

**Past Presidents
of the
Armagh Natural History & Philosophical Society**

#	Name	Dates	Notes
1	Rev T. Romney Robinson DD FRS	1850-1869	
2	Rev J.Y. Rutledge DD exFTCD	1869-1872	
3	Right Rev Wm. Reeves DD LLD, Lord Bishop of Down, Connor & Dromore	1872-1879	
4	Rev G. Robinson MA	1879-1891	
5	Rev W.F. Johnston MA FES	1891-1896	
6	Robert Gray FRCPI	1896-1924	
7	Francis J. Anderson BA	1924-1941	
8	Rev David Graham BA	1942-1966	
9	Major M.H. Armstrong MBE DL BL	1967-1968	
10	T.G.F. Paterson OBE MA MRIA	1969-1971	
11	Mrs Gwendoline Dorman	1971-1972	
12	Major H.L. McCormack	1973-1976	
13	Miss A. Noel Graham BA	1977-1992	
14	Mr A Johnston	1992-2000	No photographic negative or digital copy of portrait available in archive

The Period of the First Four Presidents

T.G.F. Paterson – 1977 ¹

Like many other literary and scientific institutions, the Armagh Natural History and Philosophical Society had a modest beginning. It was founded by four members of a local Juvenile Reading Society in the year 1839, who were desirous of extending their information and spreading the pursuit of science amongst their fellow-citizens. Kind friends to whom they had previously communicated their intention hastened to their aid and thus the Society began its career as a centre of culture in our historic city.

According to a printed report of the proceedings of the Society for the year 1851 the first President was the Rev Dr S.O. Edgar. We learn from the same authority that Archbishop Lord John George Beresford became Patron in 1841 and the Rev Thomas R. Robinson President in the same year. The statement regarding the original Presidency is not, however, borne out by the Society's records. They begin 15th February, 1842, and show Dr Robinson and Dr Edgar as speakers at the Annual Meeting in October, that being the first entry in which those two gentlemen are listed. In December of same year Dr Edgar acted as Chairman, later presiding over a meeting in the following January at which rules for the conduct of the Society were drafted. He was again Chairman at meetings in February, April, October, and present at the annual meeting held 26th October, 1843, at which Dr Robinson signed as President and Dr Edgar as Vice-President – the occasion on which they were first officially so signified.

At a special meeting held in January 1844 – Dr Edgar in the chair – we are given a list of officers and members of Committee but although Dr Robinson and Dr Edgar are [1]² shown respectively as President and Vice-President there is absolutely no mention of patronage though we are aware from other sources and from a minute of 26th October, 1842, that the Primate's support had been of great assistance in securing the co-operation of county landowners in the Society's advancement.

The Society made favourable progress from 1839 until 1846. In the last quarter of that year, it was found impossible to transact business owing to the paucity of members, and not until 1st December 1847, was there any noticeable betterment. Meetings in 1848 were regularly held from January until March, after which there is a gap in the minutes until 10th October,

¹ Although the author of the lecture is not named in the original manuscript, its authorship is revealed in the following letter, ANHPS Archives, Box 7, #22.6. D.R.M. Weatherup, wrote to H.W.F. Reid, the following on 26th January 1982, "A short account of the Society, being **the text of a lecture by T.G.F. Paterson to the members in 1977** [editorial emphasis] (photostat A) will give a general picture of the Society up to recent times..." There are several copies throughout the ANHPS archive, but the one used here is ANHPS Archives, Box.13, #15.1. Another copy is found in the Reid Archive, Box 7, #22, mentioned above. This version has been transcribed and lightly edited by David Dunlop.

² Pagination of original document signified at the foot of each original page by [#] in the text.

1850, when the question arose as to whether the Society should dissolve or continue. Fortunately, the latter course was determined.

