

Centenary of the Royal Society of Tasmania

By the Honorary Secretary

The Royal Society of Tasmania celebrated its Centenary in October, 1943. In another part of the present volume (p. 199) Miss Somerville discusses the history of the Society, which was founded by Sir J. E. Eardley-Wilmot, Bart., Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land, on 14th October, 1843.

At the Canberra Meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science in January, 1939, it was decided that the Association should meet in Hobart in the Centenary year of the Royal Society of Tasmania in order to take part in the Celebrations, but owing to the outbreak of war, it was decided to hold no further meetings of the Association until after the war. The Council of the Royal Society of Tasmania, however, decided that, in spite of the war, the Centenary should be celebrated in a fitting manner, and it was agreed to invite Professor Eric Ashby, of the University of Sydney, and Dr. George Mackaness, of the Teachers' College, Sydney, to deliver lectures during Centenary week. The Government of Tasmania generously contributed £100 towards the cost of the Centenary Celebrations.

Owing to travelling restrictions ordained by war-time requirements, the Celebrations were not attended by visitors from the Mainland, with the exception of Mr. D. J. Mahony, who represented the Trustees of the Public Library, Museums, and National Gallery of Victoria. The Royal Society of Victoria asked Dr. Thomas, Government Geologist, who was then resident in Hobart, to represent that Society.

The Council and Office-bearers of the Society in the Centenary year were as follows:—

President: His Excellency Sir Ernest Clark, G.C.M.G., K.C.B., C.B.E.

Vice-Presidents: A. L. Meston, W. L. Crowther.

Members of Council: H. Allport, V. V. Hickman, N. P. Booth, H. D. Gordon, W. H. Clemes, L. Cerutti.

Hon. Secretary and Editor: Joseph Pearson.

Hon. Treasurer: S. Angel.

A group photograph of the Centenary Council and office-bearers is given on plate VIII.

The following is a list of the functions given on the occasion of the Centenary:—

Tuesday, 12th October, 1943.—An evening meeting in the Royal Society's Room, Tasmanian Museum, presided over by His Excellency the Governor, His Excellency, who is also President of the Society, opened the proceedings with an address (see p. 224). This was followed by a lecture delivered by Dr. George Mackaness, O.B.E., M.A., Litt.D., on 'Captain William Bligh's Discoveries in Tasmania'.

Wednesday, 13th October, 1943.—A morning reception was given by the Lord Mayor of Hobart at the Town Hall. A garden party was given by the Council at the Botanical Gardens in the afternoon. In the evening the Council and office-bearers were the guests of His Excellency the Governor and Lady Clark at a dinner at Government House. The visiting lecturers (Professor Ashby and Dr. Mackaness); the Premier; the Chief Secretary; the Lord Mayor of Hobart; Mr. J. Smithies, President of the Northern Branch; and Mr. D. J. Mahony, representing the Trustees of the Public Library, Museums, and National Gallery of Victoria, were also present.

Thursday, 14th October, 1943 (Centenary Day).—An evening meeting in the Royal Society's Room, Tasmanian Museum. A large and distinguished gathering was present. In his introductory remarks His Excellency the Governor, as President of the Society, expressed the hope that the Society would have an even greater influence in the future than it had had in the past one hundred years. His Excellency also made a plea that the facilities afforded by the Society should be used more freely by citizens. He felt that the community did not appreciate as fully as it might the work which the Society had done. The Honorary Secretary read congratulatory messages received from Societies and others (see p. 229). His Excellency presented Centenary Medals to Dr. Mackaness and Professor Ashby (see p. 227). Professor Ashby, D.Sc., D.I.C., delivered an illustrated lecture on 'A Century of Ideas on Evolution'. The proceedings terminated with a *conversazione* held in the Art Gallery.

