

# Geological Society Club 1974 to 2024

## and the fate of precious decanters

### Background

The records of the Club (commonly referred to as the Dining Club) over the last five decades of the Club are a bit erratic which has made the job of writing this history somewhat difficult. For example, members' attendances were historically recorded in the Club meeting books (GSL/GD/1), but these only run up to 1964. Attendance Registers (GSL/GD/6) exist from 1884 but do not continue beyond 1950. Financial records make some reference to statistics but these only go up to 1975, and with one exception, files of the Club Committee ceased in 1999. Consequently, one of the key resources for this research has been the Club's Minute Book which began in June 1982.

For the Society's own bicentenary in 2007, Gordon Davies's book (*Whatever is under the Earth, The Geological Society of London 1907-2007*) provides a wonderful background to the Club:

*"The Society had been born in a tavern, and Members clearly enjoyed their gatherings within the convivial atmosphere of a hostelry. Perhaps the clink of glass upon glass has something of the clink of hammer upon rock. Certainly, tavern dinners continued to be a feature of the Society's programme even after the Society had in 1910 transferred its formal scientific sessions into the Meeting Room at 3 Holborn Row. Out of these tavern dinners there developed a formally constituted dining club – the Geological Society Club – founded on 5 November 1824 at the Thatched-House Tavern in St James's Street.*

*Among the Club's 30 founders, there were three founder Members of the Society: Aikin, Greenough, and Pepys. The membership of the Club was limited to 40 members of the Society (from 1836 to 1904 the membership of the Club was limited to only 36), and those 40 were invited to dine together on the days appointed for meetings of the Society. There was thus was created a recognised in-group within the Society, and, in the nature of things, those who were not part of the Club soon came to believe that all the really important decisions bearing upon the Society were being taken around the Club's dining table.*

*In its founding of the dining-club, the Geological Society was emulating the Royal Society, where a dining-club had existed since 1743, and for many years down to 1847, both dining clubs held their respective functions at the renowned Crown and Anchor Tavern on the Thames side of The Strand. By the 1920s the Geological Society was securely established. It was filled with confidence. It had a distinguished membership. It possessed a clear vision of its future."*

The Dining Club was founded as a parallel body a short while later, in 1824, to support lively discussions on this new science of geology, in the convivial environment of a London tavern. A list of founder members is reproduced below and includes four Society founders from 1907 Arthur Aikin, George Greenough, William Pepys, and John Taylor, as well as other distinguished Society members William Buckland and Charles Lyell:

LIST OF THE ORIGINAL MEMBERS  
OF THE  
GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY CLUB,  
FIRST MEETING, 5th NOVEMBER, 1824.

*The Dates represent the Year of Election to the Geological Society.—Founded 1807.—Charter 1826.*

1807. ARTHUR AIKIN.	1815. HENRY T. COLEBROOKE.
” GEORGE B. GREENOUGH, F.R.S.	1816. WILLIAM H. FITTON, M.D., F.R.S.
” WILLIAM H. PEPPYS.	1817. FRANCIS BAILY.
” JOHN TAYLOR, F.R.S.	” HENRY TUCKER.
1808. AYLMER BOURKE LAMBERT, F.R.S.	1818. JAMES VINE.
” HENRY WARBURTON.	1819. CHARLES LYELL, M.A., F.R.S.
1809. ROBERT FERGUSON, F.R.S.	1820. REV. ANDREW IRVINE.
1811. SIR ALEXR. CRICHTON, M.D., F.R.S.	” JESSE WATTS RUSSELL, M.P., LL.D., F.R.S.
” EDWARD W. RUNDELL.	” SIR GEORGE T. STAUNTON, D.C.L., F.R.S.
” CHARLES STOKES, <i>Treasurer.</i>	1821. THOMAS HORSFIELD, M.D., F.R.S.
” JOSEPH F. VANDERCOM.	1822. HENRY BURTON, M.D.
1812. DANIEL MOORE.	” ALEXANDER CALDCLEUGH.
1813. REV. WILLIAM BUCKLAND, D.D., F.R.S.	1823. P. D. COOKE.
1814. MAJOR THOMAS COLBY, R.E., LL.D., F.R.S.	” JOHN VETCH, M.D., F.R.S.E.
” FRANCIS CHANTREY, R.A., F.R.S.	1824. THOS. JEMMETT.
” JOHN GUILLEMARD, F.R.S.	

The Club celebrated its first 50 years with a dinner at the Café Royal in London, and its Centenary in 1924 was held at the Criterion Restaurant. Occasionally, special dinners were arranged. For example, in the 1934/35 session, a joint meeting of the Geological and Astronomical Societies was held and on 4 July 1935, there were more than 200 diners to commemorate the Centenary of the Geological Survey of Great Britain (at the Rembrandt Hotel).

Other notable events included a joint meeting with the Institution of Mining and Metallurgy in November 1943, to discuss the contribution of Geological Surveys to Colonial Development, and in 1948 a dinner was arranged to entertain Foreign Members of the Society who were attending the International Geological Congress (held in the Hall of the Worshipful Company of Tallow Chandlers).

Despite these internationally focussed events, by the mid-1950s Davies notes:

“... the desirability of increasing the membership was recognised...”

and the enforcement of the Rule regarding non-attendance was advocated as a means to achieve this, albeit with the clear implication that the Club's internal procedures could be improved!

From June 1960, dinners were held on 8 or 9 occasions per year at the Goat Tavern in Stafford Street. However, the 2,000<sup>th</sup> dinner was held in February 1958 (at the Martinez Spanish Restaurant, Swallow Street, presumably a much larger venue) upon which Davies recorded that the Club also had a significant blind spot (which may have contributed to its ultimate demise):

"In social terms, minds were beginning to change, for the members had to be reminded in the calling papers that ... by the custom of the Club, **ladies are not invited as guests.**"

Although in 1966 the Rules were changed to admit ladies who had read papers to the Society.

The 2,000<sup>th</sup> occasion was also marked by the purchase of port decanters, using the proceeds of a 'Decanter and dinner deficit appeal'. However:

**"A porter [in the Atheneum] dropped the case containing them down a flight of stairs so that two decanters and all three stoppers were broken and the third decanter had a chipped lip."**

Sadly, the archives do not record what the consequences were for the poor fellow's actions that day.

However, moving on to more important issues 140 years from its founding, trouble was brewing for both the Club and the Society as a whole, as recorded by Davies:

*"Among the Fellows of the 1960s the Society possessed some outstanding figures of international geology – Arthur Holmes and H H Read to name just two – but the Society itself showed little sign of being able to lift itself from that narrow and parochial rut into which it had fallen in the aftermath of World War I. The root cause of so many of the Society's problems is all too apparent. The Society was desperately short of money. Many of the older men who sat around the Council table during the 1960s would probably have been loathe to concede that the world of Archibald Geikie, W W Watts, and the Centenary was gone forever. There was a strong resistance to innovation. Things were just to remain more or less as they always had been. By 1970 a few of the younger Council members were beginning to move in opposition to what had been the prevailing flow of opinion. Change was in the offing."*

*Those younger Council members gathered regularly at the Kardomah café which used to stand just across Piccadilly from Burlington House. There they met before Council meetings to discuss strategy and tactics; and after Council meetings for a post-mortem. These Fellows came to think of themselves as constituting an informal 'Kardomah Group' serving as a very necessary visionary counterbalance to the supposed establishment deadweight of the Club [!]. The members of the Kardomah Group, together with other Fellows such as H W Ball (Secretary 1968-72), **Bernard Elgey Leake** (Treasurer 1981-85 and 1989-96, President 1986-88), **Wallace Spencer Pitcher** (Secretary 1970-73; Foreign Secretary 1973-75); President 1976-78), and Alec James Smith (Treasurer 1971-77), were to prove instrumental in the initiation of a remarkable reinvigoration of the Society. Through their efforts a near miracle has been wrought during the years since 1963.*

*... an episode which loomed large upon the Society's scene during the 1970s. It concerned the relationship of the Geological Society to the Geological Society Club. The members of the Kardomah Group, like so many of the younger Fellows, all viewed the Club with deep suspicion. Its members were senior in the Society. They were the geological establishment. The Club was exclusive. It was a cabal. Its decisions, stained with port and reeking of Havanas, were thought to be handed down to the Council with the directive that they be made Society policy. Presidential successions – officer's nominations – were all supposedly arranged between the potage and the entrée or while clasping a double-charged brandy glass. And the members of the Club were clearly culpable chauvinists. The Society had admitted women to Fellowship on 26 March 1919, but more than 50 years elapsed before the Club finally admitted women Fellows to its own membership on 31 January 1973.*

*One especial bone of contention between the Society and the Club was the entertainment of speakers following Society meetings. The Club maintained that it was its bounden duty and traditional right to wine and dine speakers who had just addressed the Society. Some Club members even gave a deft twist to history by claiming that the Club was really senior to the Society! So, following a meeting in the*

*Apartments, a speaker would be whisked off by the officers of the Club, leaving the gathered **Fellows who were not members of the Club as a mere residue, like the guests at a wedding reception following the departure of the bridal pair and the bishop.***

Consequently, as put wonderfully by Davies,

*“Resolution of the relationship between the Society and the Club really was little more than a storm in a Kardomah coffee-cup.”*

Nonetheless, during March 1973 a group of Fellows formally asked the Council to examine the relationship of the Society to the Club. After much discussion, it was **eventually decided that most of the Club’s dinners should be ‘open’ events which all the Fellows would be eligible to attend**, be they members of the Club or not. Consequently, the Club itself formed a working group in order to:

*‘Take cognisance of the view that **the relationship between the Club and the Society may need review**, shall sound opinion on the subjects and advise the Club. The members were Prof. W S Pitcher, Dr P E Kent, Mr N L Falcon, Dr A H B Stride, Prof. D Williams.’*

On the same subject, the Club minutes stated that:

*“During the year, **discussions have been held with the Officers of the Geological Society on the relationship between the Club and the Society**, the issue having been raised at the Society’s AGM in 1972 and subsequently in Council. It was felt by some that the existence and functions of the Club were insufficiently known to Fellows and, at your committee’s request, Prof. D Williams compiled a brief history of the Club for publication in the Society’s September newsletter.”*

The real decision-making body in the Club were ‘Close’ dining meetings (i.e. members-only dining, no guests) usually held in February and November, or June and November. In rare cases there was an Extraordinary Close meeting, for example, at its regular haunt of the Goat Tavern in Stafford St, on Wed 31<sup>st</sup> January 1973 when the President (T S Westoll) invited:

*“Consideration and discussion of the proposed changes in the Rules, the wording for which had been circulated. In essence, the effect of the **changes being proposed by the sub-committee was to admit ladies to the Membership of the Club and to make it constitutional for members of Council to be invited to become Ordinary members of the Club if they so desire**. The President said also that although the proposed changes in the Rules had been framed individually so that members might express their opinion on each, some were so closely interrelated that a decision on one would pre-empt a decision on others.”*

At another Extraordinary Close meeting, in **January 1974, amendments to the Rules** proposed by the sub-committee were considered and a wider discussion took place as follows:

*“Younger Fellows look upon the Club as an anachronism:*

- 1) *its electoral system should be more broadly based so that the Club may be seen to be part of the Society: both should grow in numbers and appeal.*
- 2) *Although members may wish to keep the Club small and intimate, many Fellows consider that it is an ‘in-group’ which ‘fixes’ the affairs of the Society.*
- 3) *Although members know very well that the Club has very little to do with the running of the Society, the Club does have a false image, and its objectives should perhaps be defined.*
- 4) *To worry about the admission of **ladies** is ridiculous: **they should be admitted as Ordinary members**. The questions of increased numbers and the admission of members of Council, as of right, are not important. The members **must maintain the Club** as they want it, more or less, though certainly not*

*exclusively, as a social body and that entails electing and co-opting member as they have done over the years. Otherwise, the Club has to be a representative body wrought together for quite different purposes, the process for appointment being automatic, according to the proposals. The purpose of a Club is its 'in-ness'; such exclusiveness will seem quite scandalous to those who are not members, but that is a club. The Club should certainly retain the right to elect its own members."*

After a lengthy debate, voting took place on the details of Rule changes as follows:

Rule 1. Omit ...'gentlemen who are ...

Rule 1. Add 'The object of the Club is social, to bring together geologists and others with interests and achievements in the earth science.'

Rule 2. Add 'Council members'

Rule 3. Change 'his' proposer to 'the proposer'.

Rule 6. Delete 'eligible'. Also delete 'may be nominated by the committee as Temporary members, and may continue as such as long as they continue to serve on the **Council**' and replace by: '**shall be invited to join the Club**'.

Rule 10. The Club shall meet to dine together ... **add: 'to introduce visitors concerned with the Earth Sciences'**.

It was also agreed that:

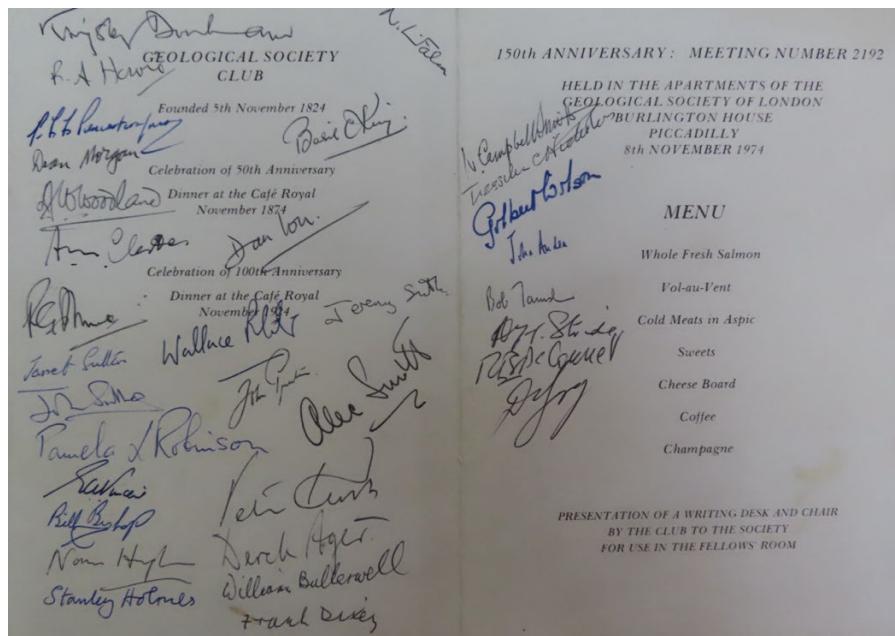
- a) **ladies should be eligible for membership** and that
- b) the object of the Club should be more clearly defined.

The outcome of this long-overdue modernisation, was that **Janet Watson of Imperial College was elected as the first lady member**:

*"To mark the election of a lady to Ordinary membership, the first time in the history of the Club, it was agreed that it would be appropriate for the formal notice of invitation to be sent from the Chair, to Dr Watson"*

It is probably true to say that 1973 was a momentous year, but in truth the changes should have taken place fifty years earlier!

**The 150<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1974** was a salmon buffet with champagne at Burlington House, from which a signed menu from 33 diners survives, including that of **Dr Pamela Robinson, who was the first lady member to attend a routine dinner**. The background to this was a change to the Rules where 'gentlemen' became 'persons' so lady members could join as full members, as distinct from attending as guests only. How very PC the Club had become!



In a review of this sesquicentennial event a few years later, David Gray noted that the Club had met on at least 2,191 occasions, attended by over **39,200 members and guests**. One can only guess at the amount of liquor quaffed – perhaps 20,000 bottles and, if all attended imbibed one 50ml glass of the much-revered port, then 2,000 litres would have been required! No doubt with a few brandies too (see below).

In addition, a new category of **Country membership was created** to offer a discount for those who lived more than two and half hours travel from London.

