History: 1926-1945

The Cardiff Scientific Society has been in existence over seventy five years and active with only one break during 1939 and 1945. Today, it fulfils the same role as outlined by the founder members:

"By Lectures, Demonstrations, etc, of a popular nature, to extend interest in the application of Science to everyday life."

The first Minute Book records the inaugural meeting of the Science League held in the Physics Lecture Room, University Buildings in Newport Road on Tuesday November 12th 1926. Mr Cox was in the chair and Mr. W. O'Grady the secretary. No records exist to explain why the group was brought together but then, as now, the membership includes the academic community in Cardiff and those with an interest in science. Minutes documenting committee discussions, decisions and reports on recent lectures were typewritten using a Smith typewriter and a signed paper copy was pasted into a hardback foolscap notebook. At the second meeting, a week later, correspondence was read from the headquarters of the Science League and members decided against affiliation to this organisation as it would be too expensive.

This decision established the Cardiff Scientific Society. 1926 was a turbulent year with considerable industrial unrest, high unemployment, and poor wages. Despite this, and with the average weekly wage less than three pounds, subscriptions were set at half a guinea (ten shillings and sixpence) for seniors and five shillings for juniors under sixteen years of age. Committee members paid for printing and stationary and were fined a small sum not exceeding sixpence if they were late for meetings.

The membership was, not surprisingly, small. Income for the first winter was £6 0s 8d, which included £1 0s 2d from the sale of refreshments and a donation from the President, Dr Shaxby. The winter programme 1929/30 included a visit to the Cardiff Dowlais works and a Presidential lecture by Professor W. M. Tattersall entitled 'Mans Relation To Nature'. Other topics were 'Ultraviolet rays in the treatment of tuberculosis'. 'Gem Stones', 'The Mating of Flowers', 'Evolution', and onMarch 5th 'Musical Quality' by Mr. C.F. Herrenden-Harker M.A., father of a present member, Dr. W. Herrenden-Harker. In the audience was Mr Clifford Nott who remained in active membership until shortly before his death in 1996. Six visits were organised during the summer months to retain the interest of members. One of the most successful was a Dinner and Social evening at a Grill in St. Mary's Street costing 4s 6d per head. One month later, members enjoyed a demonstration featuring a radio gramophone. It was noted that the attendance was better when there were demonstrations.

Membership participation was being encouraged and on May 28th 1931, four members each gave a lecture/demonstration beginning with Mr. R. Hogan's 'Germs found in disease' followed by Mr. W.M. Branson on ' Muscles and how they work'. Mr E.G. Holden followed with a description of 'Liquid Air' and the evening ended with Mr. C.M. Parsons describing 'The Modern Wireless Set'. The evening ended at 10.15pm. At the next committee meeting it was proposed and agreed that evening meetings would be advertised as 7.45 for 8pm, and that they would end at 9.30pm. Later the same year, another members evening was held with lantern slides, exhibits and conversation.

The focus was on tubercle bacilli; other colonies of bacteria; trypanosoma, the cause of sleeping sickness in Man; the mouth parts of insects carrying disease, fleas, tapeworms, filaria - the cause of elephantiasis and the trichinella worm which infects pork. There was also a demonstration of the brain and spinal cord of a monkey. A formidable biological array, and then, as recorded in the minutes, 'light refreshments were provided'. In keeping with the custom of the times, these were served by the ladies. At the next meeting, Mr. Barlow delivered a lecture on 'Bridges' using lantern slides to illustrate contractors Dorman Long 's £4 million tender to build the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Another lecture was entitled 'Turning the searchlight on our meat supply'.

Not all lectures were easy to follow or appreciated by the mixed ability audiences and the secretary was required, when inviting speakers to address the Society, in future 'to impress upon them that a popular lecture should be given as members of the Society were purely laymen'. A suggestion was made that speakers should indicate books that could be read to enhance understanding of the subject and a sub-committee was formed to organise and manage a small scientific library.

Financial difficulties continued, but suggestions that whist drives and dances could be arranged were rejected. A varied lecture programme was organised for 1934, Mr Herrenden-Harker M.A. spoke on 'Harmonics'; Professor D.T. Jones addressed the problem of 'Silicosis' and Dr. Dan Davies spoke on 'Glands and Personality' and again on 'Enzymes'. Another topic of interest was 'Infra-red photography and its influence on Spiritualism'. Dr. McGowan spoke on the 'Sterilisation of the unfit'. This, and many other lectures were followed by an off the record conversation.

There was continuing concern about the attendance at meetings and, by implication, income to the Society. A programme of demonstrations in the Department of Engineering was arranged featuring a 'Wilmshurst machine', 'Steam efficiency tests on boilers'; 'Gas fired engines and pumps'; and the 100 ton Buckton machine used for crunch tests on pit props, concrete blocks and 'Tension tests on steel chains and bars'. This departure from the usual lecture format was popular and brought in new members. Shortly before this, Mr. T.E. Gough resigned as Treasurer after a forthright opinion of his incompetence was penned in a letter to him from the long serving and respected Secretary Mr. W O'Grady. the credit balance in the bank account was then good enough to justify the printing of the Society's Objects, Rules and Constitution. A copy of this document is pasted in the Minute Book, signed and dated by each committee member. Successful summer visits were arranged to the Ely Paper Mill, Aberthawe cement works, Llandaff Cathedral, and a power station. The membership had risen to 128 seniors and 41 juniors and the balance in hand to £13 3s 2d with an insurance premium of £1 5s 0d for public liability to pay.

The 1936 'Syllabus' included a lecture on 'The ubiquitous electron' by Professor Dunbar, 'The future of Populations' by Mr J.H. Lloyd; 'An historic view of lightning in the mins' by Professor T. David Jones; and 'Germs in the air' by Professor R.C. McLean.Lectures for 1937/8 included one by Dr. Seth on 'Psychology' which concluded with an intelligence test involving the audience. Another members' evening featured Mr. S.A. Luen describing 'Psychological Tests'; Mr R.T. Gifkins talked about 'Hydraulic Power', Mr. C.M. Parsons introduced 'A Transmitting Set', and Mr. R. Hogan explaining the determination of 'Blood Groups'. Planning a future programme was overshadowed by events on the political and military scene in Europe and on September 27th September 1939, the committee resolved:

"That the activities of the Cardiff Scientific Society be and are hereby suspended for the duration of the war period."