During the Centenary week a special historical exhibition was displayed in the Museum, consisting mainly of loans from the following:—His Excellency the Governor, The Shiplovers' Society, Tasmanian Club, Mr. C. E. Radcliff, Miss Knight, Miss Andrews, Miss Cutmear, Dr. W. L. Crowther, Miss D. Bisdee, Dr. W. W. Giblin, Mr. W. T. Stops, Mr. E. Webster, Mrs. R. C. Hodgman and Sister Read, Mr. A. J. R. Miller, Southern Tasmanian Philatelic Society, Mr. N. Hurst, Mr. A. Pedder, The Diocesan Office, Mrs. A. Abbott, Mr. F. Abbott, Mrs. C. Baldwin, Mrs. A. Buring, Mrs. W. F. D. Butler, Mr. Westbrook.

Replicas of the Centenary Medal have been sent to The Royal Society, London, The Royal Society of New South Wales, The Royal Society of Victoria, The Royal Society of Queensland, The Royal Society of South Australia, The Royal Society of Western Australia, and The Royal Society of New Zealand.

The following is the text of His Excellency's address given on Tuesday, 12th October, 1943, on the occasion of the opening of the Centenary Celebrations:—

In these days, when we are urged to practise austerity, I am ambitious to display that virtue in my opening remarks, in order that you may have more time to enjoy the interesting mental pabulum certain to be provided by Dr. Mackaness, who has a profound knowledge of Captain Bligh, a man whose character and achievements greatly interest all Australians. I propose, therefore, to make only a brief reference to the hundred years' history of the Royal Society of Tasmania, especially as that history is in the Society's Papers and Proceedings for 1894, 1900-1901, and 1913, and has been brought up to date in an admirable paper by Miss Somerville, which will be published in the Society's Proceedings for this year.

The Royal Society of Tasmania can claim to be the oldest genuine scientific Society in Australia; it has existed since 1843, without a break in its meetings, and it has an uninterrupted series of publications since 1844. According to its

original rules, the leading objects of the Society were 'to develop the physical character of the Island, and illustrate its natural history and productions'. In 1907, its new rules stated that 'the objects of the Society were the prosecution of the study of science in its various branches, and more especially the development of a knowledge of the physical characters and natural history of Tasmania and the neighbouring States'. In 1914, when it was deemed advisable to broaden the definition of the Society's aims, its object was declared to be 'the advancement of knowledge'; a noble object; not lacking in ambition!

Let us consider for a moment the handicaps under which the original pioneers of the Society laboured. In 1843 there were only about fifty thousand people in this State, i.e., two to the square mile, and we must frankly admit that half of that population was, to say the least, the rejected of the land of their birth. Not very fertile ground upon which to raise a flourishing scientific Society!

But there is another side to that question; Tasmania had this advantage, that among the free settlers who came to its shores in the early part of the 19th Century, there seems to have been those who were the 'salt of the earth'; men who possessed the pertinacity and imagination of the true scientist; who had spiritual as well as scientific aspirations, as is evidenced by the places of worship they built (large enough to serve double our present worshippers). To them we are indebted for the inauguration and successful carrying on of the Society in its early years. There must have been among these free settlers great hearts, imbued with faith, hope, and ambition.

At that time men laboured under the disadvantage of a lack of that vast knowledge which the past century has accumulated and presented to us; but, on the other hand, they were not subject to so many distractions as we are; were not tempted from the hard path of scientific endeavour to tread the viciously easy paths of amusement; or seduced to acquire (and forget) knowledge seen on pictures or heard over the radio. In spite of working harder than we do, they had, therefore, more time for true intellectual endeavour.

Let me remind you that, throughout its career, the Royal Society of Tasmania has been materially assisted by the Government of the State in many ways, and continues to enjoy this support. This building in which we sit is an instance; it was two-thirds paid for by the Government, and only one-third of its cost was raised by public subscriptions. For such government assistance, the Council is truly grateful.

