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# THE FORMATION OF THE OLD EDINBURGH CLUB AND ITS FIRST 300 MEMBERS

ALAN MCKINNEY AND BOB MORRIS

The events described here may not have ‘changed the course of history’ but they certainly changed the way in which Edinburgh viewed and debated its history. The evidence is incomplete, and, as ever, history may be re-written or re-interpreted in light of changing experience and context.

We do know that a collection of ‘gentlemen’ held a series of meetings in late 1907 and early 1908 that marked a significant addition to the growing range of Edinburgh based organisations concerned with what we would now call ‘heritage’. Some decisions and actions are not recorded in the minutes, but there can be no doubt of their determination to ensure that the Club became a reality.

The Old Edinburgh Club, a local history society with a particular municipal focus, came late to Edinburgh and to understand the thinking of these gentlemen it is necessary to consider the historical environment in which they lived.

The Thoresby Society arrived in Leeds in 1889 and Thoronton Society to Nottinghamshire in 1897. In Glasgow, the Old Glasgow Club was formed in 1900 and began publishing *Transactions* in 1904.<sup>1</sup> Other less specialised societies such as the Berwickshire Naturalists and Newcastle Antiquarians had been formed even earlier. In Edinburgh, the Cockburn Association formed in 1875, had made the landscape and the historical built environment of the city its special focus. The Scottish Society of Antiquaries, after its revival in the 1840s under the guidance of Daniel Wilson and David Laing, concerned itself with the material remains of the past on a Scotland wide basis.<sup>2</sup>

In many ways, 1907 was a quiet year - the calm before many storms. The Colonial Conference met in London, argued over free trade and imperial preference and decided to call itself the Imperial

Conference. The great powers decided not to go to war over Morocco. At Westminster, a bill to extendcrofting tenure to the whole of Scotland was defeated in the House of Lords.<sup>3</sup> The massive Liberal party election victory of 1906 involved many promises, notably that of the first old age pension, whilst the growing violence in Ireland, in trades union disputes and in parts of the women’s suffrage campaign were in the future as was the great fracture of the 1914-18 War.

Amongst those who attended the early meetings there were a variety of motivations. In part they were responding to a growing concern not just for national history but also over the continued destruction of the material evidence from the past, especially the built environment of Edinburgh, which they often referred to as ‘the northern metropolis’. It was no accident that the first article in the first volume of the *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club* was a ‘Provisional list of Old Houses Remaining in High Street and Canongate of Edinburgh’. Bruce J Home began, ‘since 1860, two-thirds of the ancient buildings in the Old Town of Edinburgh have been demolished ... destruction, widespread, ruthless, and indiscriminating, has been the rule.’ However, at the 1910 AGM, the presiding officer, the Rt Hon W A Brown then Lord Provost, was to take exception to this claim expressing the view that the ‘writer had gone somewhat beyond what were the true facts’ and that ‘the greatest of care had been taken in the removal of any of the buildings’. This unease about the manner in which buildings were lost could be traced back to the 1840s when Daniel Wilson began recording the old town in his watercolours and engravings for the first edition of his *Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time* published in 1848. Engraving after engraving was marked with the date of destruction of the buildings illustrated.<sup>4</sup>

By 1907, Patrick Geddes had become less active in Edinburgh. He was not a member of the OEC but many of his friends and associates were there. Bruce J Home had collaborated with Geddes in recording the Old Town in the 1890s. Thomas Whitson had been his property adviser in the development of Ramsay Garden and other Town and Gown Properties. Both were active in the foundation of the OEC. The Secretary of the Club, Lewis MacRitchie was invited to the 'at home' which Anna and Patrick Geddes held when Patrick was in Edinburgh. On the 19<sup>th</sup> June 1909, the Club met at the Outlook Tower, before one hundred members and friends 'proceeded down the Lawnmarket and High Street in three sections under the respective leadership of Messrs Bruce J Home, John Geddie and Robert Skinner'. The Outlook Tower had been purchased by Geddes in 1892 and later transferred to the Town and Gown Association. It became a base for a variety of social and intellectual activities designed to change the understanding of cities and of Edinburgh. In March 1911, the Club gathered at the Royal Scottish Academy Galleries and were guided around the Cities and Town Planning Exhibition by Professor Geddes.<sup>5</sup> Amongst the many and complex contributions Geddes made to what we now call town planning was an emphasis on the need to sustain a sense of continuity with the past, its memories and material environment. Good planning required a sense of history. <sup>6</sup> His introduction to an account of Edinburgh Castle said little about the Castle but much about the value of a historical understanding of urban places. 'Where better can youth recall the long pageant of the historic past, and thence proceed to grapple with the tangled tasks of the present'.<sup>7</sup>