The primal place of meeting of the Society – like the names of its four founders – remains a mystery. In November 1843 it was proposed that a memorial be presented to the Toll Committee pointing out the advantage it would be to the town in general if the Society could find a permanent home. Whether the Toll Committee proved sympathetic is not clear. At a meeting held in December 1843 the Fever Hospital, now the Macan Asylum for the Blind, was thought of as a possible location but evidently that proposition failed. Whether the Society would have flourished there is uncertain – its present home is certainly much more convenient and central.

New rules were adopted in February 1843, at which time the annual subscription was five shillings with, of course, larger sums from interested friends of the Society. Admission was of a very formal nature and candidates ran the risk of non-election, two black beans in six excluding them from mingling with the members of the Society. Funds were then lodged in the Savings Bank. Much progress was made up to [2] 1845 from which date until 1850 it had merely a nominal existence.

In 1843 the Society was in occupation of part of a house in Abbey Street owned by Mr John Gibbs. There they had two rooms, one denominated the library, the other the museum, for which they paid an annual rent of £6. The space at their disposal was somewhat limited and meetings of a general character such as public lectures were held in the Tontine Rooms, and occasionally in the Market House. In regard to the Market House no charge occurs in the Society's Accounts, but substantial fees were required by the Tontine and were no doubt a drain on the Society's resources.

But to return to the Abbey Street rooms – they may well have been the first home of the Society. They were retained until 1857, in which year the removal of the specimens from Abbey Street and the restoration of the apartments in question figure in accounts paid. That the rooms were lighted by candles we know for that form of illumination is entered. The Society's bill for cleaning was then six shillings per quarter – it was possessed of a quantity of delph purchased 26th April, 1843, and in November of same year threw a tea party for 110 persons at a cost of £4.2.6. – the first social event of that kind in the Society's annals that we have record of.

From 1846 until 1850 was a very critical period in the history of the Society but 1851 saw it again in a flourishing condition. In that year Professor Davey came across from London to lecture to the members – his expense amounting to £10 with an additional outlay for the use of a room at the Tontine. He was followed by Professor Morton and Professor Allman and similar financial responsibilities. In that year the Illustrated London News was placed upon the table and down the years from that date until the present it has been in constant demand. It was then supplied by Mr Samuel White who [3] had a printing and bookselling business in English Street (established in 1826) with branches in Lurgan and Armagh.

Towards the end of 1852 the Society's attention was drawn to the Mall School,³ an edifice at that time vacant owing to its failure as a solvent educational establishment, and there begins the story of the Society's acquisition of the premises in which we are met⁴ to-night. In 1853 the salary of a curator at £3 per an. is mentioned in accounts and a ballot-box, presumably that now surviving, was procured at a cost of 4/6.

The school in question came into being in 1834 when a group of local people interested in the poor of the city decided to open a free school. It enjoyed the patronage of the National Board of Education, the trustees for the property being the Earls of Charlemont and Gosford, Viscount Acheson, Leonard Dobbin and William McWilliams, Esquires. Some years after its foundation difficulties were experienced in raising funds for the payment of the schoolmaster's salary, rent, etc. Eventually the school was closed. In the meantime, arrears of rent had accrued and a Civil Ejectment Bill was brought by the owner of ground and a decree obtained. However, before the expiration of the six months allowed by law, for the execution of the deed for redemption, Archbishop Lord John George Beresford generously paid the amount of rent and costs due, thus providing the Society with a suitable home.

Obstacles arose, however, with regard to the transfer of the lease. The Earls of Charlemont and Gosford were the surviving trustees under the school settlements, but legal troubles cropped up causing much delay. Finally, it was approved that the Lords Charlemont and Gosford could hand over to the Society's trustees. First Lord Gosford transferred to Lord Charlemont and then an assignment of trust was made by Lord Charlemont to the Society's trustees on 16th August, 1856. [4]

The Society's first trustees for its present abode were Lieutenant Col. J.M. Caulfield, Thomas Dobbin, Esq., Joseph Kidd, Esq., William Jones Armstrong, Esq., Joshua Thomas Noble, Esq., and Edward Gardner, Esq. A rent of £16 per an. was agreed upon (with fines upon renewal) and it was covenanted that should the Society's membership fall short of twenty members, cease to hold meetings for one year or contributions prove insufficient to meet two years obligations then the property was to go upon trust to the Town Commissioners under the Public Libraries Act of Ireland of the year before.