But I am not sure that all its connections with the Government have been a cause for gratitude; for instance, the rules of the Society provide that its President is to be the Governor of the State for the time being. The Society was founded late enough to escape the attentions of two 'bad' Governors, who were relieved of their office, but unfortunately it also missed the services of Sir George Arthur, a great administrator, and the real maker of early Tasmania, and also of Sir John Franklin, a fine sailor, a great explorer, and a scientist, who formed in 1838 the Tasmanian Society, which was the real foundation of our own Society. Sir John's interest in science is shown by the assistance he gave to his friend, Captain Ross, in the investigations for the determination of the position of the South Magnetic Pole. Incidentally, it is interesting to know, that he showed that 'hustle' which to-day we associate with our American allies, for he completed the building of the little Observatory (of which traces still remain in Government House grounds) in nine days. Ross records this as follows:—

'Under the daily personal superintendence of Sir John Franklin the building of the Observatory proceeded most rapidly, and the whole was completed, the instruments placed, and all their delicate adjustments fulfilled, a few hours before

the observations of the 27th August were to be commenced. The erection of this Observatory was accomplished in nine days—an instance of what may be done where the hearts and energies of all are united to promote the common object of their endeavours’.

He might have been writing about the war to-day! He continues: ‘I should do injustice to my feelings unless I expressed my admiration of the cheerful enthusiasm which the convicts displayed throughout the work. After they had been labouring from six o’clock on Saturday morning until ten at night, seeing that a few more hours of work would complete the roofing, they entreated permission to finish it before they left off; but as this would have broken in upon the Sabbath morning, their request was very properly refused’.

All the succeeding Governors of Tasmania have not been of the calibre of Arthur and Franklin, and perhaps they have not had quite such energetic helpers as those just described. The very first Governor-President of the Society was removed from his office of Governor ignominiously (though perhaps he did not deserve that fate); and the present occupant of the joint office is conscious of the inadequacy of his qualifications for the presidency of a Royal Society, his scientific knowledge being confined to finance, and the so called ‘dismal’ science of political economy. The Governor of a State is, *prima facie*, not the most likely person to be a scientist, as his position is administrative rather than scientific. It is his province to apply the knowledge of others, though from long experience I can affirm that he needs to possess some of the qualities of the scientist, such as impassivity, patience, perserverance, impartiality, unprejudiced judgment, and resilience after defeat. Scientists and governors alike need to know the lesson Bruce learnt from the spider.

A careful study of the history of the Society reveals very clearly the enormous debt it owes to the devotion and enthusiasm of its members, who during the last hundred years have made it a potent force in the provision of intellectual food for the people of this State; in fact, have enabled it to live up to its professed object, ‘The advancement of knowledge’. The number of such members is too many, and their achievements too great for me to attempt to describe them in detail; they have laboured to advance man’s knowledge of the sciences and arts of History, Geography, Zoology, Botany, Geology, Paleontology, and Anthropology. They established the Museum and Botanical Gardens, and have accumulated an invaluable library of some 20,000 volumes. We have faith that, though the names of these workers may fade into oblivion, their work will remain and bear fruit, not only here, but in extent beyond our shores, and in time beyond our generation.

In such an introductory address as this, it may not be altogether out of place to refer to some of the characteristics which these men necessarily possessed, in order to be able to give the help they did to this Society, and to this State, from the middle to the end of the 19th Century. They, whose labours we have inherited, had a somewhat different task to the scientist of to-day, for starting at a time when there were many less proved facts than we possess they had a much greater field for exploration, with many less reliable instruments suitable for their task. On the other hand, the scientist of to-day is, perhaps, hampered rather than helped by the immensity of the number of already discovered facts; in other words, the human capacity to assimilate knowledge may be stretched to its uttermost, in the case of the scientist of to-day, even before he arrives at the place from which to start for the unknown, which is his goal. Let us recollect that the true scientist is not a mere adapter, but a man allied in character to the inventor. His imagination must wander through the unmeasured world which surrounds the particular subject of his investigation. While he must be prepared to prove all things, in

order that he may hold fast that which is good, yet he must be forever exploring new paths in order to acquire greater knowledge, seeking constantly to draw fresh supplies from the 'Well of Truth'. I am not speaking only of knowledge of his own subject, but of the vast volume of constantly changing knowledge, almost inexhaustible in regard to the subjects allied and cognate to that which he is studying, that region of unfathomable dimensions, almost unimaginable in its complexity.