Those who attended the tightly focused meetings of 1907 and 1908 were part of a wider scene of a Europe which was puzzling out the links between the state and being a nation. For Scotland, many of the options which made a nation were not available. There was no common language. Scots had a choice of at least three. There was no common culture or ethnicity, indeed there was a pride in bringing together the varieties of Highland and Lowland cultures. Scots showed little interest in other possibilities such as 'home rule' or violent uprisings against the imperial power. If Scotland existed, it did so by sharing a common history and a concern for this history was a quiet and insistent aspect of Scotland's response to the rise of European nationalism.<sup>8</sup> The Scottish History Society had been formed in 1886. Lord Rosebery was

a key figure here as he was to be for the OEC. The *Scottish Historical Review* began publication in 1903. It replaced the *Scottish Antiquary*, a move which emphasised a scholarly document based attitude to exploring the past. Professor Peter Hume Brown was active from the start in many aspects of the club. He was a key figure in wider efforts to ensure that a national history was made part of being Scotland. Hume Brown was the first Professor of Scottish History at Edinburgh University. The chair itself had been endowed by Sir William Fraser, another 'lad o pairts', whose legal career led him to being deputy keeper of Scottish Records. Hume Brown was committed to a document based history and saw Scottish History as a crucial part of nationhood.<sup>9</sup> He was part of a generation which thought at a very fundamental level about the researching, writing and teaching of history. His lecture on 'The Teaching of Scottish History in Schools' reflected this

the rudimentary society realises that its continuous existence is dependent on the tenacity with which it clings to its own particular past ... [this was] ... the original instinct that impels us to realize the past through which we have become what we are ...

He defended the Union, which 'settled down' after a while to mutual advantage, but left Scotland with 'the dread of her individuality being merged in that of her more powerful neighbour'. The cure for this was not what he called 'fussy patriotism' but the study in schools of 'our own national history' which he and many others believed to be increasingly neglected'.<sup>10</sup>

Finally the OEC was a local, a city and a municipal organisation. It was part of that municipal pride which marked many towns and cities in this period. In Edinburgh municipal pride lacked the brash assertiveness of Glasgow but did contain a quiet and distinctive historical dimension.<sup>11</sup> Edinburgh City Chambers were enlarged and developed in the 1890s and 1900s. Part of the interior development involved a series of historical paintings by William Hole. Hole grew up in Edinburgh and was active in the Royal Scottish Academy. The scenes chosen illustrated events in Scottish national history located in Edinburgh. <sup>12</sup> By the 1900's, Edinburgh like most municipal councils had gathered a wide range of responsibilities from trams and libraries to bowling greens, public parks and washhouses. J D Marwick as town clerk in Edinburgh between 1860 and 1873 had created much of the legal framework for this but

he also undertook the publication of historical records as part of his task.<sup>13</sup> Edinburgh was a city exploring what it meant to be a capital city and beginning to gather together the agencies of a national government based upon the relatively new Scottish Office as well as the agencies of the growing London based departments.<sup>14</sup> The Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments in Scotland was to be formed in 1908. Mr W T Oldrieve, Principal Architect for Scotland to HM Office of Works, was an active member of the OEC. At the end of a lecture on royal palaces in Scotland, he presented himself as ‘a crown servant’ and worried that only five of the twenty royal palaces he identified in Scotland remained ‘the property of the Crown.’ He was concerned, that whilst ‘so many ancient national buildings remain in private hands; no statute existing which can prevent total destruction by ‘improvements’ or by neglect. Too often there is want of knowledge, interest or means.’<sup>15</sup> Over the previous century, Edinburgh had gathered an impressive list of public departments both national Scottish and national United Kingdom.

There was a real pride and confidence in the city itself which was best indicated by guide books such as that of John Reid. This involved not just the Old Town and the Georgian New Town but also the modern town of department stores, tramways and expanding suburbs.<sup>16</sup> There was a desire for improvement and a pride in the achievements of the Chambers Improvement Act of 1868 and subsequent interventions.<sup>17</sup> Bruce Home admitted that ‘the interests of hygiene’ had demanded some ‘indispensable clearances’. All this was in increasing competition with a deep felt need to connect with the past.

A desire to assert and define local and national identities, the need to understand the past in order to deal with the present, and a continued concern with the destruction of the built evidence of the past, were all motivations which were taken into those early meetings of the Old Edinburgh Club.<sup>18</sup>

#### THE DOCUMENTS

The formative years of the Old Edinburgh Club are recorded in two sets of documents. The first is held in the Central Library, King George IV Bridge, Edinburgh and is generally referred to as the ‘*First*

*Minute Book of the Old Edinburgh Club*’. In fact, it contains the minutes of the prehistory of the formation of the Club on the 29 January 1908. The volume consists of five written minutes to begin with but thereafter, mainly press cuttings, and some printed Club leaflets and ephemera. There is an undated membership list at the end of the volume.<sup>19</sup>

Within the flyleaf there is the following Edinburgh City Library typed note:-

This item was given into the care of the Edinburgh Room in June 1987 and is treated at the moment as being on temporary loan. Receipt acknowledged to the then Hon. Secretary Sheila Develin-Thorp, on the 11<sup>th</sup> June 1987.

