

The Royal Hammerers and The Grizzly Bears - the dining clubs of the early Geological Survey

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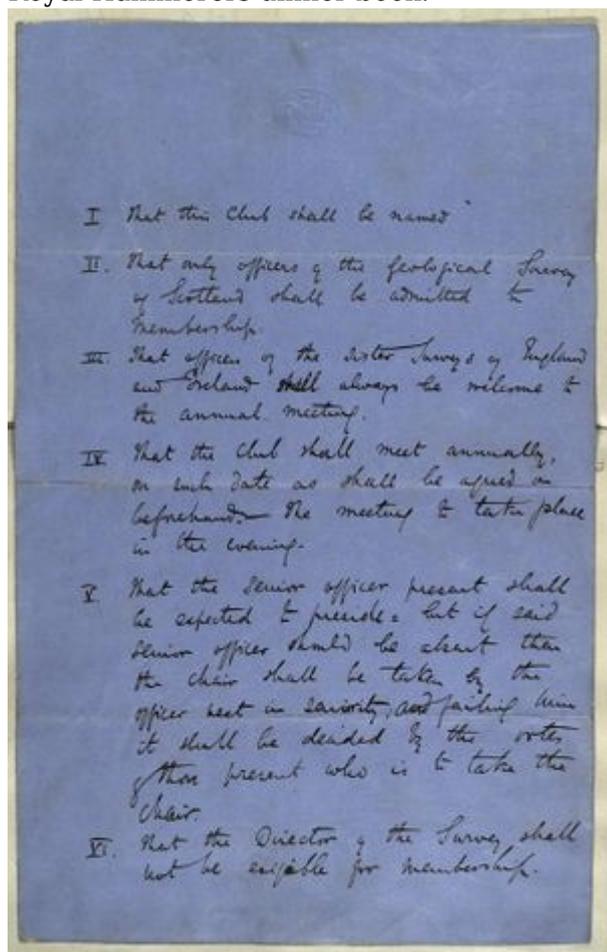


The Grizzly Bears - cartoon of the Geological Survey of Great Britain and Ireland dining club in Edinburgh. From The Grizzly Bears dinner book.



Coat of arms of The Royal Hammerers the

Geological Survey of Great Britain and Ireland dining club in London. From The Royal Hammerers dinner book.



The constitution of 'The Grizzly Bears' the Geological Survey of Great Britain and Ireland Edinburgh dining club.

Introduction

In Victorian Britain, scientific dining clubs were common. In London and Edinburgh informal clubs were formed by the Survey geologists, the clubs were called, in London, 'The Royal Hammerers' and in Edinburgh, 'The Grizzly Bears'. The records of the dinners were maintained in 'The dinner books'. They contain the unbroken records of the dining clubs. The date of formation of the London club is unknown while the Edinburgh dining club began in 1869, two years after the office opened and lasted through to 1970. The dinner books include details of the location, menu, people present and manuscript records of the entertainment, the songs and recitations by the geologists themselves. Sprinkled through the 'scrapbook' type dinner books is also a wealth of other informal material, watercolour, ink and pencil sketches, cartoons and copies of Geologists' dinner menu cards. The latter were usually humorous sketches with the characters represented by photographic cut-outs which were particularly popular in the post-war years. The following extract from Harry Wilson's book *Down to earth: one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Geological Survey*. (Edinburgh : Scottish Academic Press, 1985) highlights the history and nature of the two clubs and their members:

Off Duty

In both the London and Edinburgh offices the geologists established dining clubs, known as the Royal Hammerers and the Grizzily Bears respectively. It is probable that in their earlier years these met more often but by the end of the century the tradition of annual 'Geologists Dinners' had been established.

At these meetings the normal restraints of rank were released and senior men were the subject of ribald comment from their juniors. Many of the early songs and recitations have been preserved, particularly in the records of the Edinburgh meetings, and they give an interesting commentary on some of the people involved.