The scientists of a hundred years ago had to discover, or were in the midst of discovering, things which to us are obvious everyday truths. On their successful efforts we are able to build, for we are the heirs to a long line of noble predecessors, and upon us is laid the duty of utilizing to the full the knowledge that they acquired with such unflinching endeavour. We should be encouraged by the certainty that no tiniest feather falling from the Great White Bird of Truth is ever wasted by the true scientist who finds it. (Those who remember the wonderful allegory of truth in Olive Schreiner's 'Story of an African Farm' will understand my allusion.)

It is difficult to judge of the exact effect produced by such an Association as the Tasmanian Royal Society, if it is regarded over a brief period; but on such an occasion as this, when we are looking back for a hundred years, we must be grateful not only for its survival as a Society, but as citizens of the State must also be grateful for what has been accomplished by its members and others who have kept alive the light of culture and progress, far from the centre of many scientific activities; have even had the courage to put forward new ideas and ideals, a process which is generally anathema in an isolated self-contained community. Here I finish, with apologies for the length of my introductory address. It might perhaps have been more interesting to you, it would certainly have been easier for me, if I had spoken at greater length on the details of the history of the Society, but in these things one can only do what one is constrained to do.

The following is the text of the speeches made by His Excellency the Governor in presenting the Centenary Medals to Dr. Mackaness and Professor Ashby:—

To-night it is my pleasure to be able to say a few words in laudation of those two eminent scientists who have graced our Centenary by their presence and informed our minds by their erudition.

I deem myself fortunate in being deputed to hand to Dr. George Mackaness and Professor Eric Ashby the special Medals, which have been struck by this Royal Society to commemorate its Centenary.

These medals do not merely indicate our appreciation of the Papers which our eminent visitors have prepared for the Society, but serve also as a commemoration of our hundred years of scientific effort. The recipients are the present representatives of that long line of eminent scientists who have rendered service to the Royal Society, and to the community—men who, if by the effluxion of time they become anonymous, have, nevertheless, left to this and succeeding generations precious results of their toil.

Dr. Mackaness' Paper is part of that historical lore which he has acquired by intensive research. I know of no subject more important than his own for the average Australian to make part of his mental equipment. A young country needs to acquire a sense of history, in order that it may truly judge of its relative position to the rest of the world, and also in order to give it that perspective view of the past, which is essential if a true perspective is to be obtained of the future. In other words, if we would proceed aright along the road which lies before us,

we in Australia must have a clear view of the roads, the paths, and the tracks which lie behind us, and this view Dr. George Mackaness is able to give, and has indeed given, to the Australian public.

Dr. Mackaness is more than amply qualified for the task which he has generously undertaken by visiting us; not without some pleasure to himself, I hope; this you will realize if I remind you that he is Senior Lecturer of the Teachers' College, Sydney, a Member of the Educational Broadcast Advisory Committee, and an author of three outstanding historical publications. He is a Member of the Board of the Commonwealth Literary Fund, and formerly President of the Fellowship of Australian Writers.

Dr. Mackaness, I have great pleasure in handing to you this Commemoration Medal, with the thanks of the Royal Society of Tasmania, for the help which you have rendered to us, by your presence at our Centenary.

I base an expression of my admiration for Professor Ashby's work on the testimony of another scientist, eminent in the Professor's own subject, and also on the testimony of a leading member of the commercial community, who had had practical experience of the extreme usefulness of Dr. Ashby's scientific work for Australia.

Dr. Ashby is a botanist of unusual versatility. As a Commonwealth Fund Fellow he was engaged in botanical researches in America from 1929 to 1931. He was one of a group which carried out a series of important studies at Imperial College, London, on factors affecting plant growth, and rapidly became a recognized authority on plant ecology. Before he had been a year in this country Dr. Ashby was elected President-designate of the Botany Section of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science for the Adelaide Meeting which, unfortunately, has not yet been held on account of the war.