For security purposes the volume is kept in the safe in the Boardroom. It should always be issued on a ‘D’ Slip.

The records of the early years demonstrated the skills and energy required to make the Club happen and there was a mixture of formality and informality, of scholarly care and couthy enthusiasm. Edinburgh had a wide range of people adept at the skills of meetings, minutes, committees, event organization and publication.

The subsequent books are housed in the Signet Library, as ‘Minute Books I (29/01/1908 - 29/01/1915) and Minute Book II (20/04/1915 to 27/10/1936). Unfortunately, the latter closes with the comment by Will Burnett, Honorary Secretary - ‘The Minutes of the OEC as recorded in this Book close at December 1936 and continue in another volume’ but, to date, it has not been possible to trace that ‘volume’, or, for that matter, any subsequent Minute Books. From 1910 onwards these minute books are supplemented by two books of newspaper cuttings. All four books are available on the web.

Minutes 1908-1915:

<https://archive.org/details/OECMinutes19081915>

Minutes 1915-1936:

<https://archive.org/details/OECMinutes19151936>

Scrapbook 1910-1916:

<https://archive.org/details/OECScrapbook19101916>

Scrapbook 1916-1921:

<https://archive.org/details/OECScrapbook19161921>

The names in these books included men already experienced in the rituals and details of associational culture and civil society. Some were formally identified as representing the Cockburn Association and the

Photographic Society. Many, such as Bruce J Home, Professor Baldwin Brown, Hippolyte Blanc and Robert T Skinner were active in the historical environment as writers, campaigners, researchers and architects.

MINUTES OF THE FORMATIVE MEETINGS.<sup>20</sup>

JOHN KNOX'S HOUSE, EDINBURGH  
3 DECEMBER, 1907

A meeting was held here this evening at 8 o'clock of gentlemen interested in the formation of a Reekiana Club for the presentation of Old Edinburgh lore in some permanent form.

Present: Messers J A Barrie, Hugh Carbarns, Robert Cochrane, Andrew Eadie, W J Hay, John W Stewart, J S Kay, L A MacRitchie, A P Profit, Alan Reid, J C Robbie, A W Sinclair and Adam Smail. A reporter from the "Scotsman" was also present.

On the motion of Mr Alan Reid, Mr W J Hay<sup>21</sup> was asked to preside and Mr Smail was elected interim Secretary.

Mr Hay explained his reasons for his calling this meeting and thanked those who had responded to his invitation.

Apologies were intimated from the Lord Provost, Lord Rosebery, Lord Guthrie, Messers J S Barbour, Rev K M Berry, P A Blair, D S Cormack, William Cowan, Parish Councillor Foster, Bruce J Home, J H MacGregor, William Mitchell SSC, Andrew E Murray W S, James Oliver, Kenneth Sanderson W S, James Sinton.

Mr Hay stated that he felt the growing necessity for a Society having as its object the preservation of information regarding Edinburgh life in pre-railway days. Many changes had been affected since then. Buildings had disappeared and traditions were vanishing. Lord Rosebery had written to him advising that before starting a new Society his Lordship "would suggest that you confer with the Scottish History Society so as to make sure that there will be no overlapping..... I confess the name "Reekiana" Club does not commend itself to me but that, of course, is a matter of detail." To this letter Mr Hay replied stating that any overlapping of the work of existing Societies he would do all in his own powers to prevent and he saw no difficulty in the Councils of these Societies conferring together regarding this matter. With reference to the name of the Society he believed that Sir Walter Scott coined the term "Reekiana" to describe a contemplated work on the minor antiquities of Edinburgh, but relinquished in favour of Robert Chambers, who issued a volume in 1833 under this title, which forms a prescient for our proposed name.<sup>22</sup>

A large amount of material exists either unprinted or which has appeared only in an ephemeral form in newspapers and elsewhere. The Trades and Guilds Incorporation Records and the Town Council minutes between 1589 and 1875 are only accessible in manuscript. Broadly speaking, therefore, the scope of this Club we are proposing to form will be that of collecting material which has as its first appeal the perfecting of our local knowledge.

In the course of his remarks, Mr Hay, gave several examples of the inaccuracies of writers on Edinburgh and of the trouble this entailed on private individuals in search of reliable information. These defects, he hoped, the Club would be able to remedy.

Mr Hay then asked for remarks on the subject and Messers Smail, Cochrane, Alan Reid and Profit all concurred in their opinion as to the value of the proposed Society.

Mr Profit objected to the word Club as it had become associated with institutions far removed from our aim. Mr Reid suggested that the title might be the Auld Reekie Club and its publications 'Reekiana'.