In July 1856 the Society secured possession and, on the 29th January 1857, had a formal opening of the building at which four hundred and fifteen persons were present to hear an address delivered by the President, Dr Robinson. Here I might mention that besides the generous and sustained help of Lord John George Beresford the Armagh Toll Committee gave the Society a donation of £100 and by that year they had the sum of £787.16.6 to their credit in the Ulster Bank.

Many alterations were necessary and contracts entered into in 1856 included "271.13.1½ for necessary improvements. In the same year the contractor, Thomas Ross, was paid £120 on account towards the erection of the Curator's House, Committee Room and fitting up of

³ In the original of Paterson's typed manuscript, in pen, brackets surround "the Mall School" and above the line is written "the building in which we are now assembled"; no doubt a homely substitution for the purposes of the 1977 lecture.

⁴ Paterson has bracketed in pen "are met" and has inserted above "meet".

the Library and Museum. Heating apparatus was installed, seating arranged for the lecture room and the provision of other incidentals, all of which are duly noted and priced – one such amenity being a chimney piece of our so-called Armagh Marble for the Reading Room, an item furnished by David McCullagh at a cost of £2.10s. still in position but no longer in use. In 1857 Maxwell's were paid for painting and papering and Alexander Frizzell's account for sunblinds for the gallery was [5] settled as well as Gardner's bill for seating the theatre, the introduction of gas, putting up of fittings, provision of cocoa-nut matting, etc., and the curator's salary raised to £10. He, by the way, was responsible for the collection of subscriptions. In that year they amounted to £45.10s. and he was allowed 5 per cent. for his trouble, thus netting an extra £2.5s. All being completed to its requirements the Society was able to invest £250 in Drogheda and Dublin Railway Shares.

By 1858 the Society had accumulated a library of almost 1000 books and its members totalled one hundred and ninety-seven. A printed report for that year informs us that £250 had been spent fitting up the Lecture-room and Reading-room and making of the gallery, the latter coming into being immediately after the place had been taken over by the Society. The Curator's House was then in occupation and its upper storey in use as a Committee-room. The room directly over the Library – another addition – had been set apart for geological specimens but was then in an unfinished state. Estimates for the previous year show that Ross's contract of £62 for glass cases and presses had been sanctioned as well as an expenditure of £174 on the Curator's House.

The Report for the following year informs us of the presentation of an address to Mr Edward Gardner, one of the early members of the Society, the person who worked out the scheme for the alterations to the newly acquired building and "to whose professional skill the Society owes its useful and comfortable pile of buildings – the reading room, lecture room, museum, committee room, and curator's house, all of which were designed by him". A minute of the same⁵ year tells of 248 persons turning up for a lecture, a number resulting in the talk taking place in the Mall [6] School instead. Earlier that year the Town Commissioners declined the Society's proposition that the Russian Gun should be placed in front of the Society's House, as they considered the inside of the Mall a more fitting position, and two months later a lecture had to be cancelled owing to the visit of the celebrated General Tom Thumb.

Lectures and papers were a monthly feature in the Society from its foundation with occasional social entertainments in the evenings. In 1859 such parties were limited to two hundred invitations. Talks on subjects of a literary and scientific nature were arranged as in past years.

In 1860 a copy of the Magna Charta, now hanging on the west wall of the Reading Room, was donated by William Jones Armstrong, Esq., father of the late H.B. Armstrong, Esq. – both of whom were members of the Society. The Reading Room was then lighted by gas but complaints were being made that the burners were too high – similar notice might indeed

⁵ In original manuscript "same" is bracketed in pen with "following" inserted above.

be taken of the lights today. In this⁶ year on the 14th March [1860]⁷ the famous Dr Reeves, later President of the Society, read a paper on the “Early History and Topography of the City”, and in the next month the portrait of Mr Noble now above the fireplace was given to the Society. Another interesting speaker of that year was Dr Walker who accompanied Captain McClintock in his Artic Expedition – the subject being “The Franklin Search”.