By the mid 1970s, members felt that facilities at the Goat were poor and a number of other venues were tested, for example the Criterion restaurant and the Marquess of Granby, before **the first meeting at the Athenaeum took place on 24 November 1976.**

## Annual chronology

### 1974

Other procedural changes were in the air; minutes from the 2186<sup>th</sup> (Close) meeting of the Club, held at the Goat Tavern on 20<sup>th</sup> February, record the possibility of:

*"Club meetings being delayed so that the Society could offer as an experiment, informal hospitality to speakers and Fellows by providing cheese and wine at Burlington House for a short period after meetings. It was felt that whilst a mutually flexible approach might be adopted, members would nonetheless not wish to alter present arrangements until the Society was ready to proceed with a trial."*

Clearly by the mid 1970s ideas for change were being introduced and both these topics would not be forgotten. In fact, at the following meeting in November 1974 with the President, P E Kent, in the Chair, there was further discussion about:

*"... delaying the starting of Club proceedings to enable the Society to offer hospitality to speakers and Fellows at Burlington House immediately after Ordinary Meetings, it was confirmed that Fellows would wish to await the promulgation of the Society's plans before considering the matter again."*

There were further Rule changes:

Rule 1: The **object of the Club is social, to bring together geologists and others with interests and achievements in the Earth Sciences**

Rule 2 (i): The Club shall consist of **Ordinary members limited in number to 65**, except as provided in Rules 4 & 8

Rule (ii): The name of each candidate and those of the proposer and seconder shall be sent to the Secretary and entered in the minute book

Rule 10: The Club shall meet to dine together .... to **introduce visitors concerned with the Earth Sciences**

At the same February Close meeting, another quite fundamental change was proposed, that of introducing a new class of member.

*"It is proposed that Ordinary members of the Club who live more than 2 and half hours travelling time by train from London and who may therefore not be able to attend meetings frequently, might become **Country members**. The subscription shall be two thirds that paid by Ordinary members".*

In August a letter was circulated to members to report that the February meeting had made reference to the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the Club when it was agreed that:

*"... a tangible and long-lasting gift should be presented to the Society to mark the occasion. Not only would this help to further the close association between the two bodies but also, it was felt, that it would be more in keeping with the sentiments of the time than would a dinner at the Café Royal which marked the 50<sup>th</sup> and 100<sup>th</sup> anniversaries".*

The anniversary event took place on 8 November 1974 when:

*"On behalf of the Society, the President, P E Kent, received from K C Dunham, the most senior Ordinary member of the Club, an **inscribed teak writing desk with chair**, which were a commemorative gift from members for the use of Fellows."*

While both items were supplied by Harrods, the chair was PVC, not leather, and is long gone – probably during the 2007 refurbishment. Today the desk sits beside the window in the Library.



Members dined on fresh salmon, cold meats in aspic, sweets, cheese board and champagne, followed by the presentation of the desk and a chair for use in the Fellow's Room. The total cost of the anniversary buffet was £241.85, which represented a deficit of £30.

By year end, the **annual subscription was £3 and the charge for dining was £1.90. The Club had 104 members** and had met on nine occasions, the total number dining being 205, an **average of 23**. Ordinary members of 15 years standing could henceforth be proposed as Honorary (i.e. non-paying) members.

The remaining Rules which had been proposed by the sub-committee in May 1972, were finally completed and reprinted.

Club membership that year stood at 19 Honorary and 63 Ordinary members including such luminaries as C J Stubblefield, K C Dunham, J F Kirkaldy, D C Ion, W S Pitcher, J Sutton, W B Harland, R M Shackleton, D V Ager, A W Skempton, J W Pallister, M R House, R A Howie, H B Whittington, P Allen, and Janet Watson to name but a few. F W Shotton, J F Kirkaldy and R Glossop were made Honorary members, and F W Dunning, G Y Craig and A G Reading were elected as Ordinary members.

There were also 11 Temporary members, presumably those serving on Council that year, including G Y Craig, one Temporary lady member, Pamela Robinson and **Prof Bernard Leake** (a Discussion Group member in 2024). The total membership was 95.

In December the Club received a polite resignation from a distinguished professor at Reading University, Perce Allen, because of the increasing administrative demands on Department Heads in the 1970s:

*"Reluctantly, I feel that I really must resign from the Geol. Soc. Club. As you'll have noted I've not fulfilled my obligations, clubbable or otherwise, over the past year. **The future looks the same, in that such pleasures are getting squeezed out by the nitty-gritty demands of geological life.**"*

Was this a forerunner of a more widespread administrative workload which would gradually impact upon attendances at the Club?

## 1975

Minutes from the traditional meeting in February have not been located in the archives.

However, as confirmed at the Close meeting in June (and following the intention expressed in February 1974 to offer (as an experiment) informal hospitality to speakers and Fellows by providing cheese and wine at Burlington House for a short period after meetings) it was **decided to invite all 12 speakers at the Society's forthcoming Volcanological Symposium on 25 June to be guests of the Club at Dinner**

The June meeting also included five names proposed for Ordinary membership (A A Fitch, F H Moore, P McL Duff, W A Read and Diana S Sutherland).

However, in the handwritten notes from the November Close meeting, only Duff, Fitch and Moore were elected and the limit of 65 Ordinary members had been reached.

The obvious question is why the **Club continued with this self-imposed limit of 65 Ordinary members?**

There was only one minor change to the Rules, Ordinary members of 15 years standing or more:

*“... may be proposed for Honorary membership, and at the discretion of the Committee when they have less seniority”.*

As you have seen earlier, the purpose of the Club was social, so **port was the vital lifeblood**:

*“... there was a wish for a new supply of snuff to be purchased and noting the high cost of providing port, it was thought that the Club might investigate the purchase of another beverage or should buy a good port in bulk for members’ delectation. Objections and difficulties to following either course were raised and for the time being, port would be purchased beforehand from the management of the Goat at retail prices.”*

At year end, there were **104 members** (24 Honorary, 65 Ordinary, 13 Temporary (i.e. Council members) and 2 Supernumerary).

## 1976

At the March Close meeting, there was concern about fluctuations in attendances over the previous 24 meetings, although the average had actually been 26. Nonetheless, **the costs of maintaining the hospitable objectives of the Club had continued to climb sharply**:

*“One of the most effective ways of furthering the Club’s aims would be to **increase the number of members who attend dinners**, so that the overhead costs could be more widely spread and so reduce the need to increase the charge to dine”.*

There being no proposals for Honorary membership, there were still no vacancies in the Ordinary membership of 65, so the proposals for new Ordinary members had to be left to be considered at the November meeting. Additional nominations for Ordinary membership had come in since the last meeting, and those still waiting for a decision included Diana S Sutherland, R T G Savage, P J Adams, E R Oxburgh, C G Adams, Alwyn Williams, and Albert Horton.

The desirability of establishing a special category of membership (**Country members**) was discussed again (the first was in February 1974) and agreed that it **should be established**, although it would be considered again at the next meeting.

Clearly you cannot rush these things.

The proposed category was defined as those living more than 2 and half hours travelling time from London, and for whom the membership rate would be two thirds that paid by Ordinary members.

As an allied plan, the committee was asked to consider increasing the total number of members by small increments by transferring Ordinary members who will qualify to become Country members, and for Country members to attend one dinner each session free of charge.

However, by the next meeting, on 9 June 1976, chaired by incoming Society President W S Pitcher, no nominations for Honorary membership had been received and consequently, there were no vacancies in the Ordinary membership, for which there were now seven Fellows who were eligible for election.

Fortunately, there was in fact **wide support for the creation of Country members** which would help:

*“... reduce the pressure on the Club to elevate members to Honorary status merely to enable the admission of new members.”*

W Bullerwell was made an Honorary member and the following were elected as Ordinary members:

**E R Oxburgh**, A Williams, G D Hobson, R R Skelhorn, S Moorbath, C G Adams, A Calver, H E Wilson, P J Adams and R J G Savage, and the new Council members became Temporary members.

Professor Pitcher also chaired the Close meeting in November 1976, for which the major item was further consideration of Country Membership; It was confirmed that **Ordinary Members who live more than 100 miles from London should be invited to become Country Members**, having all the benefits of Ordinary members but without the obligation to attend a minimum number of dinners. They will pay an annual subscription £1 less than the subscription for Ordinary members and **as the subscription has gone up to £4 for the session 1976/77, the Country members' subscription remained at £3.**

The Rules of the Club would be revised by the committee to reflect these changes but in the meantime, it was agreed that:

*“The 17 members who are at present eligible for Country membership shall be deemed to have accepted, so as to make possible the election of new members.”*

For unspecified reasons, the following candidates were left for consideration at the next Close meeting:

Diana S Sutherland, and Albert Horton\*, (together with these candidates who had been proposed after the last Close meeting): A C Bishop\*, J Cowie\*, P F Lancaster-Jones\*, A L Harris\*, R C L Wilson\*, J L Knill\* and D Robson\*. All those with an asterisk are recorded in later papers as having been elected so **it appears that Diana Sutherland was never elected as only the second lady member** (or she simply withdrew).

The President proposed the Society's Executive Secretary, D Clayton, as a Temporary member.

The membership list at that date consisted of 27 Honorary, 66 Ordinary, 12 Temporary, 2 Temporary Honorary and 2 Supernumerary members, **a total of 109**.

The Club had met at The Goat Tavern on 9 occasions, the total number dining being 248 of whom 38 were Club guests and 28 were guests of members. The **average attendance was 28**, some 5 more than in the previous session. The income for the session had included contributions as well as subscriptions amounting to £264, although *‘it should be noted that the subscriptions of 9 Ordinary members were in arrears at the end of the session.’*

Many members will recall the **very high inflation during the 1970s**, a state which was reflected in the minutes:

*"In view of the rapidly advancing cost of food and service and particularly of postage and stationery, the Treasurers reluctantly have to propose an increase in the subscription to ensure that the Club remains viable."*

## **1977**

The Close meeting in May proposed some minor amendments to the Rules related to the Country membership category. The next item on the agenda was to request that the Treasurer should investigate the cost of reprinting the rules and proceed to print if funds allowed. The bigger issue, however, was that:

*"The Joint Treasurers commented on the **problem created by the large number of guest speakers at Society Ordinary General Meetings**. Entertainment of all these was beyond the means of the Club. It was proposed and agreed that the increased cost be met by an increased subscription, and this will be £8 for 1977-78."*

One Honorary member, 5 Ordinary members and 2 Country members were elected (names not on the available document).

One particularly sad event for this meeting was noted, that of the death (at only 45 yrs of age) of Club member W W Bishop, Head of Dept. at Queen Mary College.

There was also an important change of circumstance, a move from the Goat Tavern to the Athenaeum, arranged through the good offices of Dan Ion and the Institution of Country Membership. This change had been welcomed by most members, despite:

*"... a significant increase in the cost of dinner, because the accommodation, food and wines are a very substantial improvement on what the Goat Tavern had to offer".*

The introduction of the Country membership had enabled the Club to **increase its membership commensurate with the increase in the size of the geological profession, and to take advantage of the extra dining space available at the Athenaeum.**

The income for the session including the voluntary contributions from 18 members, amounted to £378, which left a modest credit balance.

*"The committee hoped that this happy situation will continue, despite the Club's decision to go on dining the Society's speakers, regardless of numbers without financial support from the Society. There will inevitably be a substantial increase in the subscription, though not necessarily to the level of £8 proposed (somewhat prematurely) at the last Close meeting. On present projections, it seems that the Club might manage to remain solvent on a subscription of £6. [Although] Five members had still not paid their subscriptions by the end of the session, despite a graduated series of reminders."*

The following candidates for Ordinary and Country membership remained for consideration at the next Close meeting:

D Robson, W K Rea, B G J Upton, J McD Whittaker, W D I Rolfe, **G Kelling**, M F Ridd and A J Charig.

At the following Close meeting in November, however,

*"It was proposed that, notwithstanding the decision at the previous meeting, the Club should continue to bear the full cost of dining members at the Ordinary General Meeting of the Society irrespective of numbers, the matter should be reconsidered. After a full discussion, the motion was not agreed." i.e. the status quo remained.*

It was agreed that the **annual subscription for 1978 should remain at £6**, that the dining arrangement for that session should be as at present and that new members of Council should be invited to become temporary members of the Club.

Professor W D Gill was elected an Honorary member and the following were elected as Ordinary members:

B G J Upton, J McD Whittaker, A J Charig and R J Chandler, and the following elected as Country members:

D A Robson, W J Rea, W D I Rolfe, D L Dineley and **Prof. Gilbert Kelling** (a 2024 Discussion Group member). It would appear that M F Ridd was the only candidate not elected.

Mr D J Clayton was elected an Ordinary member of the Club in recognition of his services to the Geological Society, and Janet Watson was elected a member of the committee to replace A M J K Clarke who retired on rotation.

It is noticeable that **Diane Sutherland was proposed in early 1976 and yet her name does not seem to have occurred again in several subsequent meetings.** Was her application not accepted as her name does not appear in the 1977 or 1978 lists of Club (Appendix 1).

## **1978**

At the 2223<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Club at the Athenaeum on 26<sup>th</sup> April, Dr P A Sabine and Sir Peter Kent were elected Honorary members, and the following were elected Ordinary members:

R Dyk, J G C M Fuller, O W Nicholls and B F Windley, and Dr M F Ridd was elected a Country member.

This meeting was chaired by the President, Prof. W S Pitcher and to which the Secretary reported that:

*"Members will know from the Geological Society Newsletters that the Society has decided to dine speakers at its own expense independently of the Club."*

And that:

*"The President does not intend to officiate at the meetings of the Club during the forthcoming session. The Club Committee has met and recommends that the Club shall continue to meet and dine in the usual manner, but that speakers will not receive invitations to dine: the Committee thought that the Club should not enter into an unseemly competition with the Society to the embarrassment of the speakers.*

This was followed, on 9 June 1978 by a letter from the Secretary to the incoming President, Prof. Perce Allen (Univ. Reading) who had sent a message to the Treasurer to the effect that he was not able to be present at the first meeting after assuming office as President of the Society, because:

- he had not been invited
- that he considered that the Society, not the Club, should entertain the speakers to the Society
- he would not dine with the Club unless the Society entertained the speakers

- the dinners could be attended by any Fellow of the Society
- and that if this was not possible, he would make other arrangements, adding that the officers of the Society were unanimous in support of this attitude.

The Club was “flabbergasted at this totally unexpected message” particularly as he had not been informed of his role in the Club as President of the Society (which was written in the Rules of the Club) nor of the Club’s long-running generosity in entertaining Society speakers.

A follow up letter from President Allen to F W Dunning, the Club Secretary, confirmed his views on the responsibilities and courtesies for dining Geological Society speakers, although he also confirmed that he was conscious that the Club had for many years carried the financial burden of entertaining the Society’s speakers after Ordinary General Meetings. But he was:

“... perturbed, however, by the fact that, whereas the Club’s name seems to imply a Geological Society organisation (and therefore open to all Fellows), it is actually a closed shop the conventions of which do not always act in the best interests of the Society. Because of this I will not be able to participate, during my Presidency, in a dining arrangement available only to a restricted group of selected geologists. We intent do dine our speakers as guests of the Society in such a way that any Fellow has a right to attend. The Officers fully support my policy.”

His last paragraph added that:

“The position could be different if the Club sought ways of building into its framework the principles and spirit embodied in this letter. And might not such a change extend (as well as preserve) the Club’s ancient ideals of service and good fellowship in Geology?”

Dan Ion’s letter to the Club Committee on 23 June 1978 proposed that the Committee should decide the action it wishes to take on behalf of the Club and then meet with Prof. Allen, but added that:

“There can be no agreement to change the Constitution of the Club just because the current President so wishes, not could there even be a promise to change, because that must be done at Close meeting of the Club after due notice to all members”.

Shifting tectonic plates would probably have caused less of a shock to the Club! This was completely out of the blue, with no prior notice to hold a meeting to discuss the issue with the Club; simply a Presidential announcement after taking office, which must have seemed pretty rude at the time.

Despite this sudden blow, Club Secretary Fred Dunning reported on 27 June that he had written to the President in very friendly and conciliatory terms, asking him to meet the Committee to try to reach a compromise, while at the same time saying that the Club obviously could not simply open its doors to any Fellow to join, and still remain a Club. [In other words, this was a clear existential threat to the Club.]