Mr Carbarns then moved that an Association be formed to carry out the ideas expressed by the Chairman and others. Mr Reid seconded the motion and there being no counter motion the Chairman called for a show of hands and the motion was carried unanimously.

After some further conversation on the subject the meeting was resolved into a Provisional Committee to draft a Constitution which would be submitted to prospective members for consideration. Mr Hay to act as Convener.

The meeting was thereafter adjourned to meet at a date to be afterwards fixed for the purpose of dealing with these matters and everything bearing on the objectives of the Club.

Adam Smail<sup>23</sup>  
(Interim Secretary)

SCOTSMAN – 4<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 1907

Proposed Old Edinburgh Society – A meeting of those interested in the formation of a Society for the purpose of ingathering and preserving in some permanent form the lore of old Edinburgh, its traditions, folk, and buildings, was held last night in John Knox's house. Mr W J Hay, on the motion of Mr Alan Reid, was called to the chair, and gave his reasons for calling the meeting. He believed that a society was wanted to preserve material in regard to Edinburgh in pre-railway days, and to secure information on the changes affected since that time. Buildings had disappeared and traditions were vanishing, and it was desirable that every effort should be made to record what was still available, especially from old inhabitants. Letters of apology for absence were read from Lord Rosebery, Lord Provost Gibson, Lord Guthrie and others. After hearing the views of Mr Hay, Mr A Smail, Mr R Cochrane, Mr Proffit and Mr A Reid, Mr Hugh Carbarns moved that a society be formed on the basis suggested. Mr A Reid seconded. A provisional committee was thereafter appointed to draw up the constitution and rules, with Mr Hay as convener. The committee will meet at an early date to consider the proposed constitution and what further steps may be necessary for the promotion of the Society.<sup>24</sup>

JOHN KNOX'S HOUSE, EDINBURGH.  
18<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER, 1907 AT 8.00PM

A meeting of the Provisional Committee was held here this evening at 8 p.m.

Present: Messers Cochrane, Reid, Murray, Barrie, Eadie, Robbie, Carbarns, Oliver, Profit, MacRitchie, Hay and Smail.

Mr Hay occupied the Chair.

The minutes of previous meeting were read and approved.<sup>25</sup>

After some discussion it was unanimously agreed that the name of the Club shall be the Old Edinburgh Club. The proposed constitution was then submitted for consideration and after various suggestions had been brought forward it was agreed that the amended draft should be again circulated among the members for further examination. On its return it was arranged that another meeting of the Provisional Committee should be held for the final revision before printing. The date of this meeting would be duly intimated to the members of Committee. This was all the business.

Adam Smail  
Interim Secretary

## THE FORMATION OF THE OLD EDINBURGH CLUB AND ITS FIRST 300 MEMBERS

JOHN KNOX'S HOUSE, EDINBURGH  
11 JANUARY 1908

A meeting of the Provisional Committee was held here this evening at 7pm.

Present Messrs Brotherston, Carbarns, Eadie, Hay, Kay, McRitchie, Oliver, Profit and Smail.

Apologies were intimated from Messrs Barrie and Cochrane and Mr Hewat's resignation was also intimated.

Mr Hay occupied the chair.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved.<sup>26</sup>

The draft Constitution which had been circulated among the members for further examination and returned to the Secretary was then read over by him. Some discussion took place regarding Mr Oliver's suggestions as to Life Membership and an entrance fee but it was decided to negative both proposals. His suggestion that the ordinary members of Council should be increased to nine and that three should retire annually and not eligible for re-election 'for one year' (this text was added to the minute – in a margin) was unanimously agreed to. After further discussion of amendments it was arranged that the draft Constitution should be printed and circulated among those likely to become members. This was all the business.

Adam Smail  
Interim Secretary

JOHN KNOX HOUSE, EDINBURGH  
16<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 1908

A meeting of the Provisional Committee was held here this evening at 8 pm.

Present: Messrs Carbarns, Cochrane, Eadie, Hay, Kay, McRitchie, Oliver, Profit, and Smail. Apologies were intimated from Messrs Barry, Brotherstone and Murray

Mr Hay occupied the Chair. The minutes of previous meeting were read out and approved.<sup>27</sup>

The proof of the Circular was then discussed and after some slight alterations was approved.

In view of the public Inaugural Meeting Mr Smail intimated that he had seen Mr John Harrison<sup>28</sup> with regard to the Presidency of the Club, but a reply had not yet been received. The Lord Provost's letter having been read, Mr Hay was asked to write to Lord Guthrie and failing him Lord Ardwall and Lord Kingsburgh requesting either to preside at the Inaugural Meeting. An informal talk then took place with reference to the parties most suitable to fill the offices and a number of likely names were suggested.<sup>29</sup> This was all the business.

Adam Smail  
Interim Secretary

In January 1908 a printed notice was circulated providing further publicity for the inaugural public meeting.