In 1861 the north or entrance end of the Reading Room was encased by John Donnelly in a like manner to the work already done on the south end and at a cost of £20. In the same year the Society received a welcome bequest of £100 from the estate of the late Dr J. Colvan, who had been connected with the Society since 1848. It was assumed that the full sum would shortly be available, so it was proposed to expend £50 on the liquidation of the head rent, £10 on a central table for geological specimens, £10 on sanitary accommodation [7] and £20 on the Library. At the same time it was resolved to wainscot the outer hall and enclose the archway with two doors.

In 1862 the Society placed on record its grief at the death of Archbishop Lord John George Beresford and expressed appreciation of his many acts of munificence towards the Society since its organisation, both in regard to his annual subscription and the ordinary revenue of the Society. In the same year the clock that now stands on a bracket above the mantelpiece was presented for the use of the reading room by Mr Hardy. In December of that year it was agreed that glass cases should be erected around the gallery for the proper display of the Natural History Collections and that some cabinets presumably in use for that purpose should be sold. At that time the roof was a source of trouble and was indeed⁸ so right down to the years until the decision of the Society to share the building with the County Council as a repository for its County Library service circa 1930.

Plans for the new cases were submitted in February 1863 and in December of that year arrangements were made to place the floor of the theatre from the entrance door on the same level with the floor of the Reading Room.

By 1864 the Society had removed its £250 from the Drogheda-Dublin Railway Company and with a view to re-investment in the Portadown-Omagh line. However, by the 18th April 1865, the money seems to have been called in and placed on deposit receipt. In that year it was agreed to again hold or revive the annual exhibition – a pleasant social gathering that continued for a considerable time. Finance seems to have been somewhat of a worry then, just as it has been several times since, and there was a tendency on part of certain residents of the city to use the reading room as visitors – thus evading subscriptions. The place was then open daily from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. and from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m. [8]

In the next year £250 was paid to the agent of the property on condition that rent be reduced to £9.16s. per an. Curiously enough at that time the income was insufficient and the Armagh Gas Company actually threatened to cut off supplies because of an unpaid bill. Things were pretty much the same in 1867 and 1868. In 1870 it was stipulated that

⁶ In original manuscript “this” is bracketed in pen with “the following” inserted above.

⁷ In original manuscript this date is added in pen.

⁸ In original manuscript “was indeed” is bracketed in pen with “remained” inserted in inside margin.

members should have the right of introducing non-resident friends to the reading room for periods not exceeding fourteen days and in that year the pictures of Russell, Johnston, Shakespeare and Pope, were donated to the Society by Thomas Dobbin, Esq., nephew of Leonard Dobbin, M.P. for the Borough of Armagh 1833-1838.

Portraits of the late Rev Dr Rutledge and Rev George Robinson were added to those already in the Reading Room in 1871 and about that time an effort was made by a few interested members to form a Chess Club to which there are references from 1872 onwards. A "Suggestion Book" was started in 1873. One of the pleas put forward for consideration "was that a Refreshment Room should be equipped for the use of visitors and strangers". The Society declined discussion of the matter owing to the request not having been signed. The "Book" seems to have fallen into disuse in 1877, possibly because of the flippancy of the proposals.

In 1876 the window shutters in the Reading Room were ready for replacement but as the windows are now free of those conveniences it seems probable that nothing was done regarding the matter. In that year a special lending library was commenced – hours: Tuesdays 3.30 p.m. to 5 p.m.; Fridays 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

The gallery required support in 1878 and it was suggested that the best result could be achieved by five cast-iron pillars. An enlargement of the Curator's House was discussed in the same year [9]