The President replied to Dunning on 5 July to say he believed that:

“The Club has done a wonderful job in the past when the Society was smaller. But times change and there are many Fellows, especially the younger Fellows, who are dissatisfied with the traditional arrangement. They would like to feel that after Society meetings, they can, if they wish, dine and continue discussing geology with their guest-speakers in the friendly atmosphere of an elegant meal.”

Readers may recall the summary above of the Club history in the 1970’s from Davies’s book in which:

*“... an episode which loomed large upon the Society’s scene during the 1970s. It concerned the relationship of the Geological Society to the Geological Society Club. The members of the Kardomah Group, like so many of the younger Fellows, all viewed the Club with deep suspicion.”*

This exchange of correspondence between Society and Club, made it abundantly clear that the ‘younger Fellows’ had now taken the initiative, supported by both the President and the Society staff.

As an aside from the main issue, the Club Secretary Fred Dunning did write to the President to apologise

*“... for the fact that due to a misunderstanding, Perce did not receive a formal invitation in the shape of calling papers for the last meeting”.*

Doubtless what had been a precedent set over 150 years ago, it had been taken for granted that one of the roles the incoming Society President was to chair Club meetings.

On 1<sup>st</sup> August 1978, Prof. Mike Audley-Charles wrote a detailed 2-page letter to Club Secretary Dunning with suggestions for possible ways of ‘building bridges between the Society and its responsibilities for dining its guests, and the Club and its interests’ as a series of ‘pathways’.

Some weeks later, prominent Club member Sir Peter Kent (Chairman of the NERC) wrote to Dunning on 22 August 1978, probably expressing the view of most Club members that were:

*“... seriously distressed over the move of our President to attempt to separate dining facilities for the Society officers, Fellows generally and the lecturers. On the one hand I doubt whether the Club would survive for long if truncated in this manner, but I doubt the practicability of the President’s proposal, since I believe it would be found that maintenance of a sufficiently regular arrangement to qualify for moderate dining costs would prove impossible. There is thus a real danger that the Club would come to an end, and that its replacement would fail soon afterwards, to nobody’s advantage.”*

He went on to say that:

*“From attempts which we have made to liberalise attendance at the Club (for example by inviting a fixed number of Fellows per meeting on application, on a first-come basis), I am well aware that there is a strong sentiment in the Club in favour of the closed-shop principle. I understand the attitude, but believe it to be ungenerous, chauvinistic and mistaken. Part of my concern is based on my belief that the Club has departed a very long way from the intention of its founders – when it was intended to comprise most of the Fellows who attended a meeting, dining together. (It was of course limited to “gentlemen”, and I believe there were difficulties over William Smith, who worked for his living and hence did not qualify; on this criterion few of us would now survive.) Not all the members are now even regular supporters of the Society.*

*The Club has made continuous but only small-scale attempts to expand its membership, and there have been of course strong logistic reasons for limiting the members. But there have always been some of us who have been less than happy about the exclusive – and excluding – attitude of other members, and the action of the President has now brought matters to a head.*

*I do not believe that direct confrontation is inevitable; in any event I believe it would be disastrous. But it is well within the power of the Club to change its roles on lines suggested last winter, without spoiling the atmosphere or involving excessive expansion, and I suggest that this should be taken up with Professor Allen as a possibility in discussions aimed at a compromise.”*

However, Fred Dunning's reply to Club member Prof. Audley-Charles on 23 August did not think that a compromise was possible; rather, he was in favour of doing nothing. There was nothing to prevent the Club continuing with its dinners and everyone wishes to avoid rancour.

Similarly, Dunning replied to Sir Peter Kent on 1 September to say that he agreed that the Club had been:

*"... ungenerously exclusive in the matter or allowing ordinary Fellows to dine with the Club on application. But I don't think that the Club will go down as a result of the President's action – provided that the situation does not continue beyond Perce's presidency. We are not really all that far from a compromise; the only thing that might come between us is that Perce would probably insist that Fellows had as much right to dine as Club members, so that if total numbers exceeded the seating capacity, some late-comer members would be turned away. The Club Committee has made several attempts (through Dan Ion, John Prentice and myself) to get Perce to meet the Committee. So far he has politely declined. I suggest that we have a special debate at the next Close meeting to determine Club policy for the next two years."*

At the next Close meeting of the Club, on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1978, there was of course:

*"An extended discussion following the consequences of the decision of the Society to dine the speakers at Ordinary General Meetings. D C Ion reported on the discussions he had had with the President. There was a **consensus that the Club should take no hasty action**, but that the committee should meet to **consider first ways and means by which the Club could be of service to the Society**, and secondly steps which might lead to the establish a working relationship with the Society in the dining of speakers."*

The committee was asked to send out a questionnaire to members and report its findings to the next Close meeting of the Club on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1979.

Prof. J Sutton and C W Wright (both Ordinary members since 1960) were offered Honorary membership, while R A Eden (Country) and W H Ziegler (Ordinary) were elected as members.

However, the Secretary reported that **of the 13 new members of Council** who had been offered temporary membership of the Club, **only 2 had accepted** (D G A Whitten and W H Ziegler), no doubt reflecting the current hiatus between the Club and the Society. **By the end of 1978 the membership had increased to 134:**

27 Honorary (long membership and no longer paying subscription)  
64 Ordinary  
30 Country  
14 Temporary (Council)  
1 Supernumerary (temporarily overseas).

At the 1<sup>st</sup> November close meeting, the following candidate were nominated for election at the next Close meeting:

A J Martin, **R C Selley**, A V Donnington, W Ziegler, R A Eden, J R V Brooks, R G C Bathurst, J R L Allen, J Murray and R Cummings.

1979

In early 1979 a questionnaire was sent out to members concerned the much-vexed issue of whether the Club should continue hosting speakers from the Society's own Ordinary meetings:

Geological Society Dining Club

Following the instruction of the last Close Meeting, your Committee has met to consider possible changes in the Rules which might follow the decision of the present officers of the Society to entertain separately the speakers at Ordinary General Meetings of the Society.

In accordance with our Constitution, changes in the Rules can only be made by a decision of the majority of members present at a Close Meeting. The following questionnaire is therefore a fact-finding exercise only, but its completion would greatly help the Committee in becoming aware of the views of the membership as a whole.

1. It has been suggested that membership of the Club should be granted to all Fellows who apply. This would, of course, completely change the character of the Club to a kind of social club for Fellows.

Would you agree to automatic election of any Fellow who applies?

or

Do you prefer the Club to retain its present elective system?

2. The Society has now many more Fellows; and with less restriction in the numbers of members dining it would be possible to increase the size of the Club without changing its elective system.

Would you approve an increase in numbers of Ordinary and Country members?

or

Do you believe the numbers should remain as at present?

3. It has been suggested that the Club might invite an official guest from time to time, to address the Club briefly and to meet the members. In this way the Club might act as a contact between the Society and influential people in the 'real world'.

Do you approve  or disapprove  of this suggestion?

4. It has been suggested that the rule which restricts guests of the Club to those interested in Geology might be more literally interpreted e.g. to include wives

Do you approve  or disapprove

5. Would you please add here any other suggestions you wish.

*Prentice*

J.E. Prentice  
Secretary

Secretary Dan Ion took the chair at the crucial meeting in May when the results of the consultation were reported. Replies from 65 members had been received and the key result was that **members did not approve the automatic election of any Fellow who applied to join the Club** with overwhelming support for retaining the present elective system.

However, **there was approval for inviting an official guest from time to time** to address the Club briefly and to meet the members, and a suggestion that the rule which restricts guests of the Club to those interested in geology **might be more liberally interpreted to include, for example, wives.**

Perhaps unsurprisingly considering the current friction, the Secretary reported that of the 13 new members of Council offered temporary membership of the Club, only two had accepted (D G A Whitten & W H Ziegler).

Considering the Club's finances, members wished to build up a substantial surplus of funds and it was agreed that the recommendation of the committee that **the subscription be reduced should NOT be accepted, but** that for the 1978-89 session it should be held at the present level (£6 for Ordinary, £5 for Country).

Attendance at Club dinners continued to be well supported though; there were 8 events during the year, with an **average of 18 at each dinner** and 40 in November, as reported in the 2234<sup>th</sup> meeting in December 1979.

**The maximum number of Ordinary members was increased to 100 and Country members up to 50** and the Secretary was tasked to change the Rules accordingly. It was also **agreed that the Club could invite a distinguished guest to speak at the dinner if it wished**, but the idea that Fellows should be able to apply for attendance at dinners when there were vacancies was not adopted. Subscriptions remained at £6 and £5 but the dining fee was increased to a monumental £4. **The tradition of inviting the senior (i.e. longest serving) member present to take the chair was confirmed.**

R Cummings was elected a Country member, J B Auden (elder brother of poet W. H. Auden) was elected an Honorary member and R Stoneley, A J Martin, H V Dunnington, R G C Bathurst, J R L Allen and **R C Selley (Discussion Group member in 2024)** were elected Ordinary members.

In response to an earlier proposal for the Club committee to meet with the Society's President to discuss improved co-operation, a meeting was held in August, which resulted in a letter from the President which was circulated to all members. At the Close meeting in November, some amendments to Rule 10 were agreed:

*"After 'Geological Society', insert 'or on such days as the Committee shall determine" and:*

*"... add **Fellows of the Society who wish to dine with the Society's speakers at the Club may do so at the invitation of the Committee, but not at the Club's expense** "[i.e. Open meetings]*

which it was felt would **give the necessary flexibility to meet the needs of both the Club and the Society.**

The Athenaeum had made it clear that it could not maintain a reasonable standard of catering on the current price so the price for a dinner would be raised to £5, which it was anticipated, might cause members to question the policy of subsidising dinners from Club funds. The average attendance at 'normal' club dinners was 25, although:

*"**52 members, non-members and speakers had attended the dinner in January 1980, when the Club entertained the Society**".*

Subscriptions were a point of concern as:

*“... the incidence of late payers was also very high: over a third of members had not paid by the end of the 1979-80 session causing loss of interest on the Club’s deposit account and in postage on a graduated series of reminders is fairly considerable and would, for example, have paid for most of the port consumed during the session”.*

The impact of all this was that Ordinary rates were raised to £6 while the Country rate was reduced to £3.

However, a limit of ‘open’ meetings was set at one third of the total. The Country membership list was full so no more transfers from Ordinary to Country were allowed at present under the Rules.

The December 1979 committee was again chaired by N Falcon as the senior member present. Members had dined as usual on 8 occasions also with an average of 18 members, the norm for recent years. However:

*“The action of the new President in providing entertainment for speakers separately from the Club, and more importantly, a series of cancellations and late changes in the Society’s programme, which resulted in a very irregular spacing of meetings, has impaired the strength of the Club.”*

Professional harmony anyone? Club members would be forgiven for asking why they had donated a teak desk and chair to the Society to mark the Club’s own £150<sup>th</sup> birthday?

Numerous decisions were made, as noted above, but the proposal that Fellows could simply apply to dine at the Club was not adopted.

Subscription rates of £6 and £5 would remain, the fee for dining could be raised to £4 at the discretion of the Treasurer. And finally, at the forthcoming joint meeting with the RGS on 30 January 1980, the recent procedure of the club should continue, with the senior member present (T C Nicholas) would take the Chair.

## 1980

The April Close meeting was brief but the minutes of the Close meeting on 12 December 1979 were approved and amendments of Rule 2 amended as follows:

1. Ordinary members were limited to 100.
2. Country members were limited to 50.

The re-election of Prof. P Allen as an Ordinary member was approved, R Bathurst and W Read transferred from Ordinary to Country membership, L R M Cocks and R K Harrison were elected as Ordinary members, and J Murray was elected a Country member.

At the November Close meeting, it was reported that in response to an invitation from the President of the Society, the committee met him and some of the officers of the Society on August 18<sup>th</sup> 1980. As a result of these discussions a letter from the President was circulated to all members of the Club. **The nature of the Society’s events had changed, to longer, thematic meetings over one or more full days**, involving a large number of speakers and as a result, the Committee had proposed some amendments to the Rules:

*“... which will give the necessary flexibility to meet the needs of both the Club and the Society.”*

Rule 10 was changed to add:

*“Fellows of the Society who wish to dine with the Society’s speakers at the Club may do so at the invitation of the Committee, but not at Club expense.”*

The meeting also drew attention to the resolution of a previous meeting, that a **history of the Club should be prepared and published**. As per tradition, the Secretary agreed to have this ‘put in hand’.

The average attendance at Club normal dinners was 25, although 52 members, non-members and speakers had attended the dinner on 30<sup>th</sup> January at which the Club entertained the Society.

The following were elected Ordinary members: L V Illing, D Blundell, M K Howarth, D Kinsman and Prof. **John D Mather** (Discussion Group member in 2024) was elected a Country member.

## **1981**

At the June 1981 meeting, the Secretary reported the outcome of discussions with the officers of the Society held the same day and agreed on the dates of 9 events which the Club would adopt, from October 1981 to June 1982. It was agreed that:

*“At open meetings the Society will pay for anteprandial sherry and prandial wine for the speakers; also, that if there are less than 6 speakers, the Club will bear the cost of their dinners; if more than 6 the cost will be shared equally with the Society”.*

The following were elected Ordinary or Country members: E G Purdy, G R Davis, P T Warren, R A Bazeley, D Powell, J F Dewey, M H P Bott, I Gass, J M Hancock, D R C Kemp, A S Laughton, J C Briden, E K Walton, and **David A L Jenkins** (Discussion Group member in 2024).

At the Close meeting at the Athenaeum on 18th November, the President Prof. H Francis took the Chair.

The Treasurer’s report dated 29<sup>th</sup> October 1981 made glum reading, as **expenditure for the session had substantially exceeded income**:

*“This was partly a consequence of the Club’s resuming entertainment of the Society’s speakers, but more than that to a swinging **increase in the price of dinners**. This increase was not notified to the Club **by the Athenaeum**, and by the time three very much delayed bills embodying the increase had reached the Treasurer, the damage was done. This increase is not likely to be the last, and the Club is faced with the **prospect of dinners priced at a level beyond what many members can afford**. A large increase in the annual subscription will be necessary to enable the Club to dine its guests, even on the assumption the Society meets half the cost when numbers exceed 6.”*

And yet more bad news followed:

*“**Late payment and non-payment of subscriptions reached a new low**. At this point in the new Session 13 members have not paid their subscriptions for the last (1980-81) Session. This non-payment resulted in a considerable loss to the Club in interest which would have been earned from the money on deposit. If the same thing happens next year, the Club will move into insolvency. The problem of late and non-payment has somehow to be resolved. Suggestions to this end include penalties for late payment, removal of persistent non-payers, publication of names of late and non-payers, bankers’ orders, direct debit forms and so on.*

*The **average attendance of members and their guests at Club dinners was 24**, one less than last year; in view of the doubling of the price of dinners in the course of the Session, this must be considered a good attendance. The number of the Society’s speakers dined averaged 9 per dinner. At the ‘open’ dinners, the maximum attendance of Fellows was 4.”*

It was agreed that the committee would keep the cost of dinners under review and the Secretary was asked to write to the Treasurer of the Athenaeum in relation to the recent un-notified price rises and the Chairman proposed that the Club might dine for its Close meetings at the Society. This resolution was approved.

The subscription was fixed at £10 for Ordinary and £5 for Country members, but agreed that **the committee will keep the cost of dinners under review**.

Sir Peter Kent drew attention to the appeal which would shortly be launched by the Society for funding the production of a **Palaeo-geographic Atlas**, for which approximately £10,000 is required, and asked for the support of Club members.

The following members were elected: H C Potter, C L Hall, B L Jones and K Coe.

#### **1982 (a Minute book was initiated from June 1982 on)**

The 1982-83 session consisted of 10 meetings, of which 3 were Close, 3 Ordinary and 4 Open. The Athenaeum remained the usual venue for meetings, but **on two occasions dinners were held in the Lower Library at Burlington House**. Dr A J Martin took over as Secretary in February and **Prof. Janet Watson took over as President of the Society**.

