson Avenue or worse?'* It was suggested that members of the Town Council join the Society for some influence on the much-needed artistic improvement of the town. There were cries of *'Hear! Hear!'* amongst the laughter, the press reported. Mr Ingleby died at Sedgford Hall in 1926 aged 72. It had been another name to add gravitas to the proceedings *although* when he won his seat by only 97 votes, he and his agent were accused of bribery and corruption and the hearing lasted several days. The country learned from the newspaper reports that Mr Ingleby was the most lavish of hosts with guests numbering in the thousands. Presents of game were abundant and his Liberal opponent declared that rabbits had been scattered freely among the voters, though he confessed that he had *himself* accepted a couple of wild duck! Mr Ingleby was cleared of the charge and declared duly elected. He held the seat for eight years.

There were three other Vice-presidents: the then Mayor, Mr R F Springall, the Rev F A S ffolkes, and the Recorder of Lynn, Mr Henry St John Raikes, who was both the son and the father of Conservative politicians. Two other prominent members of the Executive Committee for several years were Mr Edward Beloe, another solicitor who wrote a number of books on local history, and Mr G H Anderson who wrote a pamphlet on George Vancouver and a well-researched history of Welwick House, the Society's home for 50 years. He took particular interest in archeological matters and died in 1941 after a membership spanning nearly 30 years. Mr Walter Dexter, the artist, was also a founder member and took charge of the Art Section. His composite drawing of the prominent buildings of Lynn was used by the Society for some years as its logo until it was discovered that it did not own the copyright of the original it had been given by Mr Dexter, which was subsequently lost in the move from Welwick House in 1963.

There were only two ladies in the new executive line-up: Miss M H Clough who, as head of the Handicrafts Section, gave the first lecture by a lady member - but she resigned after just four years; and Miss M B Miles, who was mentioned in despatches as having helped so much to redecorate the Society's new home that she lived there for a fortnight! She was a member for 32 years. One other founder member, not yet called to higher office, was the urbane Mr Harry Bradfer-Lawrence. Interested in all things antiquarian, he wrote several books and had the most exquisite handwriting. He was a member for 22 years.

### 3.

One of the delights of preparing this talk has been reading the Minutes of those early meetings and other documents written in the most beautiful, fine copperplate handwriting which spoke volumes for a more leisured life-style in some fortunate cases but, generally, for the fact that virtually everyone was taught the art of producing clear and elegantly-formed letters and words. Unfortunately, as the years passed, the handwriting deteriorated and was often hard to decipher. It seems that speed had become of the essence, not style. Calligraphy is in danger of becoming a dying art - I spotted two talks on the subject but perhaps more are needed! You can see examples both of fine handwriting and printed programmes and tickets in this wonderful scrapbook about which there is a lovely story. It is in fact an old ledger turned upside down and contains interesting items from the first four years. Somehow it was mislaid but discovered some seventy years later in a jumble sale, retrieved for a few pence and returned to the Society. It probably sat unnoticed in someone's attic for decades and was then chucked out when the house was cleared prior to a move or after a death. The gems within should be treasured all the more.

But to return to those founder members that I discovered in my trawlings: I wondered what they looked like, what they would have been wearing and how on earth they coped with the lack of comfortable, warm quarters for their meetings and only one loo between them and all those petticoats and long skirts and ... We take so much for granted these days. Which leads me to my disappointment at the almost total lack of photographic records in the archives even though there was a section on photography for years - so the wherewithal did exist. Why did it not occur to them to take photos of each other, their headquarters at Welwick House, their speakers and their jaunts? And if they did, where are they? Probably in hundreds of skips or burnt to ashes long since because no-one knew what they were or represented.

Such photographic records would have given us a valuable and enjoyable picture of these strong-minded people who committed themselves to keeping this organisation going through the decades, through two world wars, through a fluctuating membership and bank balance and through fifty years of trying to cope with a building that badly needed attention when they barely had enough pounds, shillings and pence to paper over the cracks. For Gill and me, trying to build a picture of the last one hundred years has often been like trying to put a giant jigsaw puzzle together with half of the pieces missing their vital bits of colour.