### PRINTED NOTICE

John Knox's House, High Street, Edinburgh, 20 January 1908  
A proposal having been made to form a Club for ingathering and preserving Old Edinburgh lore, Mr Hay took the initiative step of

inviting those interested to John Knox's House on the evening of 3<sup>rd</sup> December, to discuss the matter. At that meeting a resolution was unanimously adopted to found an Old Edinburgh Club, and a Provisional Committee was appointed to carry out the preliminary arrangements for its inauguration, Mr Hay acting as Convener.

A large amount of material exists, either unprinted or in ephemeral form, while the Trades and Guilds Records and the Minutes of the Town Council (from 1551 to 1875) are still in manuscript. The aim of the Club will be to collect material which may aid in increasing accurate knowledge of the city.

It is intended to issue at least one volume annually.

The committee now submit a draft constitution, for consideration at a public meeting, to be held on an early date. If approved, the Constitution will form the Rules. The members will thereafter proceed to appoint Office-bearers and in this connection the Committee are privileged to state that the Earl of Rosebery has expressed his willingness to be the first Honorary President.

Meanwhile, if you approve of the scheme, and are desirous of becoming a Member or Associate, be good enough to fill up and return the enclosed post-card to Mr Adam Smail who is acting as an Interim Secretary.

William J Hay  
Convener of Committee

The printed circular then set out the Constitution of the Club and a number of features are worth noting. The objective of the club was 'the collection and authentication of oral and written statements or documentary evidence; the gathering of existing traditions; legends and historical data'. There was a tension in these early statements between scholarly document based and oral history and folklore. The early constitutions included a category of associate members though this proved unpopular and did not seem to last. The key provision was the requirement that membership was limited to 300 and members required to be proposed and seconded. This indicated that membership was a privilege and members were a select and selected group. It was indeed 'a club'. Unlike the Glasgow club there was no provision to exclude women. The subscription of 10/6d was substantial but not prohibitively expensive. Although it should perhaps be measured against a £1 a week which kept a wage earning family out of poverty or the £120 or so a year with which a white collar worker might keep a living in servant.<sup>30</sup> The duties of officers and council were outlined as was the objective of publishing.<sup>31</sup>

JOHN KNOX HOUSE, EDINBURGH.  
27<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 1908

A meeting of the Provisional Committee was held here this evening at 8 pm.

Present: Messers Carbarns, Cochrane, Hay, MacRitchie, Profit, Sinclair and Smail. Apologies were intimated from Messers Brotherstone, Kay, Murray, Oliver and Reid.

Mr Hay occupied the chair. The minutes of previous meeting were read and approved.

Mr Smail stated that he had received a reply from Mr John Harrison declining the office of President of the Club. It was unanimously agreed that Professor Chiene CB should be asked to be President and to take the Chair the Inaugural Meeting.<sup>32</sup> It was also arranged that Mr L A MacRitchie should be nominated as Secretary and Hugh Carbarns Treasurer at that meeting. Twelve of the members of the Provisional Committee were selected as members of Council subject to the approval of the public meeting at which other names might probably be brought forward. Other arrangements in connection with the meeting were also discussed and the final details were left in the hands of Messers Hay and Smail. This was all the business.

Adam Smail  
Interim Secretary

On the page opposite the minute of the above meeting there was an outline diagram of the various offices that were to be proposed at the Inaugural Meeting and a number of names were faintly pencilled in against these positions. The fact that this meeting took place, just two days **before** the Inaugural Meeting, underlines how frenetic things must have been. The structure of the committee was carefully designed to accommodate variations of social status as well as the ability and willingness to undertake the work of making the Club. The founding group worked hard to involve high status individuals like Lord Guthrie and Mr Harrison, Treasurer of the City of Edinburgh but in the end it was Lord Rosebery who took the bait and became honorary president. However, the minutes do not clarify why Mr Smail, who had acted as Interim Secretary since the creation of the Provisional Committee, was not nominated as Secretary for the Inaugural Meeting but, as indicated above, Mr L A MacRitchie was to be nominated for this position.

This is where the 'Formation Minute Book' ceases to record, in minute form, the development of the Club but the book continued to be used and contains a number of press cuttings, a collection of the cards and other printed material. It also records the Membership of the Club and other names were added after the Inaugural Meeting with the writing again being in the same hand. So it is reasonable to assume that Mr Smail fulfilled a role, equivalent of the Club's current Membership Secretary, and, for a period of time, was responsible for this list and the press cuttings.

Of the 'gentlemen interested' who had been actively involved in the Provisional Committee from the very outset, only Lewis A MacRitchie (Secretary) and Hugh Carbarns (Treasurer) were elected to a specific office whilst W J Hay, Adam Smail, J C Robbie and Robert Cochrane were elected as Ordinary Council Members.

The minutes of the first meeting of the Interim Committee had recorded that a *Scotsman* reporter was present. The founders of the Old Edinburgh Club showed considerable skill in ensuring widespread newspaper publicity for their activities.

On Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> January 1908 the '*Scotsman*' had a report of the meeting under the heading 'Institution of an "Old Edinburgh Club" '. This report was nearly identical to the records of the meeting in the First Minute Book, 1908-1915, now in the Signet Library, suggesting that the *Scotsman* was given a sight of these minutes.

The meeting itself was held in the afternoon of 29<sup>th</sup> January in the Old Council Chamber and the afternoon timing is significant as, initially, the Club appears to have been for those who were retired, had independent income or at least were not tied to fixed hours of work.

The meeting was chaired by Professor Chiene and there was a preamble to the report laying out the reasons for the Club which repeated the statements in the provisional committee meeting minutes and the printed circular. Particularly the proposal of Mr Hay for the 'ingathering and preserving Old Edinburgh lore' and the intention to print one BOEC volume annually.

The report continued –

Among those present at yesterday's meeting were Professor Chiene CB (who presided), Dr Lowe, Dr Caverhill, Mr Scougal, an Inspector of Schools, Mr Hippolyte Blanc Architect, Mr Ralph Richardson WS, Mr J B Sutherland SSC, Mr Theodore Napier and Councillors Moscrip and Douglas Elliot.

The chair addressed the meeting expressing his love for Auld Reekie (applause) and intimated that Lord Rosebery had agreed to be first Honorary President (applause).

The report continued –

There were, he understood, to be a number of committees and they were to do the work and report to a great central body. There were

to be a ministers' committee, a lawyers' committee and a doctors' committee.<sup>33</sup> He had been anxious to know where the first fourteen men that started the Esculapian Club in 1773 lived. Thanks to Mr Hay and Mr Adam Smail he got Edgar's Map 1765 and a Directory 1773 and with the aid of these he found out the places where those old warriors lived (laughter and applause). Some of those he had spoken to regarding the proposed club had objected on the grounds that the work it was to undertake had already been done. He was of the opinion that that work had not been done already. He hoped that they would do their best for the success of the Club, and clear up many of the doubtful historical and other points regarding the city they all loved so well (applause). He concluded by moving that the Club be formed and that the Constitution, a draft of which had been placed in their hands, should form the rules thereof.

Mr Hay, in seconding the motion, said it was a curious historical sequence that this Club should be christened on the very spot from which the throb of our modern city life took its rise in the year 1750. The objects of the Club would be carried out on distinct lines so far as they could see at present. The time was swiftly passing in which they could gather up the reminiscences of those people who could remember Edinburgh before the days of railways, and the great improvements that have taken place as a result of the introduction of modern means of transit. They should have access to old title-deeds to gather details which were valuable to the city life as historical data upon which they might work. They had a great deal written about Edinburgh. Some very excellent work had been done.

The motion was unanimously adopted.

Office Bearers were appointed as follows

Honorary President: Lord Rosebery

Honorary Vice

Presidents: The Lord Provost of Edinburgh, Sir Thomas Gibson Carmichael Bart and Sir James Balfour Paul, Lyon King of Arms; and Professor J Brown.

President: Professor Chiene CB

Vice Presidents: Mr Andrew Murray of the Cockburn Association, Treasurer Harrison and Mr J B Sutherland SSC

Secretary: Mr Lewis A MacRitchie, Solicitor

Treasurer: Mr Hugh Carbarns

Council: Mr Blanc, Dr Lowe, Mr Thomas Ross architect, Mr Bruce Holme, Mr Robert Cochrane, Mr W J Hay, Mr Oldrieve H M Board of Works, Professor Baldwin Brown, Mr Adam Smail, Mr Oliver Photographic Society, Mr R T Skinner and Mr W B Blaikie.

Apologies were received from: Lord Rosebery, the Lord Provost Lord Kingsburgh, Lord Ardwall and Lord Guthrie.

*The Scotsman* reported that just prior to the close of the meeting Mr Smail had received 82 names as members and three as associates.

In the weeks following this first meeting, the constitution was reprinted with the addition of a fourth page containing a statement of suggested work which indicated the standards and priority the Council gave to publication. The statement was dated February 1908.

The Council propose that the first publication of the Club shall be in the nature of a Miscellany, and they invite Members and Associates willing to aid with information of any kind to communicate with the secretary.

The conditions of publication are: -

Contributions must be from original research.

Authorities or references must in every case be given.

All papers accepted by the Council for publication shall become the property of the Club.

The decisions of Council regarding acceptance of MSS. for publication to be final.

Contributions to be sent to Mr W. J. Hay, John Knox's House, Edinburgh, Convener of the Editorial Committee, no later than the 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1908.

For the guidance of Members and Associates, it may be indicated that contributions may relate to a historical incident, building, or locality, and the Council will assist Members in the reading of old documents, title-deeds, or memoranda. Old diaries and journals, common-place books, and family correspondence contain much valuable material, and attention is specially directed to such sources of information ....