In March the Treasurer was concerned about what other venues for dinners might be possible, and a suggestion had come in from a member to consider the Royal Overseas League (ROL), near St James' Park. However, he noted that the cost of meals plus room hire is steep and his other concern was to secure agreement to remove **members in arrears** with their subscription and to clear up other 'grey areas'.

The possibility of moving to the ROL was not resolved during the year but by November, the Club was **troubled by the Athenaeum's constant price increases**, which prompted Treasurer Ron Harrison to pay a visit to the ROL, where the policy was to include the room hire in the price of a meal, which would be about £9 for a 3-course menu. Previously the rooms were either too small or too large for the Club's needs, but an intermediate sized room was now available for 25 to 40 diners and a bar would be provided. As an added incentive, he also reported that the Club had lost heavily on last month's dinner at the Athenaeum (£120).

The agenda for the May committee meeting at Burlington House included 'Attendance of spouses' and it was decided that **for the Open meeting in June 1983, there would be a specific invitation to spouses**.

The July list of members seemed very healthy with 32 Honorary, 78 Ordinary, and 42 Country members, a **total of 152**.

In one of those pivotal moments, The Society Executive Secretary, Richard Bateman, wrote to the Club Secretary on 15 June with details of the 'programme of hospitality' for the next session (i.e. November onwards) and reaffirmed that:

- The **Society will pay for the sherry and wine for the speakers**
- The **Club will pay for dinners of up to 6 speakers** and if more than 6, the Society will divide the cost 50:50
- **For papers with more than one author, both authors will be invited to dinner**
- For papers with more than two authors, only the presenter will be invited.

The June Close meeting, chaired by Janet Watson, agreed to some significant changes:

- a specific invitation to spouses (other than at Close meetings)
- that 'connected with the Earth Sciences' be deleted from Rule 10 (i) to read '... except at Close meetings to **introduce visitors**'.

Shortly afterwards, on 25 June, the new Club Treasurer, R K Harrison, noted with some alarm that the Ordinary General Meeting on the subject of Ophiolites on 17 November, would have 50 to 60 speakers which will obviously involve the Club in a considerable expense (~£300) which it had not planned for!

In addition, the previous month, some of the speakers did not turn up despite the dinners having been booked and paid for. He suggested therefore, that a renegotiation of the agreement with the Society was required as **the number of speakers was getting out of hand**.

For the November meeting the Treasurer reported that **the average support given by the Club to the Society's speakers was about £60 per dinner**, that the number attending dinners had varied from 9 to over 50, and that the fixed charge for dinners at the Athenaeum had been £10 for the session. However, it was agreed that for the future, there would be

*"no requirement to establish a single price for dinner" (i.e. for the session).*

At the same meeting, the Secretary pointed out that the Country membership was almost full with 42 members but there were a large number of vacancies in the Ordinary membership, so there was **"considerable scope" to introduce new members**. He also raised the question of whether candidates need to be asked before the election if they wished to join the Club, and it was agreed that this was not necessary.

Finally, another significant change was that **meeting times would in future commence at 6.30pm for a 7pm dinner** – which has remained the same to the present day.

The membership was healthy at 32 Honorary, 78 Ordinary and 42 Country members, **152 in total**.

## **1983**

Treasurer Ron Harrison wrote to the Club Secretary John Martin on 7 January with a number of items of correspondence concerning, guess what, the Geological Society Club Dinners.

The first item of concern was that although members were:

*"... content to stay with the Athenaeum and accepted the prices charged",*

he found it irritating that the Athenaeum:

*"... puts up its prices by a few pence every three months."*

**Yet members accepted this without concern and attendances had been up to or above average for the past several years.**

He had also received a letter from the Royal Overseas League about a room for the Club for 12 January, about which he had no knowledge. It turned out that a simple enquiry about the date had mistakenly been written into its diary as a confirmed booking. However, he recommended that henceforth, the Club should have a single point of contact regarding all room bookings.

Only a few days later, on 10 January, he wrote again on the continually vexing question of the cost of Club dinners as a result of some members who:

*"... were on modest salaries or pensions expressing dissatisfaction of the value for money that the Athenaeum offers at £10.25 for a quite ordinary 3-course dinner".*

In February the Secretary reported that the Club (founded 1824) had agreed to hold **a joint meeting with the Geographical Club (founded 1826) in the next session**. It would likely be held at the Athenaeum as the Society did not have a sufficiently large room. There were **37 RGS members** (including such expeditionary luminaries as Sir Vivian Fuchs of Antarctic fame and Robin Hanbury-Tenison, (the first person to travel overland from London to Ceylon by jeep) together with **31 Club members at the dinner on 16 November at Imperial College**.

The committee meeting in May gave the Secretary discretion to arrange for a buffet supper at Burlington House if necessary, in place of a set dinner. Clearly **the Society's HQ was not top of the list for catering purposes!**

In June the Secretary confirmed that **the Club had decided to revive its practice of inviting members of Council who were not already members of the Club, to join as temporary members** and wrote to all those concerned, highlighting that they would have the same rights and privileges as Ordinary members of the Club except being unable to propose or second candidates for membership, nor to attend Close meetings. The subscription would be only £5.

In the agenda for the November committee meeting, the Secretary indicated that there was some dissatisfaction at the nature of the guest list at the Open meeting in October.

*"It was felt by some members that Open meetings are turning into a general dining facility and guests present were not necessarily interested in geology or the earth sciences. The idea would be put to the Close meeting in December, that Open meetings of the Club will be restricted to guests of members of the Club and Fellows of the Society".*

It was also proposed that:

*"The question of the Club decanters should be mentioned at the Close meeting. One is cracked. They have not been used for several years and it is felt that if a good one was used, then some members might feel inclined to provide others".*

**Membership numbers at the end of the session in November totalled 158**, and the Treasurer was pleased to report that:

*"Despite stepwise increases in the costs of dinners (and port), the finances of the Club are satisfactory and despite maintaining subscriptions at the 1981-2 levels'.*

However, it was noted that while the membership of the Club had shown a slight gain during the past year, no category of membership was full. Another concern was raised by the Secretary that:

*"... doubts had been cast on the suitability of some guests at Open meetings who dine with the Club"!*

Nonetheless,

*"After a rather disorganised and idiosyncratic discussion, it was generally agreed that Open meetings should be open to members, their guests, guests of the committee and Fellows of the Society."*

In particular:

*"... the Ladies evening held last June was generally agreed to be a success and a similar evening will be organised towards the end of the current session. Similarly, members who attended the joint meeting with the RGS Club in November, thought that it could be repeated."*

Tragically, the two port decanters, thought to be in safe keeping in the Athenaeum, could not be located, and in any case when last seen, only one of the decanters was usable. Consequently, it was agreed that a new pair should be bought and

*"... they should be of contemporary design in order to reflect the good standing of the Club in 1983."*

#### 1984

At the March meeting the matter of the Club decanters was updated:

*"... the Athenaeum had at last located them. However, only two of the original three still existed and both were broken to the extent that they cannot be used. After considerable discussion, at times confused, it was generally re-affirmed that the committee was authorised to buy a new set of decanters. The number was left to the committee, depending upon cost, but it was generally agreed that at least six should be purchased. In addition, these should be suitably inscribed. If necessary, the committee was also authorised to approach members for a subscription towards the cost."*

In June it was agreed that they should be engraved as follows:

*"To commemorate the 160<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Geological Society Club 1824 – 1984."*

Clearly the decanters were a vital component in the Club's culture.

The joint meeting with the RGS Club was:

*"... enjoyed by all those members who attended and all members were in favour of a return fixture. At the 1983 joint meeting the RGS Club provided a speaker to celebrate the centenary of W M Davis's hypothesis of cyclical erosion. Speakers are not traditional at the Club dinners, but Professor Smith suggested that on the forthcoming meeting, the Club might consider the opportunity to celebrate the presentation of the Club gavel."*

In June the Close meeting authorised the Secretary to fix meetings for the next session to fit as well as possible with the Ordinary General meetings of the Society, and to cease holding a meeting in January 1985 onwards, as attendance was usually low.

However, as reported in August, it had been:

*"... difficult to find evenings that fit comfortably with availability of rooms, Society meetings and suchlike considerations. Consequently, a number of meetings have been arranged for Tuesday evenings in the hope that some Country members who may be travelling to London for an all-day Society meeting, may be available to attend a Club meeting on the previous evening."*

The Secretary also observed that the first two meetings of the session

*"... had been marked by a spate of late bookings, late cancellations and no-shows".*

Nonetheless he also noted that the Athenaeum catering manager had been very co-operative concerning fluctuating numbers.

The November meeting at the end of the 1984-85 session was an **Open meeting in the Ladies Annexe of the Athenaeum, and open to applications from all Fellows of the Society**, and the speakers at the Society will be invited as guests of the Club. The dinner cost was £10.95 per person. This was the 2276<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Club and the Secretary reported that the **average attendance during the session had been 29 members** and

guests, reflecting satisfactory support for the Club. The Club had dined six times at the Athenaeum, and twice at the Society. Subscriptions remained at £10 for Ordinary and £5 for Country members.

The Treasurer noted that the average contribution from Club funds towards the port, guest meals, sherry and drinks was about £55.

By now you will have noticed the significance of port and wines are in such rocky encounters; and on a wholly related matter Treasurer R K Harrison was also pleased to report that:

***"Members may like to know that the five new decanters were delivered on 10 October. They are of exceptionally high quality, hand-cut lead crystal, and of modest cost of £50 each including the Club's engravings. The original 1958 decanter which could be reused has been renovated at nominal cost by Webb's and remains a tangible reminder of earlier dinners".***

Indeed, that must have been most reassuring.



During the year, 6 meetings were held in the Ladies Annexe at the Athenaeum, and twice at the Society. **On 16<sup>th</sup> November 1983, a dinner was held at Imperial College jointly with the Royal Geographical Society and well attended by both clubs;** it was regarded as a success such that the Club intended to act as host to a dinner on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1985, in the Old Refectory at UCL.

The limits to membership remained at 100 for Ordinary members and 50 for Country members. Since being enlarged some years ago, neither category had been filled and total membership had been steady. Professor Janet Watson had retired as President of the Society, succeeded by Professor C H Holland.

The calling notice to members for the November 1984 meeting (at the traditional time of 630pm for 7pm dinner) was an open meeting, meaning that:

***"... all Fellows of the Society and the speakers at the Society will be invited as guests of the Club. Members wishing to attend should reply to this notice as early as possible and replies received no later than 31<sup>st</sup> October. The charge for the dinner will be £10.95 per person and must be paid in advance."***

The September 1984 membership list recorded 30 Honorary members, 86 Ordinary and 42 Country members, with 1 Supernumerary member – **D A L Jenkins**.

At the December meeting, **Mr D A Gray offered to write a new history of the Club** when he retires, in approximately 12 months' time.

## 1985

The first Close meeting of the year took place in June, when **a change to Rule 1 of the Club was proposed and agreed, the purpose being to allow the Chief Executive of the Society to be a member of the Club**, although the terms and conditions of his employment do not allow him to be a Fellow. **Mr Richard H Bateman** was duly elected as an Ordinary member.

The final Close meeting took place in December, when there were only two new members proposed. This led the President to propose that the usual procedure of putting the candidates in voting order prior to voting, should be put aside on this occasion. While this was supported, it was with the clear understanding that this decision did not set a precedent to be followed in future.

A related problem was the the voting box used in the election of new members was not available. Consequently, a novel solution was proposed to deal with this extreme emergency:

*“Members agreed to his suggestion that to preserve the secrecy of the ballot, voting will take place by show of hands with closed eyes, only the tellers keeping their eyes open”.*

British innovation at its very best. The new members elected in December was current Group member **Antony Barber**, and past Group member **Dick Moody**.

The whereabouts of the ‘**Members Signature book**’ was raised as it had not been used in the session; Dr Martin, the outgoing Secretary, explained that **it had been mislaid** at the time of the Close meeting in June and not been traced since. Too much port perhaps?

The traditional committee for the following session was agreed, consisting of the President of the Society, Secretary, Treasurer and 2-3 members.

## 1986

The December Close meeting acknowledged that the Club’s senior Honorary member, **W Campbell-Smith, will reach 100 years of age** on 30 November 1989; the Secretary would send appropriate congratulations and would be invited as a guest of the Club at the next Close meeting!

The meeting also generated a lot of discussion about the **lack of coincidence between the Society’s scientific meetings and Club dinners, caused by the fact that most meetings were arranged by the Specialist Groups** (which were founded in 1963 with the formation of the Engineering Geology Group).

The Club agreed with the Society’s Archivist, Dr J Thackeray, that the **Club archives be lodged at Burlington House**, with similar access arrangements for Club members as Fellows have for the Society’s archive material. It also agreed to the suggestion that a **history of the club be written**.

Current Group member (and future chief executive of the Society) **Edmund Nickless**, was elected to the Club.

## **1987**

Sadly, by the December Close meeting, Dr W Campbell-Smith was not able to tackle the arduous journey to London for dinner. In what might well be termed an appropriate response however, **the Club would write to him together with the signatures of all those members present and deliver it with a bottle of port.** Congratulations, flowers and a bottle of port would also be sent to Mr T C Nicholas on his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on 17 August 1988.

Is the secret to longevity in the geological community due to regular intake of port?

2024 Discussion Group members **Colin Summerhayes** was elected in June and **Max Coleman** in December.

The price of dinner at the Athenaeum had risen to £13 from the March meeting. **Edmund Nickless** became the Club's Secretary.

The 2,300<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Club would be held at Burlington House with the attendance limited to 40 (presumably this was the maximum that could be accommodated in the lower library) at £15 each. **Lord Sherfield** (an outstanding Foreign Office diplomat and later Britain's ambassador to Washington) **was invited to be the after-dinner speaker** and a group photograph taken – although this does not appear to exist in the archives.

## **1988**

At the Club's June meeting, it was agreed to **dispense with the rule requiring a ballot to determine the order in which proposals for membership should be taken**, and once again **accepting that this decision will not set a precedent.**

A future Club Secretary, **Andy Fleet** (and a 2024 Discussion Group member) was elected as an Ordinary member.

At the December Close meeting the membership totalled 170, an increase in the Athenaeum's charge to £13.50 was accepted but **the Society's housekeeper had indicated that it would not be possible to undertake the catering for February 1989.** Subsequent enquiries of commercial caterers indicated that costs would be significantly higher, in the region of £20 per head, with no certainty of quality. It was agreed, therefore, that it would be **difficult to improve on the arrangements and cost of meals at the Athenaeum.**

Perhaps equally important, the Secretary reported that **the snuff box** was not going to be available at the dinner in the evening as it **was in need of repair.**



The Box contains a type-written note which is unsigned and undated, but is transcribed below.

---

*GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY CLUB  
The Red Lion Snuff Box*

*The box, which is made of tortoise-shell, is inlaid with a Lion – couchant – in mother-of-pearl. To the front of the Box is attached a small silver plate on which is engraved:*

**THE RED LION SNUFF BOX, PRESENTED TO THE GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY CLUB  
BY W. HENRY BARNES ESQ. 1910**

*The facts, as far as I remember the, are that Forbes, Ramsay and others of the old school, dined during their visits to Birmingham at the Red Lion, sang their songs after dinner, passed round the Box and took their snuff. I remember the Box 55 years ago, as it stood on the mantelpiece: a niece of the owner of the house, who was years older than myself, told me that her uncle inherited it from a relation who kept the house.*

*This is, I think, all I know: enough, however, to establish the fact that the men of the fifties and sixties took their sneesish (sic) out of it.*

---

Recognising that membership was close to the limits allowed for in the Rules, particularly in respect of Country members, the committee was asked to ease matters with a proposed change to increase the limit to 75.

In addition, reference was made to the requirement that Ordinary members who have not attended any meeting for two consecutive [annual] sessions and have not furnished sufficient reason for non-attendance, may be declared by a majority by ballot, to be no longer members of the Club. The Secretary was asked to look at the pattern of attendance and report back.

Current Discussion Group member **Nicholas Walsh** is believed to have become a Club member in 1988, but as this is not recorded in the minutes, it may have been as a Temporary member by virtue of being on the Society Council.