The London outfit was formed soon after the Survey started to recruit staff to augment De la Beche's one man band. The date of the first meeting is uncertain, but there is record of a poem by Baily, delivered at the dinner in 1849, which described the 'coat of arms' which had, by then, been drawn. This consisted of a trilobite shield flanked by two anthropomorphic reptile supporters, one male (Saurian) and one female (Pleisosaur). The shield was embellished with a clinometer, hammers, a compass and a magnifying glass. A ribbon bears the legend 'Hammer; Heart and Hand'. This crest was used at the dinners of the 'Royal Hammerers' at least up to 1914, though the name of the Society seems to have been lost much earlier, and the motto had been changed to *Scientiae et Utilitati*, while a crest of an arm wielding a hammer had been added. The first meeting of the Edinburgh Club was in Dejay Hotel 16 February 1869, two years after the Edinburgh Office was opened, when nine members met to dine and listen to eleven songs, including three by Archie Geikie, the first Director in Scotland. It is doubtful if he was asked to listen to one given to a dinner in the nineties which clearly expresses the distaste felt for him when he had become Director General. The author of the invective is said to have been E H Cunningham Craig.

In the Flett era people from outstations who came to the annual Geologist's Dinner had to pay their own fare. On one occasion Flett found himself in the gent's lavatory with R C B Jones from Manchester and asked 'Have you finished the six-inch maps of the Wigan sheet?'

'Is this official business Sir?'

'All right, you can claim a night's expenses.'

In the post-war era, from 1950 to 1970, the tradition of songs and recitations continued but, while the Edinburgh dinners were irreverent but staid, the London events were much more energetic affairs. They were peripatetic, because restaurateurs were seldom prepared to allow a second visit! There is, for example, the story of R C B Jones swinging on a chandelier and bringing down the ceiling. Sitting among the debris he had the presence of mind to shout for the manager from whom he demanded damages for his ruined suit: 'I was standing here when this damn thing and half the ceiling fell on me'. Bromehead, a District Geologist, used to do a sword-dance among the cutlery on the tables, and Trotter, an Assistant Director, regularly stood on a chair to conduct the assembly in rendering 'Blaydon Races'.

The tradition of songs and recitations at Geologists Dinners continued until 1970 and senior men accepted the annual liability to be pilloried by their juniors on the principle that they were 'primus inter pares'; but the records show nothing approaching the undisguised venom of 'Our D G'.

The implementation of the Fulton reforms in 1971, with the end of a clear-cut division between Geologists and others, marked the end of this tradition. Rightly or wrongly it was felt that ridicule of the Directorate could not continue when it was no longer possible to restrict these dinners to an elite.

After a few uncertain functions under the new regime the tendency, in keeping with the general change in social habits, has been for purely male functions to disappear and be replaced by events at which all staff, male and female, were encouraged to bring their

wives and lovers. These were particularly successful in the first few years of the Keyworth office where the facilities of the old Training College were still available, but like any other 'office party', they are historically unremarkable.

There are copies in the archives of a number of the songs presented to the 'Royal Hammerers' during the second half of the nineteenth century but they are pretty dull, comprising mainly parodies of popular songs and all expressive of very noble sentiments. Much more complete and interesting are the Edinburgh 'Dinner Books' in which there is a record of much that followed the first dinner in De Jays Hotel in 1869. One significant item in the 'Club Rules', unfortunately undated, is that the 'Director of the Survey shall not be eligible for membership'.

Perhaps the most fruitful period for this versifying came in Scotland in the inter-war years (1920-40), during most of which Murray Macgregor was in charge of the Edinburgh office. Murray ('the wee Macgregor') and Archie MacGregor were both determined poets and some of their products are given in the appendix at the end of the book.

Another feature of the Edinburgh dinners, and later of those held at Leeds, was the annual production by the Drawing Office of comical menus usually based, in the post-war years, on humorous sketches with the characters represented by photographic cut-outs. One of these is reproduced as a plate. , In London, on the other hand, the annual dinners were recorded by panoramic photographs taken for several decades by the same commercial photographer, Mr Horne of Pentonville Road.

There are four dinner books:

The Royal Hammerers

The Grizzly Bears - volume 1

The Grizzly Bears - volume 2

The Grizzly Bears - volume 3

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