Time to talk about Welwick House in a little more detail. Mr Anderson, Honorary Treasurer and founder member, said that from his searches he believed that the house was built by one Thomas Pierson in 1726 on land covering about one and a half acres. Situated next to All Saints' Church, this spacious Georgian mansion and grounds would have included adjoining buildings and stabling. Over the years, it was variously used as a school more than once, a museum, temporary accommodation for workhouse inmates, owned by shipbuilders (in 1806, the rates for the house, shipyard and land totalled £37), split up and the land sold off for building houses and a convent. In 1859, the shipowner, Mr John Dennis, purchased the house and spent a considerable sum putting it in order. Sadly, he was not to enjoy the fruits of his expenditure for long, being killed in a railway accident in Hunstanton four years later. In 1869, a Mr Baron, manager of the gasworks, gave the house its name. Which begs the question: What was a mansion of this size known as for the previous 118 years? Welwick is the name of a small village just south of Withernsea on the peninsular north of the mouth of the Humber. Did Mr Baron hail from there originally? It would have been one way of putting an otherwise isolated group of dwellings on the map. Today, Welwick has just under 300 inhabitants. Its claim to fame is that two of the Gunpowder plotters lived there and it is in the Domesday Book. It has a nature reserve and once had a useful gravel and sand pit when there was a housing boom in the 1930s. Now here's an idea: when I last checked, there were nine houses for sale in Welwick. The most expensive one has four bedrooms, numerous rooms downstairs including a music room (that's if they leave the piano behind), a separate building with a conservatory, nearly two acres of land, plenty of parking and within easy reach of the nature reserve, the Heritage Coast and the City of Hull! The advertisement did not give the house a name so if anyone from here is interested in starting up a Society of Arts and Sciences in the depths of Holderness, go buy this property and call it Lynn House. What a wonderful way to put our little town on the map at last!

As most of us know, Welwick House was rented by the Society in 1913 and used for its activities for 50 years. The exemption from rates which the Society enjoyed, from being classed as an educational establishment, probably saved it from going bankrupt on more than one occasion. In 1967, four years after the Society vacated the premises, the building was demolished, having fallen into disrepair over several years because of lack of funds to keep it properly maintained and in good order inside and out and in spite of it being classed as of 'architectural and historical interest'. We know that back in 1936, Miss Laura Bennett, the owner, wrote to the Society informing it of her intention to put the property up for sale. Unfortunately, the Society had to reply that it was not in a position to make an offer. Wouldn't we just love to know how much it fetched at auction? Afterwards, Mr Catleugh, a founder member and local businessman, acted on behalf of the Society in dealings with the new owner but there appears to be no record of that person's name. Surely that would have been an opportunity for Mr Catleugh to renegotiate the terms of the lease so that at least the new owner could agree to carry out some much-needed maintenance immediately and on-going? But Welwick House probably needed a small fortune to put it in order and perhaps the new owner only wanted money coming in from the rental, not money going out on never-ending repairs. As it was, the Society, according to the Minutes, was continually struggling to attend to draughty rooms, lack of ventilation, rotting floors and ceilings, the installation of effective heating, electricity and so on and so on *ad infinitum*. Why did Mr Catleugh put himself in the impossible position of trying to please two opposing camps?

Furniture, furnishings and fittings were mostly donated or made by the lady members in the case of the furnishings, but were not going to last forever. Some of the original cane chairs were lucky to fetch £30 at auction many years later. The Caretaker's quarters sounded dire and had to be vacated after a flood. The Red Cross was, for a while, allowed to use the upper rooms and did its best to make them habitable with redecoration and electricity only to be asked to find other accommodation when the Society's newly-formed Art Circle needed more space. This once-imposing mansion with a grand staircase leading to a minstrel's gallery must have been a sad shadow of its former status. No doubt, in 1913, it seemed the perfect venue for the Society's purposes. Why was this gradual deterioration to the point of demolition allowed to happen? English Heritage! The Preservation Trust! Where were you when that poor old pile needed you?

All the sections were popular and fully active in the early days with recitals and exhibitions, readings, lectures and outings. There was a ladies choir and, no doubt the grand staircase played its part setting the singers off visually. A piano was obviously important from the start but after some not very successful results from a rented one, a fund was started - mostly sustained by regular whist drives - to raise the £65 needed to buy a Hopkinson instrument. Compared to the annual rent for Welwick House at that time, which was £26, this was a huge sum to find. Nowadays, you can't *give* a piano away. Music and refreshments, the latter very much the ladies' domain, always featured at the end of the Annual Meetings (as they were called then) and the Minutes generally paid tribute to them for seeing to the members' comforts. It was ever thus. A press report of the Annual Meeting in 1932 actually described the social conclusion of the meeting as a form of *conversazione* with music and supper. I hope the ladies were all wearing delicious little hats and perhaps the men were still wearing morning dress for evening functions as was the custom when the Society was first formed.