## **1989**

The October Close meeting considered the **proposal to raise the number of Country members from 50 to 75**, especially given the relocation of BGS at Keyworth, the wish to encourage active participation in the Club and the fact that for Country members, there was no minimum attendance requirement. The motion was put to the vote and carried with 23 in favour and 1 against. Three members were elected as Honorary members.

**There was no requirement in the Rules that the Club should always dine in London**, and Manchester was suggested as an alternative venue. The committee was asked to consider matters and report back.

At the next Close meeting, in December, Prof. Stoneley suggested that from time to time the minutes might be circulated to members. As the last agenda item, one sharp eyed member recalled that at a previous Close meeting, **wine had been included in the usual dinner price**. Unsurprisingly,

*“... this arrangement had proved highly satisfactory and the committee were invited to consider this with an adjustment as necessary to the cost of dinner.”*

However, members supported the present arrangements of members purchasing their own wine, as it encouraged individuals to share and at times show largesse, and it was agreed that matters should continue unchanged.

**This pattern continues to the present day.**

2024 Discussion Group members **Chris Clayton & Ian Vann** were elected to the Club.

## **1990**

There were only two committee meetings held in 1990, in June and December. In the former meeting, brief statements were made by supporters for membership and a ballot held to determine the order in which nominations would be determined, as per normal practice.

A difficulty had arisen concerning evening dinner arrangements for the Society's popular William Smith meeting; both the Athenaeum's Ladies Annex and Burlington House could accommodate a maximum of 40 seated for dinner, and there were real practical difficulties of preparing hot food at the Society especially as it would be a buffet.

However, members were not in favour of a buffet meal and hence the Secretary was asked to

*“... explore the possibility of dining at another of the Clubs within walking distance of Burlington House”.*

Current 2024 Discussion Group member **John Cope** was elected in June.

## 1991

Once again Prof. Stoneley suggested that, from time to time, the minutes should be circulated, but for the second time this proposal seems to have been quietly dropped.

In a general discussion about a possible increase in the dinner price in June, a

*“... subsidy might be sought to offset the cost. Others considered the Athenaeum prices competitive and preferred the ambience of the Ladies Annex for example, to the Royal Overseas League (ROL) which had been used on the occasion of the recent Fermor Lecture”.* [This is held every couple of years and usually runs over two to three days. The meetings discuss broad topics crossing disciplines, as well as focused specialist themes].

The ROL seems to have been the only other Club considered within walking distance of Burlington House but nostalgia rules and there remained a general desire to hold some dining events at Burlington House:

*“... recognising this would mean a restriction on numbers dining if a ‘sit-down’ meal were contemplated. The preference was to accept a buffet meal. **An objective was to maintain a proper contact with the Society.**”*

Apart from the detail of where to meet and how the dining shall take place, an ongoing concern was:

***“The falling attendance which had characterised the current session”.***

Consequently, the Secretary was encouraged to:

*“... seek to achieve a better coincidence of dining events with popular scientific meetings as a mechanism to attract potential recruits. The requirement of Ordinary members to attend on a minimum number of occasions was noted.”*

Discussion Group members will recognise similar issues at the present day.

In December, a committee was selected to assist the President in running the Club, consisted of a Secretary, Treasurer and three other members. There was also concern about the volume of papers circulated for meetings, with a suggestion that circulating the minutes could be dispensed with.

Current 2024 Discussion Group member **Bruce Yardley** was elected in June.

## 1992

What seems admirable about Prof. Stoneley was his common sense. For example, at the June meeting he expressed concern about the case made by supporters of candidates for election:

*“Academic research and output was not a prime consideration; rather the worthiness of the candidate and in particular their club-ability. He hoped that emphasis would be placed on such attributes at future meetings.”*

**Wonderful sentiments for a Dining Club** surely and his comments were reiterated at the next meeting in December, immediately prior to considering eight nominations for membership, all of whom were elected.

On a related matter, there was a proposal that:

*“Seating should be allotted by ballot at some of the meetings, especially Close meetings, to allow a greater number of the members to become acquainted with each other. At Open meetings, guests*

*could be paired with their hosts. There was a favourable but not unanimous positive response and it was agreed that the Secretary should investigate the practicability of the proposal."*

Another member returned to a familiar theme by asking:

***"... why wine should not be provided in the cost of the meal and this proposal also met with acquiescence from the members."***

The Secretary was asked to tread a very well-worn path, to investigate the practicality of this proposal.

Current 2024 Discussion Group member **Annette Cutler** was elected in June.

### **1993**

Once again, the Club **discussed with tedious monotony, whether to waive the Rule which required a ballot** when considering the order in which nominations were considered. On this occasion **the solution adopted was to vote for candidates in the order in which they were set out in the meeting papers**, especially since the number of nominations did not exceed the available vacancies for membership.

On the question of whether members and guests should be paired at Open meetings:

***"... to allow a greater number of the company to become acquainted with each other"***

What a good idea!

Similarly, the familiar topic of whether wine should be included in with the cost of the meal, the proposed arrangements would impose an additional administrative burden but it was possible for a trial to be held if members wished. It was resolved to **leave the present practice unchanged**, although:

***"... all those reserving seats should also purchase a bottle of wine"***

and keep the issue under review. Of course.

While food and drink were clearly of central interest to the Club, a question was raised about:

***"The absence of dinners during the summer months when many academics were away on field work. However, those working in industry or government were not so obligated and the prospect of dining with the Club could relieve the monotony of a long hot summer."***

By a show of hands, the Secretary was asked to investigate the possibility of a Club meeting in September.

Quite so; victuals and club-ability are central to a dining club are they not?

Current 2024 Discussion Group member **Rod Graham** was elected in June.

### **1994**

At the June meeting, chaired by incoming President, Professor Sparks, it was agreed to continue with the experiment begun last year, of holding a meeting in September.

It was reported that the neighbouring **Royal Astronomical Society Dining Club (RAS)** was keen to join the Club at one of its dinners, and this was agreed.

In December the Secretary remarked that the Ordinary membership was close to the limit of 100 allowed by the Rules, and it was pointed out that this category of membership required members to attend at least one meeting in two consecutive sessions. Members who did not attend for good reason:

*“... could be declared to be no longer members is so declared by a ballot at a Close meeting.”*

However, considerable upset had occurred last time the Club had decided to enforce this Rule!

A joint meeting with the Geographical Society Dining Club was planned to be held in April 1995, and a possible joint meeting with the Royal Astronomical Society in September.

## **1995**

As noted above, the possibility of raising the limit on the Ordinary membership had been suggested, as had the possibility of reducing the territorial limit from 100 to 75 miles from London, or to introduce active and retired categories of membership, all of which would, of course, require changes to the Rules.

Administratively, the simplest measure was simply to raise the number of Ordinary members from 100 to 125, and this proposal would be put to the next Close meeting.

It was also noted that it had been a **long time since any members had been elected to Honorary membership** which, under the Rules, required at least 15 years Ordinary or Country membership, although:

*“... recent practice had been to adopt a 20-year cut-off before considering candidates.”*

Six members were elected as Honorary members without further ado.

Because of a rail strike (well known in 2023 too of course) it had proved impossible to meet with the RAS as planned and this had again been arranged for the month of September.

At the December meeting, the limit on **the number of Ordinary members was raised to 125**.

Current 2024 Discussion Group member **Hilary Downes** was elected in June and **Danny Clark-Lowes** in December.

## **1996**

The Treasurer drew attention to the increase in the cost of dinner and port at the Athenaeum and it was recommended that the subscription rate should be increase from £10 to £15 for Ordinary, and from £5 to £7.50 for Country membership. Considerable debate followed including a suggestion of having different rates for working and retired members, which was not supported. Instead, it was agreed to raise the subscription to £12 and £6 respectively.

It was also pointed out that there were:

*“... a number of contradictions and inconsistencies resulting from previous piecemeal changes”*

and it was agreed that Rule 3(ix) should read:

‘Country members shall be liable to pay one half of the subscription of Ordinary members under the same calendar arrangements.

As the last item of discussion at the December meeting, it was proposed that members:

***“... might wish to consider allowing members to make short statements on matters of topical geological interest after dinner”***

although the Secretary advised that there was merit in the suggestion, it might bring an air of formality to the proceedings and would need to be carefully handled if it were to remain light hearted and informative.

Sentiments which have remained at the heart of Group Discussions to this day.

Current 2024 Discussion Group members **Alison Ries** and **David Norbury** were elected in June, as was past **President Richard Fortey**.

### **1997**

The President, on the recommendation of the committee, invited the meeting to waive the rule concerning Honorary membership in respect of the retiring Executive of the Society, Mr R M Bateman.

*“The award of Honorary membership would be a small way in which the Club could recognise the very considerable contribution made by Richard Bateman over the past 17 years to the affairs of the Society.”*

The President also reported that the Club Secretary, **Mr E F P Nickless**, would retire from the Club given his appointment as the new Chief Executive Officer of the Society. Dr **Andy Fleet** had agreed to serve in this capacity instead.

The Treasurer reminded the meeting of the discussion in December that with a declining number of members dining, there was a projected fall in the reserves of the Club and that an increase in subscription rates might have to be recommended soon.

As an AOB item, concern was expressed that too few Athenaeum staff were available to help with the serving of pre-dinner drinks.

True to form, the Secretary was despatched to pursue the matter.

**Ted Nield** (former editor of Geoscientist and 2024 Discussion Group member) was elected in December.

### **1998**

As per tradition due to the President being away, the Club's longest serving member took the Chair for the June meeting.

The Secretary circulated a list of future meeting dates and invited discussion of the possibility of using the Society's rooms for more than one meeting per year. Members decided that:

*“... just one meeting at Burlington House per year was appropriate, feeling that the seating arrangements there are not ideal and a buffet is not an attractive alternative to a meal.”*

On the question of joint meetings, while the Secretary was supported in pursuing the topic with the RAS, it was pointed out that having arranged a dinner with the Royal Geographical Society, **the Club had never been invited back!**

It was also pointed out that **the Club's three decanters were not being used**. They had been presented to the Club in 1996 by the British Geological Survey. Naturally the Secretary undertook to pursue this important matter with the Athenaeum.

**Prof. Selley** proposed that the Club should send **Prof. Shearman a bottle of port in celebration of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday**. Members warmly supported this proposal.

After the Treasurer's report had been presented, Dr Skipp asked if notices of meetings could be sent by email and subscriptions collected by direct debit, to which the Treasurer:

***"Cautioned against rushing into modernisation of which he was suspicious."***

This probably neatly summed up the **diehard attitude** of the Club's procedures. Nonetheless, the committee was asked to report back at the next Close meeting on these two issues, and to check that all members remained Fellows of the Society.

The Secretary reported that the Athenaeum wished to raise the price of a meal to £27.50, this being only the second price revision in five years, and the first since September 1996. The Club currently carried the 12.5% staff charge on the present £25 price from funds. The committee had recommended revising the cost of a dinner to £28 for the next calendar year, with funds being used to make up the shortfall from the staff charge. However, **Prof. Stoneley urged consideration of alternative venues** and others gave examples of lighter charges, while others argued that the venue should not be changed for the sake of the Country members who needed familiar routes to London rail termini.

The final decision was to charge £28 for each dinner in 1999 and to ask the Athenaeum for an 'all up' price for 2000.

A combined proposal from the Treasurer and Secretary was presented, concerning a change to payment of membership dues; the rationale was to **align the Club's dining session and the financial year** which run from September, while the subscriptions fall due in December. It was agreed that the annual subs should be payable in September in future.

In the final Close meeting discussion of the session:

***"The issue of the availability of half bottles of wine was raised. Dr Martin expressed the opinion that half bottles were miserly and Charles Lyell would have complained. It was resolved to take no particular action."***

Sound decision making.

Current 2024 Discussion Group members **Jon Gluyas & Cally Oldershaw** (former Hon. Sec.) were elected in December and **Gilbert Kelling** was made an Honorary member.

## **1999**

The two options of holding meetings at the Society's apartments and of joint meetings with other Clubs were discussed, and agreed that one meeting a year at the Society was appropriate and that a joint event should be arranged for May 2000. Also, members were happy for the Secretary to **explore holding joint meetings, in the first instance with the RAS**.

This issue seems to rumble on perennially without resolution.

At the December meeting, the Club was faced with yet another change to routine at the Athenaeum, this time that it was no longer possible:

***“... to provide wines from a cellar list for logistic reasons. Wine choices would be limited to ‘Club’ reds and whites – limited to one of each kind.”***

The Secretary also reported, as requested at the last meeting, **that half bottles are not available**. No doubt a welcome decision by many.

Under AOB:

***“R Howarth suggested that the image of the Club was one of being male oriented, geriatric and exclusive, and that this led to a large proportion of the Society being cut off from the Club. He went on to suggest that the committee spread the spectrum of venues and include some low-cost alternatives.”***

Mr Fuller observed that Dan Ion had always slated it an exclusive club, and Dr Skipp felt people outside the earth sciences could be introduced for networking. Also:

***“Mr Wilson ‘as a retired Scottish Presbyterian’, announced that the cost of the dinner worried him but he did recognise that some felt it was good value.”***

The Club has never lacked diversity of opinions!

Current 2024 Discussion Group member **David Cook** was elected in June and **Jenny Bennett** in December.

## **2000**

At the June meeting, Chaired by Lord Oxburgh, there was an **extensive discussion about the matter of joint meetings with other dining clubs**. There was support for the RGS, whose turn it was to host, and for the RAS which the President supported, and **also support for other Burlington House societies**.

Such initiatives have also been pursued by the Discussion Group, equally without success however.

It was also suggested that the Club should:

***“... display archival material at meetings. Dr Martin supported this idea, pointing out that the Club’s archives are more extensive than the Society’s, for Charles Lyell is on record as saying he was no good for work following Club meetings.”***

Almost certainly with no surprise to anyone, the Treasurer proposed increasing the cost of a dinner in future to £30, reflecting the increase in the Athenaeum’s charges. The proposal was accepted by 13 votes to 2 and the committee was asked, once again:

***“... to explore whether the cost of dinners might include wine.”***

Perennial wishful thinking?

Current 2024 Discussion Group members **John Cosgrove** was elected in June and **Mark Moody-Stuart** in December.

## 2001

The June meeting consisted almost entirely of routine business and so it was not until the AOB item when the price of wine was mentioned, with a proposal that a price could be set for dinner including wine. However, the Treasurer did not like such 'packages' and it was suggested that **other arrangements could be made, for example a list kept at the bar to make sharing bottles easier.**

After much discussion it was decided to maintain the status quo and the Secretary undertook to 'negotiate' with the Athenaeum regarding the wines offered before each dinner.

Current 2024 Discussion Group member **Jenny Huggett** was elected in June

## 2002

Prof. **Max Coleman** raised the issue of the:

*"Paucity of attendance at recent meetings and of the problem of an ageing membership ... which was leading to a moribund state of the Club, which needed reinvigorating. He further suggested that as the Club did not seem to be attracting new members, the committee needed to consider the strategy for the Club and bring forward plans for its development. It needed to clarify its objectives"*

A **very** prescient comment.

In discussion, it was felt that ways should be investigated to get the Society's Council more involved, and also whether the cost of dinners was too high and perhaps putting off new members. Prof. Stoneley suggested that **there might be too many dinners in the diary** as well.

Prof. Clemens felt that **part of the attraction of the meetings was that they are held at the Athenaeum**, though accepting that it was good to hold one or two meetings per year at the Society. Prof. Moody posed the question of how newly elected members could be encouraged to attend, as so few seemed to do so.

It was agreed that the committee should review the situation and make recommendations to meet the concerns raised, bearing in mind the cost of dining and the need to attract and retain the 'rising geostars' as active members.

At the final meeting of the year in December, the Treasurer highlighted the **problem of collecting subscriptions from members**, which Prof. Styles felt was attributable to laziness, so he **suggested that subscriptions should be paid by standing order**. In addition, Dr Martin urged that subscriptions defaulters should be given one reminder then struck off.

Revolutionary fervour indeed.