The following are suggested as suitable subjects for Miscellany or subsequent volumes:-

The West end of Edinburgh about 200 years ago. (Mr Andrew E Murray W.S. Secretary to the Cockburn Association)  
Robert Chambers and his Books on Edinburgh. (Mr Adam Smail)  
Literary and Historical Landmarks of Edinburgh (Mr Robert Cochrane)  
Huntly House, Canongate.  
Morningside, Past and Present.  
Old and New Cattle Markets and the Corn Exchange.  
Pilrig House,  
Restalrig and its Antiquities.  
Maps and Plans of Edinburgh.  
Old Inscriptions, Initials, and Carvings.  
Photographs of old or removed Buildings.  
A Bibliography of Edinburgh.

Striking here was the emphasis on 'original research' and the inspiration which the work of Robert Chambers still provided.



MEETINGS OF COUNCIL AND GENERAL  
MEETINGS: THE FIRST FULL YEAR

The activities of the first full year of the Old Edinburgh Club can be traced in the minutes now in the Signet Library and they set a pattern for subsequent years.<sup>34</sup>

Following the Inaugural Meeting (29/01/08), the OEC Council met five times (6<sup>th</sup> Feb, 17<sup>th</sup> March, 6<sup>th</sup> June, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1908 and 13<sup>th</sup> January 1909), and established an operational pattern with the normal ‘bread and butter matters’ such as membership applications and money being addressed but the main focus of the Council, in this first year, was the production of the Book of the Old Edinburgh Club (BOEC). There follows a summary of these meetings with the attention focused on some of the more unusual issues.<sup>35</sup>

At the first Council meeting, 6<sup>th</sup> February 1908 the Minutes show the organization of the Club being driven forward. Professor Chiene stated that the Club had 130 members and 6 associate members. The Membership fee was 10/6 (or 55p decimal). Within one week of the Inaugural Meeting, when Mr Smail reported that the Club had 82 members and 3 Associate Members, there had been a dramatic increase. The Editorial Committee was appointed - Mr Hay, Mr Cochrane, Miss Rosaline Masson and Mr William Cowan with Mr Hay as Convener. A letter (dated 5<sup>th</sup> February) had been received from the Town Clerk

intimating that the Magistrates and Council at their meeting on the 4<sup>th</sup> inst had agreed to become patrons of the Club.

Council appointed as auditor, Mr John Hamilton CA. Being alert to Clause V in its Constitution requiring four Ordinary Council members to retire each year, a ballot was undertaken the result of which was Mr Blanc, Mr Hay, Prof Baldwin Brown and Mr Blaikie were to retire in 1909, in 1910 Dr Lowe, Mr Smail who had been the Secretary during the formative period, Mr Home and Mr R Skinner with Mr R Cochrane, Mr J C Robbie and Mr J Oliver to demit office in 1911.

Whilst the activity of the provisional committee had led successfully to this inaugural meeting, the influence of the new President, John Chiene, Professor of Surgery, resulted in Council meetings being held in other premises. Chiene was also

interested in the Esculapian Club, often spelt Aesculapian, and this showed the way in which his identity with Edinburgh and with his medical skills led him to history. The Esculapian was one of the many clubs of enlightenment Edinburgh and combined the discussion of medical matters with conviviality and feasting. Chiene’s invitation to Mr MacRitchie, Secretary, that the Council meeting of 17<sup>th</sup> March 1908 (see below) should be at his home at 26 Charlotte Square is therefore worth closer attention.