He has shown himself keenly alive to the importance of primary production in Australia, and of the agricultural aspects of Botany. He has had wide experience in the fruit world, and spent some time in the famous Hood Valley of America, working on food storage. This experience has proved of great value to Tasmanian fruitgrowers, as in 1937 and 1938 the evidence given by him was responsible for a decision in the law courts in London, that it was the carriage of fruit that caused the breakdown in Tasmanian apples, and that disease of brown heart was caused after the fruit left the orchard, and not during the growth of the apple.

Previous to this, all claims made against the shipping companies for faulty carriage were refused, it being maintained that brown heart in apples was an inherent vice.

Dr. Ashby was elected Chairman of the Australian National Research Council, and with a colleague was chosen to report to the Government on the use that was being made of Australia's scientific resources in war-time. As a result of this report the Scientific Liaison Bureau was established, and Dr. Ashby acted as the Bureau's first Director.

Professor Ashby, to you also, with this commemorative Medal I give the very sincere thanks of the Royal Society of Tasmania, for the help which you have rendered by visiting us and for preparing a Paper, which will be published in our Papers and Proceedings, on the intensely interesting subject of Evolution, which you are treating in a historical sense, appropriate to the fact that we are celebrating our existence during the century to which your paper refers.

The following messages were received on the occasion of the Centenary Celebrations:—

From the Premier of Tasmania

On behalf of the State Government, may I convey to the President, the Council, and members of the Royal Society of Tasmania our congratulations on the important event now being celebrated.

It is fitting that we should pay a tribute at this time to that small group of people who, with the encouragement of Sir Eardley-Wilmot, Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony, founded the Society 100 years ago. Thanks mainly to the Society's endeavours, there afterwards came about the establishment of the Botanical Gardens and the Tasmanian Museum, since maintained on slender financial resources. These annual maintenance grants, incidentally, are being increased as from the beginning of the current fiscal year.

In the Statute which incorporates the Society, it is recorded that the Society was established for the prosecution of the study of science in its various branches, and more especially for the development of a knowledge of the physical character and natural history of Tasmania and the neighbouring States'. I have no doubt that your Council will continue to carry out that trust faithfully, thus keeping step with learned bodies in other parts of the world.

In this work, you have the support of the Government. I now extend my good wishes to all those who promote the activities of the Society, and particularly to those distinguished visitors who have been able to come to Hobart to join in your Centenary Celebrations.

As I cannot be present at to-night's meeting, to which your Council kindly invited me, would you please apologize for my absence.

ROBERT COSGROVE, *Premier.*

From the Chancellor of the University of Tasmania

Since its foundation in 1890 the University has been closely associated with the Royal Society of Tasmania. Indeed the Royal Society was prominent in the original movement for the establishment of a University in this State.

The Centenary of the Royal Society is therefore an historic occasion of more than ordinary interest for the members of the University, and I am desired to express to the President, and Vice-President, and the members of the Royal Society the most cordial congratulations of the University of Tasmania and to wish the Society an undiminished continuance of its high achievements in the realms of service and culture.

From the date of the foundation of the University its professors have published results of their researches in the Proceedings of the Royal Society. . . . I think it not necessary to hope, because it is certain, that the co-operation with the Royal Society of Tasmania, which began from the foundation of the University, will continue to the end.

W. J. T. STOPS, *Chancellor.*

*From the Australian and New Zealand Association for the
Advancement of Science*

On behalf of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science I take this opportunity of offering hearty and sincere congratulations to the Royal Society of Tasmania on the completion of its first hundred years and on the scientific work it has accomplished during that period. The occasion is worthy of far greater recognition by scientists throughout Australia than is possible under existing conditions, and members of my Association will always regret that it was not possible to meet in Tasmania this year and so to extend greetings and felicitations in person. They all look forward to a successful continuance of the Society's work and to even greater achievements in the future.

With best wishes for a successful celebration.