Under Any Other Business, a **wide ranging and lively discussion took place concerning the state of the Club** and how it might develop.

The Secretary felt that the relatively poor turnout at meetings reflected a moribund state and suggested that there was a **need for a clear strategy for the Club's future and a new sense of purpose**. The issues may stem from the cost of dinners, the menu offered, the ambience and dress code of the Athenaeum, the perception of a closed or secret society, and the **difficulties of travel out of London after meetings**. As a short-term solution, he undertook to write a piece on the Club for Geoscientist and the website to advertise meeting dates.

Prof. Styles urged that meetings should be held to coincide with Council and Ordinary General meetings of the Society, while Dr Martin proposed that limits on numbers of members would foster a sense of exclusivity.

**Prof. Coleman expressed concern that the Club was lagging behind a rising, very active science and that this is not a sustainable situation. In the past he contended that the Club influenced the Society, whereas the reverse was now true.** The Club should engineer a sense of purpose for the Society and act as a 'ginger' group for the Society.

**Prof. Selley** supported the idea of a 'Geoscientist' article as well as advertising a calendar of meetings on the website.

Mr Holt clarified that the raison d'etre of the Club is a social one and concerned with the dissemination of ideas, and these should act as guiding principles.

Dr Martin pointed out that these principles actually predate the Society's formal foundation, and therefore members should be **faithful to historic roots and talk science, but not take itself too seriously**. He added that in his time as Secretary, meeting times were tied to important Society meetings and that should be the future.

Dr Clayton stressed the age disparity of the Club, noting that he was one of the youngest members of the Club, yet one of the oldest by Society standards.

Mr Hardman suggested that members live in an age when **young people are very purposeful and would not join the Club solely for dining**, but might be attracted by an occasional discourse.

Various members made reference to the age profile of learned societies and that **the Athenaeum was actually a disincentive for younger people**.

Dr Warren made an argument for the Club to define its role and purpose better, saying there was little central discussion; it did not act as a Club at all and that **having a good evening is not sufficient**.

Dr Hepworth concluded that **the Club needs to change its image with the objective of attracting young people and discussing cutting edge science**. He suggested the Secretary should try to identify what the Club is really about and this should be discussed at a Close meeting in the near future.

Wonderful points here but they do imply 'adapt or die'!

There were no nominations for membership.

## **2003**

Once again, in June, the AOB item was where discussion concerning the state of the Club and how it might develop continued in a lively and wide-ranging fashion, with all members present contributing.

Mr Holt opened the discussion by pointing out that there were **two schools of thought about the Club: one that it was too stuffy and formal and needed to attract the young by arranging discussions, and the other that the Club was about good food, good company and spontaneous discussion** which should not be forced. Views were expressed concerning these two schools of thought.

Prof. Holland pointed out that the Club seemed to have changed from being an academic body to one dominated by the oil industry.

Prof. Dewey expressed being comfortable with the Club being an 'older persons' gathering and suggested it should stay that way as the young do get older!

The desirability of joint meetings with other dining clubs was explored with pro- and anti-views put forward.

Prof. Holland and Dr Cocks stressed the need for individuals to encourage other individuals of a 'clubbable' nature, to attend meetings with a view to them becoming members.

The question of guests being able to attend at reduced rates was raised by **Prof. Selley** and Dr Cocks.

Prof. Moody expressed the view that the **cost of a dinner was high, particularly for younger people**, but others believed it to be reasonable.

The Secretary told the meeting that **Prof. Selley** had drafted an article about the Club which would be published in Geoscientist to inform Fellows of the Society about the Club. He also explained that a notice would appear in subsequent Geoscientists inviting Fellows to attend Open meetings of the Club, thus returning to previous Club practice.

Prof. Simmons suggested various **ways of promoting the Club including having a talk on the 'Geology of Wine'**, trying different venues, and working through the structure of the Society. He stressed the need for content which should not be lost in any marketing exercise.

During the discussion the question of the availability of the minutes for members was raised and the Secretary undertook to see what the Rules dictated and to keep members aware of efforts to promote the Club. Mr Higginbottom asked for clarification about the rules for Open and Ordinary meetings of the Club.

Dr Hepworth summarised the issues discussed and **asked if those present favoured some form of specific discourse at meetings but the majority of those present were not in favour**, and he expressed disappointment at this, and hoped that the Geoscientist articles and other initiatives, including by individual members, would enhance the health and wellbeing of the Club in future years.

The **membership totalled 193**, composed of 43 Honorary, 83 Ordinary, 44 Country, 10 Supernumerary and 13 Temporary members. The committee to serve the President consisted of **A J Fleet** (Secretary), **C J Clayton** (Treasurer), J Simmons, S van Rose and **E W Nield**.

Under AOB, the **idea of a Club fieldtrip to an area of vineyards was proposed**. The idea was welcomed warmly and explored in depth. **Prof. Selley**, Prof. Simmons and **Dr Huggett** undertook to take the idea forward.

There were only two new members elected.

## 2004

The President, Prof. Styles, took the Chair. The **idea of a Club fieldtrip was greeted enthusiastically** and it was agreed that a suitable venue and date be sought and circulated.

A proposal from Dr John Martin that **Club papers be lodged with the Society for archiving** was readily approved.

The Secretary raised the issue of the Society's bicentennial in 2007; members present agreed to consider ways of celebrating the event.

The subjects of growing the membership and improving attendance at meetings was discussed again. **The President urged members to bring more guests or groups. Mr Nickless** suggested each member should bring at least one guest per year. Dr Downes proposed that **members should seek to raise the proportion of lady members.**

For the December meeting, **Prof. Selley** took the Chair and 26 members were present. The membership of the Club totalled 190. Under AOB a number of topics were discussed: **ideas for celebrating the Society's forthcoming bicentennial year in 2007 were raised**, including a special Open meeting, linking with the History of Geology Specialist Group (HOGG) for dinner or lunch. The committee was asked to take forward ideas and report back.

Dr J Martin raised **the issue of limits on membership and suggested that they be removed** as it did not seem likely to be approached. **Prof. Selley** proposed that the upper limits should go and this was seconded by R Hardman and approved. Lively discussion followed on **attracting new members and the possibility of financing guests in order to incentivise new members, but no clear strategy was reached.**

2024 Group member **David Jenkins** was elected an Honorary member.

## **2005**

After a convivial dinner in the Garden Room of the Athenaeum, members assembled for a Close meeting that was, by acclaim, chaired by Prof. Charles Holland by special courtesy of the two members more senior to him who were present, Peter Sabine and John Hepworth. A total of 17 members were present.

At the December meeting, in the absence of the President, **Prof. John Mather** took the chair.

The Secretary reported that the total membership was 186 and he would pursue the outstanding subscriptions. It was agreed that any member with more than two years outstanding subscriptions should be 'struck off'.

The Treasurer proposed that the price of a dinner should be raised to £35 to cover increased costs by the Athenaeum and this was approved.

Possible Club events during the Society's bicentenary were discussed and agreed that Prof. Mather would report on the possibility of updating and publishing the history of the Club. Also, Dr Warren would investigate the possibility of a joint dinner with the Council of the National Museum of Wales, and Mr Hardman suggested that the Club could invest in a fund to buy vintage port to mark the event.

**Prof. Selley** was thanked for the trips around Denbies vineyard which he arranged and led during the 2004-5 session.

Current Discussion Group members **Ruth Allington** (2022-3 President) and **Adam Law** were elected.

## **2006**

At the June meeting, Peter Sabine took the Chair in the absence of the President. Seventeen other members were present. The Secretary was absent but had reported that the membership totalled 183 members.

The Club next met in the Council Room of the Society in November with the President, Dr J Hepworth in the Chair and 27 members were present.

The Secretary reported that the membership totalled 189 and as the Treasurer wished to retire, he proposed Mr A J P King be elected as Treasurer and this was carried. Mr C J Clayton was elected as an Honorary

member in recognition of 10 years' service as Treasurer of the Club, and Mr E Nickless was also made an Honorary member after serving as Secretary from 1988 to 1997.

Current Group Discussion member **John Bennett** (& present Hon. Sec.) was elected a member in June and future Society President, **Mike Daly**, was elected in November.

## 2007

**Peter Warren** took the Chair in the absence of the President at the June meeting.

The Treasurer gave a brief report on the Club's finances. While these were in balance, increased income was needed and he therefore proposed that subscriptions should be raised for the 2007-8 session to £15 for Ordinary members and £6 for Country members. Subscriptions were last raised in December 1996. After discussion, a proposal to raise subscriptions to £20 and £10 respectively was carried.

At the following meeting in December, **Prof. Selley** took the Chair in the absence of the President and 18 members were present. The total membership was 193.

The Treasurer's report was tabled and accepted. He also raised the issue of charges for dinners no longer meeting the actual cost and the impending annual increase by the Athenaeum. **Some discussion of the Athenaeum as a venue took place, inevitably, but the consensus was to remain there for the near future**, and to raise the price of a dinner from January 2008 to £40.

The Treasurer indicated his wish to retire from the post next year. Mr **Adam Law** was proposed by the Secretary as the new Treasurer, seconded by Mr J Simmons, and agreed unanimously.

Suzanne van Rose also wished to stand down from the committee and it was agreed that **Jenny Huggett** would succeed her.

**A motion to strike off members who had not paid their subscriptions was proposed, seconded, and approved.**

The possibility of holding dinners outside London was discussed. J Simmons agreed to look into a possible venue in Oxford. Further joint meetings with other clubs discussed briefly.

Votes of thanks were recorded to:

- An anonymous donor for a gift of £1,000
- **Jenny Huggett** for organising and presenting a wine tasting for the Club at Burlington House as part of the Society's bicentenary celebration on 18 April 2007
- **Dick Moody** for organising a highly successful dinner at the Connaught Rooms on 12 November 2007 as a joint event with the History Group (HOGG) to mark the bicentenary, where about half of the audience wore period costume\*.
- The Treasurer and the committee.

Current 2024 Discussion Group members **Malcolm Brown** and **David Hammond** were elected in June, & **Robert Knipe** in December.



**Fig. 5.** Members of the HOGG Committee on the night of the 12 November 2007. From left to right: Peter Tandy (Newsletter Editor), Nic Bilham, Patrick Boylan, Cherry Lewis (Chairman), John Mather, Alan Bowden (Treasurer), Anne O'Connor (Secretary), Richard Moody. Missing members: Beris Cox and Anthony Brook. Courtesy: Ricky at Artistic Images, Ai Events (modified by R. T. J. Moody).

\*See *'The Making of the Geological Society of London, Special Publication 317, 2009, p439.*

## 2008

Peter Sabine again took the Chair in the absence of the President.

Uniquely, there were no proposals for membership; some discussion followed and Edmund Nickless repeated his previous suggestion that:

***"Everyone here this evening undertakes to propose at least one new member at the next Close meeting".***

The proposal was seconded and carried by 11 votes to 1.

The Secretary reported that the total membership was 178.

There was a brief discussion to consider other venues (e.g. the RAF Club) and dinners with other societies.

For the December meeting, Peter Sabine Chaired the meeting once again and the Treasurer raised the issue of subscriptions being paid late and it:

***"Was observed that geologists were never the best financially organised people."***

The popular themes of the subscription rate and, in the light of increasing charges by the Athenaeum, the **dinner price, were discussed yet again**. One might have thought that this would by now have been a fixed item on the agenda!

It was agreed that the subscriptions should remain at £20/£10, and so the real debate was whether the charge for a dinner should be £40 or £45; a vote taken, with 6 votes were cast for £40 and 9 votes for £45. Very close voting or a near refusal to face reality?

It was noted that Tony King would hand over to **Adam Law** as Treasurer in the coming months, and a vote of thanks was offered to Tony for his work.

The frequency of future meetings was discussed and it was decided that the Club would continue with the same frequency of 8 or 9 per year. **That the cost of dinners was such a highly contentious issue, it seems strange that a reduction in their number (to say once a quarter) was never considered.**

**Edmund Nickless** suggested that new members might be encouraged if more members brought guests to meetings, and John Simmons suggested that first-time guests might dine at a price of £10 less than the dinner cost.

## 2009

In the absence of the President, **Dick Moody** took the Chair.

Future meetings and their venues were discussed AGAIN. **It was proposed to hold 1 or 2 meetings at other venues than at the Athenaeum, in less formal surroundings.** It was agreed to try this during the 2009-10 session.

A number of issues were raised under AOB. The Secretary suggested that it was time to revise the Club Rules in order to simplify them and **widen those geoscientists who could join.** **E Nickless** suggested that they should focus on being more inclusive.

The Secretary also proposed that **electronic communication** should be the default way of conducting business and this was agreed, provided the specific needs of individual members for written communications were met.

A request for cheese to be served before dessert was made and the Secretary agreed to enquire about this.

A number of **suggestions concerning increased attendance at meetings were discussed.** AGAIN. Also joint meetings with other societies, a ladies evening, events that coincide with the Society's flagship meetings, and finally a survey of members asking why they did not dine as frequently as in the past.

At the December meeting, it was notable that for the first time, the minutes did not state who chaired the meeting. It was also coincided with an **unprecedented number of apologies**, nine. December meetings were clearly not popular, understandably really as it is guaranteed to be a short working month.

The total **membership** was stated as 37 Honorary, 78 Ordinary, 40 Country, 11 Supernumerary, and 13 Temporary (i.e. Council) members, **totalling 179.**

Following the Secretary's report there was a discussion on a range of topics concerning attracting new members, to the format of meetings.

**John Bennett** asked what might be the Club's 'unique selling point' for 30-55 year-olds. **P Warren favoured having a speaker at meetings** while other members preferred random, free ranging discussions, and inevitably there was much encouragement for members to bring potential new young members.

Under AOB, the Secretary raised the issue of how to mark the 2,500<sup>th</sup> meeting which would take place early in 2011. **J Bennett** suggested a clear focus on introducing young members. **P Warren** proposed a theme of "where we are and where we came from". The committee was asked to consider the matter further.

Current 2024 Discussion Group members **Mike Young** and **Adam Law** were elected in June.

## 2010

In the absence of the President, **Prof Selley** took the Chair.

The Secretary reported that the total membership number was 169, 10 less than last year, rising slightly by December when it totalled 176.

Venues for the 2010-11 session were discussed after the Secretary sought advice on the matter, and it was **agreed that meetings should stay at the Athenaeum**, except one at Burlington House. Not surprisingly, it was also agreed that **the 2,500<sup>th</sup> meeting should also take place at the Athenaeum**.

The Treasurer's report was accepted and after discussion, it was agreed that the price of a dinner should rise to £50. Plans for that meeting were outlined.

**Jonathan Craig** was elected a member in December.

## 2011

The Secretary was pleased to report that **an exceptionally high number of new members had been proposed**, 8 for Ordinary membership and 2 for Country membership.

Following the success of the 2,500<sup>th</sup> meeting, it was agreed that similar meetings to which **members were encouraged to invite spouses and friends, should take place about once every five years**.

Under AOB, (current Discussion Group member) **Colin Summerhayes** asked what steps were being taken to increase membership; the reply was that this was in the hands of all members. He also commented:

*“... that nearly all members were men, to which Julia Hubbard asked what the matter was with that? Discussion on this matter ended at that point.”*

In December, the minutes (as per recent practice) did not state who was chairing the meeting but it was later reported that the President took the opportunity to briefly review the achievements of the Society in recent months, highlighting the Poetry Day and a reorganisation relating to the Library and Publishing.

The Secretary reported an increase in membership to 184, and that the **average attendance had been 15** for the present session (excluding the 2,500<sup>th</sup> meeting). This compared to an average of 18 during the 2009-10 session.

The Treasurer's recommendation to raise the price of a dinner to £52 was accepted. Mike Ridd raised the question of moving to a less costly venue. Peter Warren pointed out that the Athenaeum charged no room hire and suggested that it would be **difficult to find significantly cheaper prices elsewhere**. After discussion it was agreed to increase subscriptions to £25 and £12.50.

On behalf of Tony King, **Adam Law**, and other members of the committee, **Ted Nield** proposed that the Secretary, **Andy Fleet**, be an Honorary member in recognition of his services as Secretary.