In 1880 a member deposited a warrior's club of some sort and the Secretary was directed to return the Society's thanks for the "striking present". The Report for that year states that an old book of entry kept on the table for the registration of names of members and visitors had developed into a nuisance through the scribbling of schoolboys; was therefore no help as to attendances and should be discontinued. In 1882 a lady member requested the use of a lecture room for a talk to ladies by a member of that sex, a request that was refused on the grounds that there was no byelaw in the Society's rules by which males could be excluded. A year later it was suggested that the windows of the Reading Room should be lowered.⁹

The year 1884 endowed the Society with one of its finest gifts, a collection of books on Irish topography and history, given by J.G. Livingstone, member of an old Armagh family whose former home – since rebuilt – is now the Provincial Bank, a house in which his ancestor, then agent for Lord Charlemont, entertained John Wesley. In August of the same year the use of the building was given over for two days to the Royal Society of Antiquaries, and papers were read by members of the Society, Dean Reeves, Rev John Elliott, etc. and local monuments visited. On that occasion Lord Charlemont presided. The Society again visited Armagh on a two-day excursion in June 1951 when I¹⁰ had the honour of receiving the party and later addressing them in the Council Chamber at the Court House.

⁹ Paterson's text continues for two lines but he has hatched it out and written above in pen, but it is largely illegible in the copy transcribed.

¹⁰ T.G.F. Paterson

Three years later (1887) the Society arranged its first annual Field Club outing. The party, thirty-three strong, proceeded in Brakes to the Ballybrolly Stone Circle, and from thence to Benburb where the Powerscourt Bawn was inspected. From that point they drove to Charlemont and [10] there examined the Fort, afterwards continuing to Loughgall where they partook of a sumptuous tea in the Rock Tavern and before returning to Armagh explored the Manor House grounds. In 1888 steps were taken to prevent non-members, especially ladies, from frequenting the Reading Room. This was effected by taking the offenders' names and requesting them to join the Society.

In 1892 the foundation stone of the Art Rooms was laid by Lady Margaret Stronge, a ceremony attended by the two Archbishops of Armagh, and a large gathering of the elite of the country and city. The architect was the then County Surveyor, the late R.H. Dorman, C.E., brother of Dr Dorman of Keady.

Having now completed a very cursory account of events in the period 1839-1892 I would like to retrace my steps slightly and say a few words about early members of special importance. The Roll contains in 1842 the name of John Corry, Armagh's greatest antiquary, and Col. William Blacker, the Orange poet. Subscribers in that year included the Lord Primate, the Earls of Gosford, Charlemont, and Caledon, Lords Lurgan and Acheson, Lady Caledon, Lady Cremorne, Lady Acheson, Lady Hassard, Col. Verner, Col. Rawdon, Sir James Stronge, Bart., Col. Blacker, the Hon'ble. Henry Caulfield, Capt. Algeo, I.Y. Burges, A. St. George, and Edmund Bacon, an imposing array later supplemented by the Duke of Manchester. The Roll down the years is equally interesting and on some future date we should perhaps discuss the more significant names thereon. We might also study lectures and lecturers. In astronomy they comprised Dr Romney Robinson, M. McNeale Edmonson, W.H. Rambaut, A.A. Rambaut, Assistant-Astronomer at Dunsink and later Irish Astronomer-Royal, and Dr Dreyer; historians of the calibre were the celebrated Dean Reeves and J.F. Elrington-Ball; medical men of eminence like Dr Henry MacCormac and Doctor Henry Lodge Kidd; speakers on varied [11] other subjects Professors from Irish and English universities, and Barrington and Gilchrist lecturers.

I should now like to pay homage to the Presidents of the period 1839-1891. Earlier I mentioned that a printed report of 1851 gives the first President as Dr S.O. Edgar, author of the "Variations of Popery", and Minister of the Second Presbyterian Congregation of Armagh from 1811 until his death in 1850. The gentleman in question was undoubtedly many times Chairman in the early days of the Society's existence and its first Vice-President – whether there were any Presidents before 1843 seems doubtful – at any rate Dr Robinson appears as President in that year and Dr Edgar as Vice-President.