The Drama Section grew from modest poetry readings to full-scale productions, often in association with the St. George's Players. Some of the titles that caught my eye as I looked for quirks and signs of imaginative choices, were a far cry from the Shakespearian and other better-known plays of the day, though these were often attempted at one time or another. In 1936, a play by the Spanish Quintero brothers was chosen for a play-reading. It was called *'The Women Have Their Way'*. Set in Mexico, it is a simple story of life in an unsophisticated setting. A young lawyer comes to a small town on business. The women of the town decide that he has fallen in love with a pretty girl, though both deny it. However, by persistently gossiping about the seemingly non-existent romance they actually make it happen. End of story. There is no brilliant dialogue, indeed it is positively ordinary and dull at times, but the brothers were credited with writing dozens of simple plays with great skill. Now what intrigues me is how this play came to be chosen. Maybe it was in the Samuel French play catalogue and they chose it for its title. Did they regret it or was it a hoot? There was a room in Welwick House where the ladies used to meet every week. We know that much noble knitting of comforts was done for the soldiers on the Front during World War 1 but I daresay it was a hive of gossip at *all* times and this play could well have tickled their fancy. It could also be that it reflected a turning of the tide within the Society itself: that the women wanted to play a greater part in the running of it beyond the tea urn and cake-stand. We shall never know. (I should tell you, by the way, that when I Googled *'The Women Have Their Way'*, up popped the website for Ten ways to get the woman you want - ask men! What would the ladies in 1936 have made of such a suggestion?)

There were one or two home-grown dramas briefly alluded to in the Minutes but with the outcomes left dangling in one's imagination. In 1947, Miss Watts (she of whist drive fame) was asked to 'interview' (never 'speak to') Miss Metcalf concerning the activities of the Drama Section on the state in which the room was left after their last visit. A complaint had been made by the Caretaker. Did the fact that they were rehearsing '*Just Married*' account for their unseemly behaviour, I wonder? The Minutes of the next meeting reported that Miss Watts had duly seen Miss Metcalf and.... Yes? I have to report that nothing, absolutely nothing was said about the state of the room! Did the doughty Miss Watts chicken out of the confrontation or was the outcome deemed too scandalous to be recorded? It was a disappointing end to a promising punch-up. Again, we shall never know.

Another drama, that I suspect reoccurred from time to time, concerned Welwick House and the endless need for repairs and maintenance. The state of the floor in the Art Room was causing consternation and Mr Catleugh, who was still acting on behalf of the Landlord, refused to contribute any money towards the strengthening that it was felt the floor needed '*The Society could do as it wished*', he said. Without his help, he implied. The President, Mr Webb, felt obliged to ask for a vote of confidence and intimated that he might consider resigning at the next meeting. As it happens, the floor was given an expert inspection and found not to be unsafe after all. I may be wrong, but I have a theory that the true owner of Welwick House at that time *was* Mr Catleugh and he had decided he could stand up to the Society's demands more effectively if he appeared to have no say in the matter, only to be acting for someone else. It might explain why the Landlord's name is never mentioned in the Minutes. Whoever owned the house got their come-uppance when it was eventually demolished. They certainly did not deserve to make any money on its sad demise. Mr Webb did indeed step down at the AGM seven months later.

What a wonderful compendium could have been compiled if copies of the talks had been prised from each speaker over the past 100 years. These erudite, entertaining and awful lectures (well, there must have been *some!*) could have been perused, yawned and giggled over by succeeding members. The local press did their bit in the early days by reporting at length the AGMs and principal lectures. The fact that these reports were often 40 to 50 column inches long in tiny type with never-ending paragraphs readable only under a magnifying glass, is neither here nor there. But that service petered out and there was a huge gap of virtually nothing except the merest mention of tantalising titles in the Minutes. If you were lucky while the capable, charming but, according to Sophia Hankinson, mysterious Mr G G Naylor was Secretary, your brief mention would be adorned by a glowing adjective of praise.