An Open meeting in the Garden room(?) at the Athenaeum in 2011

Current 2024 Discussion Group members **Nic Bilham** and **Richard Scrivener** were elected in June and in December **Andy Fleet** was made an Honorary member.

## 2012

Due to the absence of the President, P Sabine took the Chair.

The Secretary reported that membership totalled 180.

For the umpteenth time, there was a brief **discussion of venues for future meetings but it was agreed to continue to meet at the Athenaeum for the 2012-13 session**. It does make you wonder if members have very short memories! It was also agreed that future **calls for meetings should only be sent via email** (except for those without email who would be sent a list of meeting dates once a year before the session began).

A request was made to try and avoid holding meetings on which Shell sponsored lectures or similar high-profile events were taking place at the Society. The Secretary had endeavoured to do this but sometimes lecture dates changed after the Club meetings had been arranged, or the availability of the Athenaeum had precluded this.

**Prof. Selley** suggested that members attending Club meetings at Burlington House might bring wine on a 'BYO' basis.

This being the **last meeting at which Andy Fleet attended as Secretary**, the meeting passed a vote of thanks to him for his time as Secretary, and also one to his PA, Mrs Shashu Ladji, who had done so much to help organise Club meetings. He was succeeded by **Cally Oldershaw**.

At the December meeting, the membership totalled 184, the Club had dined on eight occasions, with an average attendance of 18.

Current 2024 Discussion Group **Susan Fleet, David Shilston** (past President), **Richard Trounson** and **Russell Garwood** were elected. **Andy Fleet** was thanked for his time as the Club's Honorary Secretary.

## 2013

While there is a copy of an agenda for the June meeting, no copy of the minutes could be found.

For the December meeting, President David Shilston sent his apologies, along with nine members. John Mather took the Chair. Two new lady members were elected. The membership totalled 178. In the Minute book from June 1982, this was also the first time that the minutes had been typed.

**Members suggested inviting a speaker to give a short presentation** at a meeting later in the session and the Secretary agreed to act on this.

Following on from the successful dinner at the Oriental Club, it was also agreed that at least one dinner would be at an alternative venue in addition to the dinner at the Society. The RAC was suggested and the Treasurer would check availability for the April meeting.

## 2014

At the June meeting, the President, David Manning, took the Chair. There were 14 apologies. One of the three new members elected was perhaps especially notable, **Crispin Tickell**. (Sir Crispin had a distinguished diplomatic career (GCMG KCVO FZS), and had since been a prominent environmentalist and academic. He died in 2022).

Following the Treasurer's report, there was a discussion about the future of the Club. **The efforts of the Secretary in finding new dining venues such as the Oriental Club and the Naval club and having wine included with the meal**, had increased interest from members.

*"However, although there had been an increase in numbers of members dining, the level of membership has not risen and **the position will soon become unsustainable**. Membership remained at 178, as before."*

**Cally Oldershaw** announced that she would be standing down as Secretary in December. **Danny Clark-Lowes** was welcomed as a new member of the committee following his election. The committee asked for any member to contact the Secretary if willing to be put forward as the prospective Secretary at the Close meeting in December.

The Secretary had circulated meeting dates via email. However, although dates for 2014 and 2015 had been matched with Society Council meetings, further Shell lectures had been arranged since the Club dates had been circulated and room bookings made.

The President suggested options to **explore the future sustainability of the Club**. He reported that he had asked a small group to work on this, chaired by Andy Fleet, with Adam Law and Helen Scholes (who is not a member of the Club). **The working group hoped to present a series of options at the Close meeting on 15 October**. These would be discussed at the Close meeting on 10 December.

Following a discussion members suggested options that could be explored including:

- encouraging diversity and a younger membership
- greater support and attendance from the Society's Council and committee members
- approaching employers for support for younger members
- reduced fees for younger members

- subsidised dinners and cheaper eating options and venues on occasions.

In the meantime, it was agreed that **seating at one large table worked well** and could be used for discussions at both Open and Close meetings.

At the December meeting, President David Manning took the Chair; there were 31 other members present and apologies received from 15 others.

Committee members Tony King, **Jenny Huggett** and **Cally Oldershaw** stood down. There had been no members willing to be put forward as a prospective Secretary or committee member. The President asked members to re-consider the position and contact him if interested.

The membership totalled 169.

Regarding the future of the Club, the President spoke about the report that had been prepared by the working group, and Andy Fleet reported on feedback that had been received from members during the consultation period. Four options were discussed:

1. **Do nothing, in which case the Club will likely become unsustainable.**
2. **Take measures to wind up the Club.**
3. **Maintain the status quo but continue to seek ways to sustain the club (e.g. by attracting new members, being more affordable etc), then re-assess interest at an agreed point in the future.**
4. **Approach the Society to explore ways of assimilating the Club within the Society.**

Taking into account member feedback and the discussion at dinner, options 1 and 2 were dismissed. It was agreed that options 3 and 4 be explored further both:

- a) Continuing Independently from the Society, AND
- b) Working together with the Society.

Findings would be reported on 4 February 2015 [although this was postponed due to illness].

A vote of thanks was given to those members of the committee standing down. Cally Oldershaw was thanked for her valuable contribution as Secretary and for '**bringing the Club into the digital age**'.

Current Discussion Group members **Andrew Dobrzanski** (Chairman) and **Richard Herbert** were elected and Bryan Skipp (the writer's own sponsor) was elected as an Honorary member, in recognition of his support of the Club over many years.

## 2015

The President, David Manning, was in the Chair, 27 others attended and 16 members sent their apologies. **Danny Clark-Lowes** was acting Secretary. Given that the Club was thought to be in a transitional phase, it was agreed that the current committee would remain in post for the immediate future.

The President invited **Andy Fleet**, chair of the working group, to give a brief summary of the proposals and options offered in response to the decline in numbers dining. He then asked Adam Law to review the financial consequences of this decline, and **Danny Clark-Lowes** to report on the responses received to the recent questionnaire sent to members.

Of the 68 members who responded, **59 were in favour of bringing the Club closer to the Society**, whilst 4 voted against and 5 abstained or sought clarification. It was accepted that the many helpful suggestions of

respondents should be acted upon and that revisions to the proposed new Rules would be made and these revised new Rules put to a vote at the next Close meeting.

However, the following proposition was put forward which, following customary discussion, was supported unanimously by a show of hands:

*"As per the results of the consultative ballot, this meeting agrees that, to secure the future of the Club, the Club seeks to collaborate with the Geological Society of London so that membership of the Club will be open to all Fellows of the Society with individuals being able to opt to be active members of the Club, with the Club continuing to be run by a committee, but with the administrative support for the Club being provided by the Society."*

The President was also in the Chair for the December meeting, with 24 other members present. There were 14 apologies. The Club had dined on eight occasions, once at Burlington House and seven at the Athenaeum, with an average attendance of 23. Seven new members were elected. **The membership remained at 169.**

Discussions with the Society about the future of the Club were reported by Andy Fleet; a draft Club constitution had been drawn up and some useful comments received. The membership's attention was drawn to an email communication from the President to the membership on this subject. Details of the draft constitution were discussed and comments from members not able to attend were relayed to the meeting. It was agreed by a show of hands that the new constitution be adopted in principle, subject to incorporation of various drafting points raised at the meeting and any amendments required by the Society.

Current Discussion Group members **Edward Bromhead** and **Ian Simms** were elected.

## **2016**

The President, **Malcolm Brown**, took the Chair, with 11 other members present. There were 18 apologies and no proposals for membership.

Regarding discussion with the Society about the future of the Club, a letter from the President had been circulated to the membership prior to the meeting, together with **Terms of Reference (ToR) drawn up by the Society as a framework for the creation of a new specialist group to be called the Geological Society Discussion Group.**

The President explained the background to these ToR and, after customary discussion, it was **agreed unanimously that this represented a satisfactory way forward. It was noted that the Society would conduct the administration of the Discussion Group's meetings**, as it already does for some of its other specialist groups.

An additional Close meeting would address the matter formally and for a vote to be taken.

The Close meeting on **13<sup>th</sup> July was the 2,548<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Club and introduced by the President, Malcolm Brown, as a special single-issue meeting**. There were 22 other members present, with nine apologies. The proposal was to adopt the draft Terms of Reference and this was passed, there being a quorum and a greater than two thirds majority in favour.

In response to a question about the role of the Science Committee, Society staff member Nic Bilham explained that although all Specialist Groups formally report to that committee, this does not diminish their significance within the Society or distance them from Council.

The Terms of Reference were as follows:

It is proposed that the Geological Society Discussion Group (GSDG) should be a specialist group of the Geological Society of London (the Society) and should report to the Science Committee. The proposed Aims, Terms of Reference, Structure, and Method of Working are outlined below.

#### *Aims*

- To further discussion and debate on subjects of particular interest within the geosciences that relate to the activities of the Society and/or arise from scientific meetings of the Society;
- To discuss and debate other geoscience matters raised because of the timeliness or topicality of an issue;
- To engage with the broadest group of individuals interested in the geosciences;
- To broaden through discussion the recognised boundaries of the geosciences;
- To cover all directly incurred costs.

#### *Terms of Reference*

- To operate within the Bye-laws and Regulations of the Society;
- To report to the Science Committee on activities and a plan of events and functions;\* - see below
- To prepare an annual budget delivered to the Director of Finance & Operations in accordance with the Society's budgetary timetable;
- To adhere to approved budgets and where there is a variation to bring this to the attention of the Director of Finance & Operations and Finance & Planning Committee;
- Not to run the GSDG in deficit without specific formal approval from the Executive Secretary and/or Director of Finance & Operations;
- To ensure that the plan of activities is self-funded against charges and that this is reflected in the budgetary plan;
- To meet all requirements for submission of financial year-end returns, as determined by the Society;
- The GSDG's activities and/or events will be open to all with an interest in the topic of the event;
- Membership will be open to all Fellows and their guests.

#### *Structure*

- A Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer and Secretary will be elected from within the membership of the GSDG. The term of office will be three years extendable for another term.
- The committee of the GSDG may include up to 4 elected and up to 8 co-opted members.

#### *Method of Working*

- A modest subscription will be charged in addition to the standard Fellowship subscription, through the annual renewal process.
- The committee of the GSDG will meet up to four times a year.
- An Annual General Meeting of the GSDG will be held at a time to fit in with the budgetary process of the Society and to approve the subscription.
- Events, including evenings and day meetings, will occur throughout the year and on a regular basis.
- The GSDG will provide a report to the Science Committee of its activities to suit the Science Committee's programme.
- The Science Committee will keep the GSDG's terms of reference under review and may change in consultation with the GSDG's committee.

Version 1, 1st June 2016

Minor revisions 7<sup>th</sup> September 2016

Thus, **July 2016 can be regarded as the formal end of the Geological Society Dining Club**. However, it appears that no arrangement had been made for the membership list of about 169 (as recorded in the 2014 Club minutes) to be transferred to the Society's own membership database, and it took several years for the database to be adapted and so in the end of year subscription renewal process, Society Fellows were not alerted to the need to 'tick' the Discussion Group option and membership plummeted.

## Geological Society Discussion Group

The inaugural meeting of the Discussion Group took place on **14<sup>th</sup> December 2016**, chaired by President **Malcolm Brown**, with 21 other members and one guest, at the Athenaeum. There were 13 apologies.

The President explained that this was the first AGM of the newly formed Group and was to be conducted under the procedures of Specialist Group AGMs. He then gave a short history of the creation of the Discussion Group.

At the time of the closed meeting of the Club in December 2015, consideration was being given to revising the Club 'Rules'. The intention was to create a new constitution that fostered closer relations with the Society **in order increase the membership and attendance at dinners**. However, by the time of the closed meeting in June 2016, the Society had indicated that what was required, was the establishment of a new Specialist Group with agreed Terms of Reference.

In the minute book, a resolution was passed on 13 July 2016 at a special meeting to 'establish ourselves as a specialist Group of the Society' and to accept the Terms of Reference and in September 2016 the Society's Council passed a resolution to establish the GSDG as a specialist group of the Society.

It is interesting to note that the Club decided to seek closer links with the Society 'in order to increase the membership and attendance at dinners'. It was the Society, not the Club, that required, that the Club became a Specialist Group with 'Terms of Reference'. They were modified very slightly for clarification and dated 'December 2016 albeit with minor clarifications in March 2017' and included in the Group AGM minutes of 23rd March 2017.

At a Special Meeting of the Club in July 2016, Terms of Reference drawn up by the Society were tabled and recommended as a workable framework. These were approved, there being a quorum and a greater than two thirds majority in favour.

In September, the Society Council duly passed a resolution to establish this specialist group as the Geological Society Discussion Group. It was noted that the GSDG's events would be open to all Fellows with an interest in the topic of the event, and that the Society would conduct the necessary administration, as it already did for some of the other specialist groups.

The President noted that, because the accounting year of the GSDG needed to be brought into line with that of the Society, future AGMs would be held in March, after the Treasurer completed the accounts from the previous calendar year.

The Treasurer reported that the accounts were nearing completion showing a healthy balance of about £7,500. A resolution to close the Club account and transfer funds to the Society, as per committee recommendation, was passed by a show of hands. This would in effect be ring fenced by the Society for the Group.

The Acting Secretary reported on meetings held over the previous year; between December 2015 and November 2016, the Club dined on 10 occasions, once at Burlington House and nine times at the Athenaeum, with an average of 14 (down from 23 last year), with a range from as few as 6 up to 25. Membership figures for 2016 were 34 Honorary, 81 Ordinary, 40 Country, 12 Supernumerary and 28 Temporary, totalling 195.

He also outlined plans for the 2017 programme with meetings held at lower cost venues (Bumpkins and the Gay Hussar) as well as at Burlington House and the Athenaeum. It was envisaged that the cost of dinners would range from about £30 to £60, the objecting being to broaden the appeal. Speakers were being invited to introduce and lead discussions on topics for discussion over dinner.

In November 2016 the first meeting with a speaker was Sarah Gordon (FGS), who introduced a lively discussion on: Water, Hazards and Risks, at the Athenaeum.

**John Talbot** and **David Hammond** joined the Group.

## 2017

A committee meeting of the Group took place at the Society on 23 March with the President in the Chair, and with apologies from eight members. The President presented the report on behalf of the Treasurer. The accounts for 2016 showed a small loss, and at the year end the balance stood at £8,268. It was noted that from a financial and banking point of view the finances would be managed by the Society in future.

It was explained that the annual membership subscription would be retained, attendance at meetings by those who are not members [of the Group] being subject to a supplementary payment. On the recommendation of the committee, it was agreed by a show of hands that membership dues would be £30 for Ordinary members and £15 for Country members. The Supernumerary and Temporary categories were now obsolete. There would continue to be a £7 per person supplement for non-Fellows attending as guests and for Fellows who are not Members; with those registered for an undergraduate or postgraduate degree (students) being exempt from the requirement to pay the supplement.

Election of the committee. The Terms of Reference stipulated that a Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer and Secretary should be elected from within the membership, with an option for up to four other members co-opted. President **Malcolm Brown** would continue as Chairman, **David Norbury** would take up the role of Vice Chairman, Adam Law was re-elected as Treasurer and Danny Clark-Lowes was elected as Secretary. **Nic Bilham**, **Edmund Nickless** and **Alex Whitaker** were proposed and seconded as additional members.

The Discussion events of the year were as follows:

*Prof Alex Whittaker, 'Stratigraphy, Lost in Translation?' at Bumpkins restaurant;  
Hugh Dennis, 'Subsurface sand remobilisation & injection: implications for oil & gas exploration & development', at Burlington House;  
Kate Royce, 'Pingos' at the Athenaeum;  
Phil Gibbard, 'Opening of the Dover Straits' at the Gay Hussar restaurant;  
Glen Burridge, 'On risk' at the Gay Hussar restaurant;  
Kitty Hall, 'Do geologists get to the top?' at Bumpkins restaurant;  
Prof Chris Jackson, 'Silver Pit Crater, Southern N Sea' at the Athenaeum;  
Members 'Show and Tell' evening at the Athenaeum.*

A summer outing to Denbies Winery, Dorking was led by Prof. **Dick Selley** (2024 Discussion Group member).