The first President that we have actual proof of was the famous astronomer, Dr Thomas Romney Robinson, whose portrait hangs upon your walls wrongly labelled. The inscription as you can see credits him with the Presidency from 1859 until 1869, but the Minutes of the Society show that he held that office from at least 1843 – [indeed a printed report for 1851 shows him in office in 1841].¹¹ Dr Robinson was a warm friend of the Society from its

¹¹ In the original, in pen, the clause in brackets is added.

inception and one of the most remarkable men of his day. He became a Fellow of Trinity in his twenty-second year and in 1823 Director of Armagh Observatory, a post that he filled with much distinction. He died in 1882 having held the directorship of the Observatory for fifty-eight years, and we may be sure that when his sister-in-law, the famous Maria Edgeworth, was from time to time his guest that she like other distinguished visitors to the city had the privilege of using the Society's Reading Room.

Your second President, the Rev John Young Rutledge, (1869-1872) was Rector of Armagh from 1865 until his death in 1872. Dr Rutledge was also Chancellor of Armagh Cathedral and is commemorated by chancel windows in St Mark's.

The third President, the Rev William Reeves, was the most outstanding personality ever connected with the Society. [12] He held office from 1872 until 1879, and was indeed the most notable figure that ever graced the Presidential chair. Through his efforts the venerable Book of Armagh, a manuscript compiled in our city in the year 807, was preserved for future generations and to him we owe many valuable historical contributions on ecclesiastical matters. Dr Reeves was the second member of this Society to hold the very exalted position of President of the Royal Irish Academy – our first President also held that high office and it gave me much pleasure when that august body paid its first visit to Armagh in 1949, to receive my fellow-members in this building, to point out to them those two facts and also remind them that the son of their first President, the Volunteer Earl of Charlemont, was an original trustee of this property and the person answerable for its final transfer to this Society. But to return to Dr Reeves. He became Vicar-Choral of Armagh in 1862 and in 1865 Rector of Tynan. Later he held the office of Precentor of the Cathedral with the rectory of Tynan. He became Dean in 1875 and held that dignity with the Keepership of the Public Library to which he was appointed in 1861. In 1886 he was chosen as Bishop of Down, Connor and Dromore, and Armagh thus lost the greatest figure associated with its history in recent times. He died in 1892 leaving behind him much manuscript material in script that is a joy to read and behold. Specimens of his truly beautiful calligraphy may be seen in the Public Library – at its best perhaps in his copies of the Archiepiscopal Registers. A memoir of his life was written by Lady Ferguson but a new and more informative biography is desirable.

The fourth President, the Rev George Robinson, was of local extraction, his ancestors having been resident at Woodford for at least two centuries. They also had a house in Armagh – its site is now occupied by the Archbishop [13] Alexander Memorial Hall. He married Charlotte, daughter of the Hon'ble. Andrew Stuart, son of the Earl of Castlestuart, and was rector of Tartaraghan from 1849 until 1882, in which year he resigned, taking up residence at Beech Hill where he died many years later.

Though the Society's first love was the study of Natural History in its various aspects, it soon found itself involved in researches of a more general nature. In 1854 archaeology was introduced as a subject of discussion; and in that year the Rev William Reeves, D.D., (then a young parson with seven years' service in the church) was invited by the Society to come and talk to members and their friends on the Book of Armagh. The lecture took place in January 1855. On that evening the actual manuscript was exhibited to the Society by its

then owner – later third President of this Society, and one of the most gifted of his generation. It is unnecessary for me to say other than if Dr Reeves had not out of his own very limited means purchased that most precious relic of the See of Armagh it might well have left the country. Later your first patron, Archbishop Lord John George Beresford refunded Dr Reeves the £300 he had expended on the purchase and gave an additional £500 towards publication. Unfortunately, the Archbishop – who amongst other dignities had attained the Chancellorship of Trinity – was persuaded to make a gift of the manuscript to the Library of that University. If I emphasise those two names, it is because I wish you to appreciate the fact that the famous Book of Armagh after being absent from our city for centuries made its first public re-appearance under the auspices of this Society and was saved for future generations by two people intimately connected with the Society – your first patron and your very brilliant third President. [14]

When Archbishop Lord John George Beresford died in 1862, he was succeeded in the Primacy by his kinsman, Marcus Gervais Beresford, then Bishop of Kilmore, who immediately upon his arrival in the city consented to become Patron of the Society and held the office until his death in 1885. Archbishop Marcus Gervais Beresford was followed in turn by Archbishop Robert Knox, a former Bishop of Down, who died in 1893 – at which date my survey ends.