In more recent years, the style of Minute-reporting changed radically from the carefully-itemised earlier method and was not easy to read at a glance. During one period, a brief synopsis of the talk at the time was sent to the local press but there has not been sufficient time to read the faint carbon copies or sort out the contents of those later files. If I may, I would like to inject a kindly note to future historians, secretaries and anyone who contributes written or photographic material to the Society's archives: please neatly sign, date and identify everything. When it is not so marked, it is extremely frustrating trying to figure out the who and the when.

The range of topics has always been far-reaching though in the old days there was often repetition of subject and, one suspects, second and third attempts to squeeze the last drops of juice from an expensive holiday. When Mr & Mrs Dorer - both great contributors to the working of the Society - when they waved goodbye as they set off for South Africa where they would stay for a year, you just knew that not one but several talks would have been prepared on the return sea journey ready-to-go as soon as the Lecture Programme permitted. In the early days, members were encouraged to prepare papers and present them to their sections and quite a few would have enjoyed the opportunity. A number of the ladies were teachers and already used to addressing an audience so they would have welcomed the chance to shine in front of their peers. The Age of the Grand Tour must have inspired adventures all over Europe and beyond. There was hardly a country or area in the world that was not covered but, sadly, not immortalised in the files.



In the beginning, talks were often illustrated by lantern slides and the episcopes or epidiscopes. Later, transparencies were all the rage and the Society was obliged to fork out for the appropriate equipment. It would be impossible to run through even a small selection of the subjects covered without sending you to sleep or out the door prematurely though I did make copious notes of titles that caught my eye, some of which reflected events in the wider world. Because I could not decide which to list, I decided on just two that tickled my sense of humour because of their juxtaposition in the programme: a talk by a Mr Clutterbuck entitled '*After Mass*' was followed on the next line by one from Mrs Peake entitled '*The Kiss!*' No, it's a job for a proper historian to tackle at a later date - and I use that word 'tackle' advisedly. To coin a much-used phrase: you name it and you'll find it there somewhere. Elsewhere, I have mentioned the Bagnall-Oakley lectures but much earlier there had been the Cambridge University series of lectures which, after many years, died a death through, I suspect, lack of significant attendance and cost. Miss D M Smith, a big-hitter who first enrolled in 1917 (she resigned and rejoined several times) won, in 1933, the Churton Collins Prize for English Literature offered by the Cambridge University Extension Board.

The same 'you name it' cliché can be applied to the walks, rambles, strolls and saunters (yes, all those words were used in the early programmes) throughout East Anglia. Excursions took them as far as Stratford-upon-Avon but during the wars and post-war periods, petrol and transport were in short supply so jaunts were often restricted to attractions nearer to home. Up the road, Mr Tracy's 'glades' in North Wootton were a regular fixture for several years and members were reminded to bring their cameras and specimen boxes wherever they went. Anywhere that was worth visiting will have been included in the summer outings and nature study programmes. No doubt, there were a few excursions that did not pass muster - a visit to one place was deemed a success but the tea following was not!

I want to mention two women who helped run the Society at different times: Miss Katherine Sherman and Miss Audrey Stratford.

Miss Sherman - to whom I shall return shortly - was a member for nearly 60 years - possibly the longest-serving - and in the Chair for thirty. Miss Stratford first enrolled in 1934 but resigned five years later. She rejoined in 1970 but it is not clear if she was still a member at the time of her death in 2000 aged 92. She was instrumental in involving the Society in the production of the town's first Guide Book and in making some changes to the Society's Constitution, one of which was to prevent any *chairman* or woman from serving for more than five years at one sitting, though she herself served for only three. She inherited her father's business in town and had a good nose for publicity. When she wrote her first book on knitting, she persuaded the Society to help her launch it. She provided the local press with some good photo opportunities by demonstrating her skill at knitting with broomhandle needles and several balls of wool simultaneously. She wrote an excellent book called 'The Committee' which should be required reading for anyone who is a member of an organisation where they might one day become a member of its committee. She was well-travelled, well-educated, clever and organised but I suspect she could be somewhat intimidating on occasion. There is evidence of ruffled feathers in the files. Tall with a neat, if severe, appearance, she gave a number of talks, including at least two on playing cards of which she had a large collection from around the world.

Katherine Florence Sherman was headmistress of two King's Lynn schools and appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1942. She joined the Society in 1921 when she was in her early 30s and was a member until she died in 1979 aged 91. Her early contributions were few and far between, probably because her full-time career as a teacher included many extra-curricular activities that we know teachers are expected to embrace, like it or not. However, she hung in there, gradually attending more regularly until in 1940 she and Miss Gladys Watts (who had joined in 1928 and was also a teacher) gave a talk about a holiday in Thuringia, which I imagine they must have taken before the war.