## 2018

The next AGM was held on 24 April 2018 at Burlington House. As President Malcolm Brown was absent, the most long-standing member, Richard Bateman, presided with David Norbury chairing the meeting. Fourteen members and two guests were present, with other members sending apologies.

Treasurer **Adam Law** presented his report. The accounts for 2017 were divided into the year ending 31 August (the final financial year of the Club) and 1<sup>st</sup> September to 31<sup>st</sup> December. These showed a bank balance of £8,024 at the end of August, and a balance of £9,188 at the end of December 2017. The balance on the account at April 2018 was to be transferred to the Society. **Adam Law** wished to stand down at the next AGM. **Edmund Nickless** thanked the Treasurer for his tireless work.

Prof. **Max Coleman** was added to the committee and **Chris Johns** joined the Group.

The Secretary added that during 2017 the Group had held eight meetings, two at the Athenaeum, one at Burlington House and five at lower cost venues (Bumpkins and Gay Hussar). Costs ranged from £30 to £60, with an average attendance of 18, up from 14 the year before.

Membership figures of 153 were not significantly different to those from the previous year.

The Society took on responsibility for GSDG membership for 2018, collecting these with the Fellowship renewals in the Autumn 2017. However, this had not proved trouble free and efforts were being made by the committee to ensure that all members who had not yet renewed were contacted.

It was agreed that the committee would approach previous Honorary members of the Club inviting them voluntarily to pay annual Group fees (£30 or £15) as they were not part of the normal payment and renewal process.

Speakers introducing topics for discussion were:

*Mike Searle, 'Channel Flow in the Greater Himalaya' at the Gay Hussar restaurant;*

*Adrian Paye, 'Buildings conservation and building stone' at the Athenaeum;*

*David Shilston, 'Triumph and disaster – the effective use of case histories' at Burlington House;*

*John Simmons, 'Geological disposal of radioactive waste in the UK' at Bumpkins restaurant;*

*Members 'Show and Tell' evening at the Athenaeum.*

There was also a discussion of geological objects brought by members, and a tour of the meteorite collection in the Natural History Museum for the summer outing.

## 2019

In the absence of President Nick Rogers, the most long-standing member, **Dick Selley**, presided while **David Norbury** chaired the AGM on 18 April at the Society. Fourteen members and three non-members were present. **Adam Law** remained as Treasurer for another year but **Nic Bilham** offered he would take on this role. It was agreed that past President **Malcolm Brown** would be co-opted onto the committee.

The Secretary's report was tabled; there had been six meetings, the average attendance had been 16, down from 18 in the previous year, and below our target of greater than 20.

In terms of membership, those from 2019 were collected with Fellowship renewals, many of the Club's Honorary members had taken up the suggestion of paying the Group subscriptions voluntarily. Otherwise, the fully paid up Ordinary and Country dues totalled 73 members.

One of the regular venues, the Gay Hussar, had sadly closed for business but it was hoped that the King's Head would be a suitable alternative. The Treasurer's report was presented by **Nic Bilham** who stated that financial records for each meeting had been kept by the Conference Office and provisional accounts for 2018 showed a positive balance of £478. He added that:

*"For a number of administrative reasons and despite the best efforts of the Treasurer, it had not proved possible to agree a final figure to transfer to the Society. As a result, the Dining Club bank account had not yet been closed."*

Speakers introducing topics for discussion were:

*John Gluyas, 'Decarbonisation' at Bumpkins restaurant;  
John Cosgrove, 'The Albert Memorial' at Burlington House;  
Adrian Jones, 'Deep Carbon' at the Athenaeum;  
Jonathan Turner, 'The Critically stressed Earth' at the Kings Head, Stafford St;  
Members 'Show & Tell' at the Athenaeum.*



Summer outing to Darwin's home at Down House, Kent in July 2019

## 2020

The AGM for the year was delayed until September due to the Covid infection, and was followed by a Discussion on Zoom led by **Max Coleman** on 'How on Earth did Life start'.

In the absence of the President the most long-standing member, **Dick Selley**, presided and **David Norbury** chaired the meeting once again. Fifteen members participated.

The Secretary reported that during 2019 the Discussion Group had held five meetings, two at the Athenaeum, one at Burlington House and two at lower cost venues (Bumpkins and the Kings Head). Costs to members ranged from £34 to £69. A summer outing was arranged to Down House (Darwin's residence in Kent) where a geologist curator gave us a tour. The average attendance at dinner meetings was 14, down from 16 in the previous year. Numbers of members' guests attending meetings was similar to previous years. The total membership was 70.

For the first time, summaries of each Discussion had been made by John Bennett from June 2018 onwards and put on the Society's website, not only as a record of the Group's output, but also for the Fellowship as a whole.

Treasurer Nic Bilham summarised his report which had been circulated prior to the meeting. He had been acting Treasurer for some 16 months prior to this AGM. He noted that when the former Dining Club became a

Specialist Group of the Geological Society, it had been agreed that the Society would provide administrative support, including collecting subscriptions and dining fees.

As part of this arrangement, it was agreed that the GSDG's bank balances would be transferred to the Society. The current balance of money due to be transferred was £10,638. This remained outstanding for reasons that were not clear. In the meantime, an unsatisfactory split in the GSDG's finances had continued. There was verbal agreement that the GSDG will continue to exercise control over the balance of its accounts once these are transferred to the Society.

Dinner meetings continue to make a small loss but the loss on dinners was more than offset by annual subscription income of £30 for Ordinary Members and £15 for Country Members.

**Adam Law** was thanked for 10 years as Treasurer and **Danny Clark-Lowes** was thanked for his 5 years of service as Secretary. He was succeeded by **John Bennett**.

Committee members continuing were **Max Coleman, Edmund Nickless, Alex Whittaker; Malcolm Brown, Danny Clark Lowes, Adam Law** and **Ben Franklin** (2024 Discussion Group member), were co-opted.

Discussions were led by new member, **Anna Bidgood**, on 'Deep Continental Subduction' at a new venue, the University Women's Club (UWC) in Audley Square.



The subsequent speakers and topics were:

*Max Coleman, 'How, on Earth, did life begin?' (Zoom)*

*Mike Daly, 'The future of the Society' (Zoom)*

*Members 'Show & Tell' (Zoom).*

## 2021

Attendances had averaged 14 in recent years but attendances dropped after Covid.

One of the Aims for the Group as defined at the time of the merger in September 2016, was “to engage with the broadest group of individuals interested in the geosciences”. However, in practice and despite much enquiry and effort, this had proved impossible to achieve.

- 1.1. A spreadsheet of Discussion topics and attendances since the first Group event in Nov 2016 has been generated and is circulated separately.
- 1.2. There have been 25 speakers in the 5-year history of the GSDG and attendances have varied from a peak of 170 in 2017 to 76 p.a. in 2019 (Covid restrictions).
- 1.3. From Jun 2018, all 10 of the Discussions have been recorded and a summary transcript provided on the website.
- 1.4. As of Aug 2021, there are 62 Group members. (There were 88 on the old Dining Club membership list in 2020, which is now redundant)

The speakers and topics chosen were as follows:

*Matt Fox, 'Glacial erosion controls' (Zoom)*

*Ken Amor, 'The Stac Fada impact deposit' (Zoom)*

*Caroline Smith, 'Mars Mission 2020' (Zoom)*

*Jonathan Craig, 'The Future of the oil industry' at the UWC*

*Jenny Bennett, Eileen Hendriks, at the UWC*

*Members 'Show & Tell', at the Athenaeum*

*The summer outing was to the Gilbert White museum in Selborne, Hampshire.*



## 2022

The Group's Discussions mostly took place at the University Women's Club, with:

*Ruth Allington, 'The Future of the Society – 2'*

*Kathryn Goodenough, 'Critical Minerals: Rare Earth Elements'*

*Roderick Smith, 'Critical Minerals: Lithium'*

*Jeroen Van-Hunen, 'Geothermal energy from mines water'*

*Members 'Show & tell' evening, at the Athenaeum*

The summer outing was to the British Lithium pilot plant near Roche in Cornwall.

There were 63 members on the Group list.



## 2023

The topics for Discussion were introduced by:

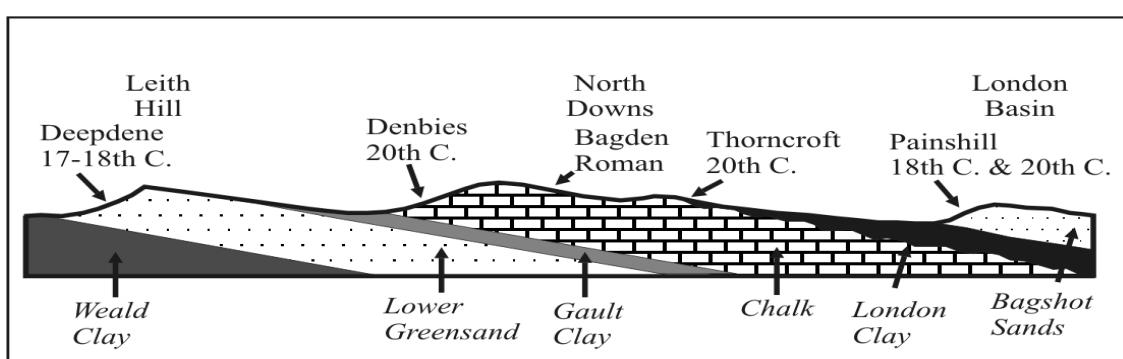
*Paul Atherley, 'The world's first sustainable magnet metal supply chain'*

*Simon Thompson, 'Future of the Society – 3'*

*Jane Francis, 'Climate change variations across the globe'*

*Roger Moore, 'Climate change, coastal hazards and resilience'*

The summer outing took place, once again, in glorious sunshine in June. at the Denbies wine estate near Dorking.



*South to north cross-section through northern Surrey showing the location of vineyards ancient & modern. A Roman vineyard has recently been discovered on the Lower Greensand at Abinger. Note the position of vineyards on south-facing well-drained slopes.*



## POSTSCRIPT

In 2012, only 12 years ago, the membership totalled 184 and the Club had dined on eight occasions, with an average attendance of 18. By contrast, membership of the Discussion Group in 2023 was a mere 52, the vast majority of whom had previously been Club members. It had met on only 5 occasions with an average attendance of 8.

It was clear that despite being an integral part of the Society, the Group's activities had not been attractive to new members. Where were the perceived benefits of joining the body of the kirk? Where was the administrative help and promotion that was expected? What exactly was going wrong?

By 1974 the Club was:

- elitist with a lack of clear objectives until 1974
- proud of its background but incapable of looking ahead
- no good at PR despite members being part of quite large geology based organisations
- lax at paying its own dues!
- limited by its own Rules: women were not admitted as members until 1974 (the Club's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary) 54 years since women were admitted as Fellows of the Society

and had:

- isolated itself from the Geological Society as well as society at large
- failed to realise that vast numbers of graduates were pouring into N Sea work, bypassing the Society
- complained endlessly about the rising costs yet arranged to dine 8-9 times a year in central London
- wished to expand its membership as early as the 1950s but with no clear means of doing so
- only admitted ladies in the 1960s – and then only those who were speakers at Society events
- limited Society speakers in 1975 by specific invitation
- only became concerned about fluctuating attendances at dinners in 1976
- many ideas for increasing membership but no means of doing so.

In 2016 when the Dining Club merged with the Geological Society, that was after 192 years of independent existence as a parallel body, with its own agenda, membership, finance and mode of behaviour. At the time, there was a unanimous feeling that after being concerned with the need to expand its membership, (or to state the obverse, watching attendances decline and very few members joining) since at least 1976, the Club no doubt felt that it had no other choice.

But in doing so, it became part of a large bureaucracy, with 22 closely knit Specialist Groups. By contrast, the Discussion group was a generalist body and specialist in none. There was no help of any sort and we seemed both sheltered but also abandoned, a bit like surviving a sailing shipwreck, happy to be alive and onshore but needing sustenance, to identify the location, navigate to safety and negotiate some help from the natives!

In short, what was the survival strategy? What working synergy did we have with the 21<sup>st</sup> century GSL? Where would we find 'clubbable' Fellows who liked to meet in central London and enjoy a convivial meal with like-minded Earth scientists?

Also, why did membership numbers plummet from 182 at the last count down to 52 after the amalgamation? While all Club members were GSL Fellows, it became clear that no instruction had been issued to update the Society's database to reflect that they were now also members of the new Specialist Group.

In the 2017 annual subscription notice for example, there was no facility to allocate either a £30 additional fee (or £15 for Country members) to Group members, neither was there a means of allocating those who had been Club Honorary members who should have been recorded as non-paying members of the new Group. The

Terms of Reference specifically mentioned administrative support but none was offered. How were we to advertise our future events to the membership?

What exactly did the Science Committee each year require from us in an annual report? Were we expected to somehow log our activities or output, or just count the numbers of members attending events?

How could we increase our numbers, carve out a worthwhile future and prove our worth to the membership at large. Did the Society's Council not wish the Group to take the lead on holding private evening discussions with Government or industry leaders on strategic topics?

Were the Club's traditions of 'clubability', conviviality and good conversation still relevant among other earth scientists? If so, how do we reach them?

We needed a publicity channel to the membership to at least ask them the question but how do we do that? Through a regular publicity notice in *Geoscientist*?

What we envisaged was the ability, in the early days once we had set up a programme of Discussion topics, that we would email the whole membership to inform them. But the Society was unable to help with this simple step, as we were only one of now 23 specialist groups so understandably, members would be flooded with such emails.

Were we still a London centric body or should we hold Club type events around the country now? This was unlikely, given our near two centuries of history and central London base.

Would the Society be more encouraging to allow the Group meet at Burlington House?

Would the other groups help to provide speakers?

The trouble was all the other Groups were literally Specialist in their interests; the Discussion Group was bundled in with the other 20 or so Specialist Interest Groups, but we were 100% generalist, not specialists in anything except providing a convivial place to have non-specialist conversation geared more towards the big picture of the geological world.

We were never going to hold an evening or whole day events in a lecture theatre and publish a book afterwards, so how exactly were we going to fit in to this now very complex and varied Society?

We were not an academic or research body, like the other SIGs.

Frankly, it seemed that we had moved house but no other occupant was interested in what we did or could provide any worthwhile support. It looked like we were pretty much isolated 'from the body of the kirk'.

The Club was highly relevant in the pre-war environment, but looked very isolated in the increasingly specialist world where even geology had morphed into dozens of specialities which became islands in a vast ocean of detailed information, and London was not the largest island in the archipelago.

The geological scene had changed radically and even the Society itself seemed to ignore the massive scale of hydrocarbon-based employment in the 1970s, as the tensions between the younger members of the informal 'Kardomah' group had shown.

The Society had failed to keep up with major social and commercial trends which accompanied its own massive increase in membership.

Even in the 1970s and 1980s, the Club minutes often recorded a wish to increase its own membership, if only to spread the administrative costs of its activities. But society itself had moved on, major centres of employment had moved out of London and spending precious evening time in a central London pub no doubt lost its appeal. We had moved house, but the neighbours had lives of their own to lead.

My first visit to a Club evening dinner was in 2004, and I loved it, chatting amiably to senior figures, many of whom I had only come in contact with via their publications! They were real social animals, not just researchers operating an electron microscope in isolation or working in large team developing plans for a new oil or gas fields in the N Sea. On one occasion I exchanged names with my neighbour at the dining table, and astonished to discover it was past President Bernard Leake (whose portrait hangs in the Lower Library). He had led an international group in the 1970s which had classified the (very complex) amphibole group which had proved central to my own research. He was an international star chatting to someone who had left academe far behind. Both utterly surprising and yet most enjoyable. I did feel privileged to be a guest. But why were there so few others of my age?

I had wandered through this wonderful conversational porthole where people chatted about stuff I was interested in; so very different to day-long geological conferences where, frankly, the title often sounded relevant, but on the day, it was rarely stimulating while the Club conversation was endlessly interesting.