Unfortunately, time does not permit me to deal with the roll of members for the period covered – the Church of Ireland is strongly represented – the Presbyterian Church in proportion to its numerical strength equally so. The first Vice-President of the Society, Rev Dr Samuel Oliver Edgar was minister of the Second Presbyterian Congregation (1811-1850). His successor the Rev Wm. Henderson, minister from 1850 to 1868, was also a member. First Armagh was also well to the fore. Its list contains the Rev P.S. Henry 1826-1846, in which year he became President of the newly formed Queen's College in Belfast, the Rev Alexander Fleming (1846-1851), the renowned Dr John Hall, minister from 1852 until 1858, the Rev Jackson Smyth 1859-1890, during whose ministry the present beautiful church was built at a cost of £11,500. Third Armagh produced the Rev John McAlister 1838-1871 during whose pastorate the present handsome church was completed, the Rev John Elliott (1875-1898), a keen historical student, and our present President, the Rev David Graham, during whose ministry in 1916 the Second and Third Congregations united, and of whom all I shall say is may his shadow never grow less!

Peers of the realm, Members of Parliament for the Borough and county of Armagh, officers of His Majesty's Army, county gentry, astronomers, doctors, lawyers, linen merchants, [15] and business men of the city are all to be found on the Society's Rolls – with them Edward Rodgers, the author of "The Ancient City", "Topographical Sketches", "Memoirs of Armagh Cathedral" and other works of local interest; Robert Pillow, the antiquarian, and finder of the Armagh Ogham Stone; William Paton, the last Sovereign of our city; Major G.W. Beresford, the last representative of the Borough of Armagh in the Imperial Parliament; John Thompson, founder and editor of the "Armagh Guardian", and Matthew Small, founder of the "Ulster Gazette", papers first published in 1844, five years after the foundation of this Society.

In conclusion I should perhaps mention that according to the Honble. Henry Caulfield, brother of Francis William, 2nd Earl of Charlemont, and father of James Molyneux Caulfield, 3rd and last Earl of Charlemont – this Society evolved from the Armagh Mechanics Institute, a body that functioned in Armagh from at least 1825 and was composed of operative and non-operative members. Records are available down to 1831 but unfortunately I am unable to state definitively when it fell into decay. Its earliest and most influential supporters were the Honble. Henry Caulfield (M.P. for Co. Armagh 1802-1830) and his very talented wife to whom the minute-book was given when the Institute ceased to exist – a document still surviving and endorsed in its late owner’s handwriting to the effect that the Armagh Natural History and Philosophical Society of Armagh was of direct growth from the seed sown by the Armagh Mechanics Institute.

The Mechanics Institute opened a school at 66 Upper English Street in February 1826. Its first, and perhaps only master, was Mr H. Breen, a man of great ability and a very fine mathematician who at some date before 1839 proceeded to Greenwich Observatory where he was joined in 1840 by his younger son, James. His eldest son, John, was also for nearly twenty years an assistant at the same observatory and his [16] youngest son William filled a like post at Cambridge Observatory from 1846 until 1858. Hugh Breen, the elder, died in 1858, aged 57 years. At that time the father and three sons were actively engaged in astronomy – a family achievement probably unequalled before or since.

If its¹² descent from the Institute of 1826 is certain – as indeed seems correct – then the Armagh Natural History and Philosophical Society has been one hundred and thirty-one years in existence and is therefore one of the oldest corporate bodies in our city.

Typed from photocopied manuscript, DSD, 11/01/2022

¹² In original, “its” is bracketed in pen, with “the Society’s” written above.