A. B. WALKOM, *Honorary General Secretary.*

From the Royal Society of New South Wales

On behalf of the President, Council, and members of the Royal Society of New South Wales, I have the honour to congratulate the Royal Society of Tasmania on reaching its Centenary, and of wishing your Society a very happy and successful celebration of this event.

Your Society has performed during its one hundred years a very valuable service for science in Tasmania and Australia, as well as making a most valuable contribution to Australian life in general.

While expressing our felicitations to your Society for its past achievements, we also wish it great success in its work during the next one hundred years.

A. P. ELKIN, *Honorary Secretary.*

From the Royal Society of Victoria

The Royal Society of Victoria acknowledges and reciprocates the greetings from the Royal Society of Tasmania, and offers its congratulations on the attainment of the hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the Royal Society of Tasmania. It also desires to thank your Council for the proposed gift of a commemorative medal.

FRANK L. STILLWELL, *Honorary Secretary.*

From the Royal Society of South Australia

The President and members of the Council of the Royal Society of South Australia wish to convey congratulations and greetings to the Council and members of the Royal Society of Tasmania on the occasion of their Centenary.

W. TERNENT COOKE, *President.*
R. L. CROCKER, *Hon. Secretary.*

From the Royal Society of Queensland

Telegram.—Congratulations on attaining Centenary. Best wishes for future success from Royal Society of Queensland.

From the Royal Society of Western Australia

I am instructed on behalf of the Council and members of the Royal Society of Western Australia to send greetings and congratulations to the Royal Society of Tasmania on the attainment of the one hundredth anniversary of its foundation, and all good wishes for the success of the meetings to be held to celebrate this event.

A. G. NICHOLLS, *Joint Hon. Secretary.*

From the Trustees of the Public Library, Museums, and National Gallery of Victoria

I am desired by the Trustees of the Public Library, Museums, and National Gallery of Victoria, to write to the Royal Society of Tasmania on the occasion of its Centenary celebrations.

We desire to congratulate your Society on its 100th birthday, and on all that it has done during its long period of activity. As the oldest Royal Society outside Great Britain, it holds a special position in the British Empire. We know it has always been an active body, and has published much good research work.

We have asked Mr. D. Mahony, Director of our National Museum, to represent the Trustees at your celebrations, and trust that your Society will accept him as our representative.

KEITH MURDOCH, *President.*

From the Australian Chemical Institute, Tasmanian Branch

The President and members of the Tasmanian Branch of the Australian Chemical Institute wish to extend their heartiest congratulations to the President and members of the Royal Society of Tasmania on the occasion of the attainment of the hundredth year since the foundation of the Royal Society of Tasmania, and, to convey their best wishes for the success of the functions to be held in connection with the Centenary celebrations and for the continued progress of the Society.

J. L. SOMERVILLE, *President.*
GEO. C. ISRAEL, *Hon. Secretary.*

From the Mayor of Launceston

Whilst writing to you it would not be fitting on my part if I did not refer to the service which your Society has rendered during the 100 years of its existence. Its contribution to the cultural and scientific life of our community has proved of great benefit, and I sincerely trust that the Society will continue to function in a successful manner.

On behalf of this Council and citizens of Launceston I desire to convey our hearty congratulations.

DESMOND OLDHAM, *Mayor.*

From Mr. E. L. Piesse

As a member, now of rather long standing, of the Society, a former member of its Council and for some time its Honorary Secretary, I have received with pleasure the programme for the celebration of its Centenary and the invitation of the President and Council to be present.

I recall that when, thirty years ago, for the occasion of the Society's seventieth birthday, I wrote an account of its early history, I had in mind that I might be at its Centenary. But two world wars have intervened; the first took me away from Hobart in 1914, terminating my honorary secretaryship, and the consequences of the second are an obstacle to my returning even for these celebrations.

Our Society has for a century provided interest for its members and increase of knowledge for the public at large. It enters active and vigorous upon its second century. I join with my fellow members in hoping that the Society, now one of the oldest institutions of Tasmania, will long continue the useful life of which it shows full promise.

E. L. PIESSE.