It wasn't long before Team Sherman and Watts were organising regular profitable whist drives. (Not being a card-sharper, I looked up the definition of 'whist drive' in the dictionary: apparently it is a classic English *trick*-taking card game with enormous scope for *scientific* play, whatever that means. I wonder which part of that definition appealed to the teachers?) The Team also organised the refreshments for the annual Christmas party for several years. As happened frequently with members who liked to travel abroad and elsewhere, Miss Sherman gave a talk on America, one of several on the subject in quick succession, including a talk by an American visitor on America! The transatlantic crossings must have offered a glamorous escape from life in post-war Lynn. I'll bet there were many photos taken on those trips that would have been fun to look at now. All gone, sadly.

In 1950, Miss Sherman was suddenly in pole position to be elected to the highest office. The whist drives had proved to be a winner in more than one way! From the only grainy, much photocopied image I have seen of Miss Sherman which appeared alongside her obituary, she had a look of the late Queen Mother. According to Sophia Hankinson, she was a 'poppet with red hair' and could be very persuasive. From the start of her Presidency, it appeared that she did things properly and graciously. Before Committee business, a minute's silence was always observed for recently-deceased members whose funerals she generally attended and flowers and cards were sent to bereaved members or those in hospital. The fortunes of the Society during her tenure were often deemed to be 'happy and healthy' and she always thanked members for their loyalty. She oversaw the move from Welwick House - a building she found depressing, understandably - to the town's museum, a move which necessitated a certain amount of reorganisation when the Society needed to use its premises. Ordinary committee meetings, other than the AGMs, were usually held in the home of whoever was in the Chair.

In the 50s, Miss Sherman tried to raise the profile of the Society's lecture programme by inviting the writer and illustrator, Mr R P Bagnall-Oakley, to give an annual talk in St George's Hall. Described as dashing with an eye for the ladies, Dick, as he was known, was also a mildly eccentric all-rounder and it is possible that Miss Sherman had a soft spot for him as she personally took charge of the arrangements for his annual visit. However, by 1970, the lecture was losing money and it was reluctantly decided to discontinue the event.

In 1971, Miss Sherman had some health problems and her friend, Miss Watts, usually took her place in the Chair. Sadly, Miss Watts died of cancer in 1974. Her friend talked of the 'great loss of one of the oldest-surviving members of the Society', having served for 45 years. She had given her best. (Even though I knew none of these people, I was often pulled up short when coming across the death of someone I had been tracking through the Minutes.) In 1975, Miss Sherman expressed a wish to relinquish her role as Chairman after 30 years. Mrs Bailey, who succeeded her, said her work had been 'beyond compare'. After a pacemaker had been fitted, Miss Sherman did not attend any more meetings and, apart from donating a quantity of cups and saucers (these were always in short supply), her active involvement ceased and she died in 1979. The first lecture of the forthcoming season was called The Katherine Sherman Memorial Lecture and was given by Mr Bill Timpany on his work as Chief Clerk to the Justices, no doubt to reflect her time as a Magistrate.

When I started to think about writing this talk I asked around for amusing stories concerning members, other talks or situations in the Society's history. Helen Johnson told me of a visiting speaker who refused to use the B & B accommodation in town recommended by the Society and instead booked himself into Congham Hall at the Society's expense. The bill just about cleaned out the Society's budget! She also told me of a member who was so enormous he had to bring his own chair to meetings. Which is a neat cue to another derrière anecdote. After Richard Morley's talk on Ivor Novello some time ago, I naughtily drew attention to the fact that I was probably the only person present who had sat on his knee - Ivor's, that is, *not* Richard's! Just in case anyone is thinking I can't be *that* old, remember I was only a baby at the time. Thank you, Brian and Tony, for the little pats you gave me as I left - it made me feel that Anneka Rice's '*Rear of the Year*' had some competition at last!

Trawling through the Minutes time and time again, I started to notice characters that seemed to have a little life of their own - nothing earth-shattering in the week-to-week happenings but they appealed to my sense of humour or indignation. There was the occasional mention of Mrs Wykes, the long-suffering Caretaker, whose job it was to keep the fires lit when the Lecture Room was in use and to clean the premises. Nothing is written about her salary as such - it is possible that the quarters she inhabited there were in lieu of that. What was mentioned was the money paid for the ton of coal that was delivered as and when, which of course was her responsibility. Towards the end of her time in 1949, she was paid an honorarium of *two guineas* for her past faithful service and another in 1951 of the same amount after which there is no further mention. Goodness knows how old she was by this time but it seems incredible to me that she was offered such a paltry amount after having been employed at the house since 1913.

Miss Renault, who enrolled in 1928, took on the responsibility much later of serving the coffee at social functions. In 1970, she reported that the coffee was paying its way and the following year, at 4p<sup>pence</sup> a cup, she had made an enormous profit of £4.14.0. In 1973, she was actually mentioned in a press report as having served the coffee! She and her coffee pot were certainly making their presence felt and even more so when, two years later, she announced that either the price per cup was increased from 5p to 10p or she would cease serving it altogether. There must have been an outcry of indignation because the members reluctantly agreed to the prohibitive price hike. After 1979, I gave up on tracking Miss Renault and her authoritarian ways.

Let me tell you briefly about another character I spotted: Miss Swift, who looked after the Archeological and Nature Study sections for about 15 years. She was often reported as having given a 'lengthy and interesting' report on the summer nature study outings but one mention in the 1965 Minutes caught my eye when the report was described as being 'lengthy and racy'! Swift by name and racy by nature! Oh, to have been given some more enlightenment. Dear Miss Swift, who looked quite jolly and wholesome in one rare press-cutting, eventually retired in 1979 after 30 years as a member.

I have been able to profile only a tiny fraction of the many members who stand out as being long-serving, committed and so varied in their enthusiasms and contributions to the Society. It seems almost disloyal not to mention more fully people like Mr Chas Webb, Miss Laura Howard, Miss Aylmer, Miss V Winearls, Miss W Sedgley, Mr G G Naylor, Miss D M Smith and the benefactor, Mr G H Tyndall, all of whose names buzzed through the Minutes year after year until they faded away to be replaced by a new cycle of queen and worker bees. I certainly should mention Mr Frank Southgate, the member who was killed at the Front in the first world war, and Mr Edgley Bunn, who perished in the Lynn floods of 1953. The Society is indebted to Mrs Frances Hoyos who served as Secretary and President in the 70s and 80s and wrote the green Digest of the Minutes of the first 50 years. Only those few of us who have been up close and personal with all or most of the archives can appreciate just what *is* involved besides headaches, sleepless nights, the ability to write increasingly incomprehensible notes, gaining a new talent for juggling hundreds of little bitty pieces of information in our heads most of which will never be used and, in my case, finding the meaning of a number of scientific words, long since erased from my memory... except the word '*bromide*' which I saw in a talk entitled '*Bromide Toning*'. I thought bromide was something they put in soldiers' tea to dampen certain urges. Was bromide toning an attempt at disguising its bitter taste? I wondered. Turns out that it is, rather boringly, also something to do with the development of photographs. My collection of ancient and modern dictionaries have certainly earned their place in my over-crowded library but none of them mentioned the use bromide was put to in the barracks' mess - I only have my husband's word for that!

So, *whose* grit was in the oyster? *Your* oyster, remember. Undoubtedly, it was the founder members initially, mostly well-educated men of status and purpose who stayed on for many troubled and difficult years and were inclined to retain the senior posts on the Committee, probably because they were the wrong age to be called up. The lady members played to their strengths and were invaluable in providing the 'comforts' for the members as a whole though the Minutes show that they made significant contributions to the enjoyment and running of the various sections. Many were probably conditioned to take back seats unless they were particularly single-minded but the tide was definitely turning. The war years made an obvious difference to the gender make-up of the membership and, gradually, the women took over the running of the Society. For several years, there were no men on the Committee at all. From the evidence, therefore, we have to give the larger slice of credit to the women for providing the grit. We also have to remember that in the outside world, the increasing emancipation of women was taking place and influencing how they behaved and asserted themselves. Long may it remain so.

It has been a fascinating experience for me to go through some of the Society's history and I thank Christine for asking me to share with you tonight some of what I have gleaned and to be allowed to do so in a light-hearted way. I am also extremely grateful to Gill who did much of the donkey work of research, provided ideas and support and was always willing to provide even more when I started to suffer from an excess of information and note-taking. The very fact that this Society is celebrating its hard-won centenary of *achievement and enlightenment* should be the spur to take you galloping into your second centenary and I wish you Godspeed!

Thank you.