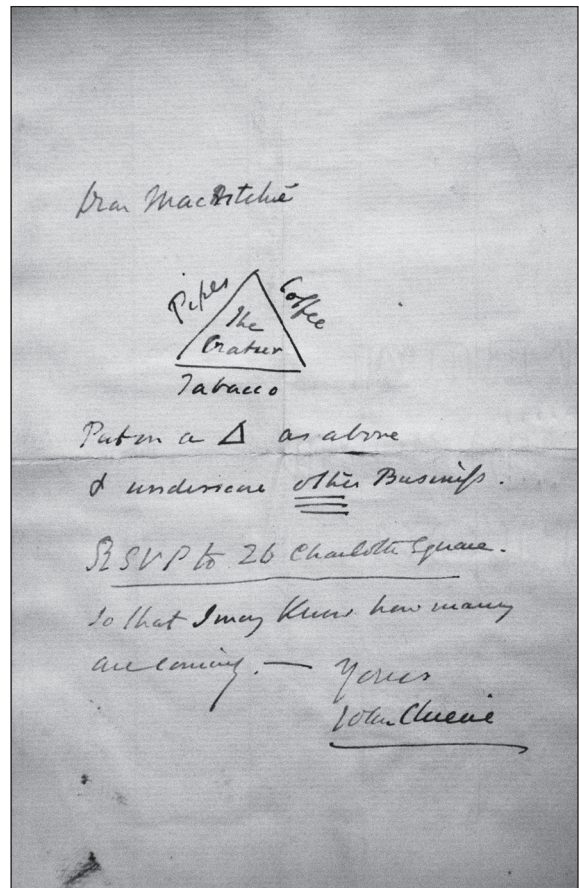


Fig. 1. Pipes, Coffee and Tobacco invitation from Professor Chiene

Now ‘cratur’ was an Irish word or rather a Hiberno-English word denoting whisky and 17<sup>th</sup> March was St Patrick’s day but John Chiene was an Edinburgh born man so it is not clear why he should celebrate 17<sup>th</sup> March with a word from the vocabulary of the English speaking Irish. Maybe it was just for fun. In any case, the air of intense male sociability wrapped in an atmosphere of tobacco smoke and whisky

fumes perhaps explains why, despite the openness of the rules, women were not found as members in large numbers and why people like Rosalind Masson, though well used to public life, refused a later invitation to join the committee.<sup>36</sup> The triangle also deserves attention. Was he mocking or mimicking the symbolism of masonic and other fraternal orders?

However, in due course the notice was issued to Council members (see below): -

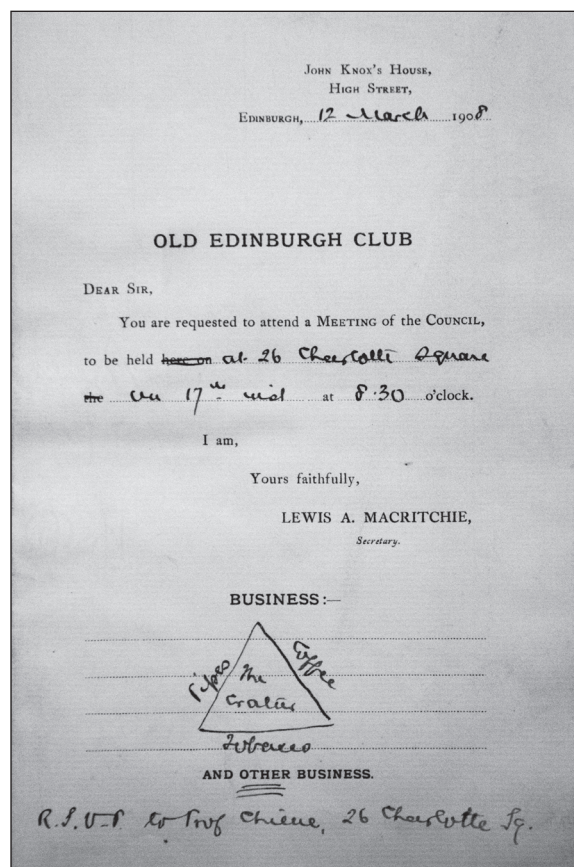


Fig. 2. The printed invitation from Professor Chiene.

Council next met, 17<sup>th</sup> March 1908 at 8.30 pm at 26 Charlotte Square, the home of the President, Professor Chiene. The ‘Editorial Committee’ was augmented by the addition of Mr John Geddie, Mr William Baird and Mr John Hogben. Miss Rosaline Masson, previously nominated, had declined the invitation to join the Editorial Committee. A motion by Mr Thomas Ross, seconded by Mr Smail, then further defined the path this Committee was to pursue with the minutes stating that all authors had to clearly

‘facilitate the verifying of facts contained in the said articles’ and then all matters related to the contents of the first publication were remitted to the Editorial Committee which was to report to the next Council meeting.

In an effort to maintain the interests of Members, it was proposed that the Club should hold three General Meetings per annum ‘at which papers on Old Edinburgh might be read’ with the dates suggested being the 1<sup>st</sup> May, the middle of October and the end of January. The responsibility for such papers was remitted to the Editorial Board with the Secretary being instructed to write to the Town Council seeking permission to hold these meetings in the Burgh Court Room. It could be considered that such meetings were the precursors of the Club’s current Winter Lecture programme and this proposal was considered to be a positive development although, in the first year of Council, it appears this was not achieved. The minutes also record that the Secretary was instructed to write to Lord Rosebery to enquire if it was ‘convenient for and agreeable to his Lordship to be present at the first General Meeting of the Club’ but correspondence, tabled at the next Council meeting, indicated that this had not been possible.

Prior to the close of the meeting a number of items were submitted for the inspection by Council members and these included: -

- A pocket book belonging to Prof Chiene bound with the skin of Burke the murderer.
- History and Laws of the Bonaly Friday Club 1842.
- The Scots Memorandum Book or Instructional Poetry Journal of 1757
- Invitation Card to a meeting of the Over Groggy Club 1832
- A series of coloured caricatures (Normand) 1829.

Notwithstanding the first gruesome item, the meeting closed with a vote of thanks to the President for his hospitality.

Within the month Members were advised, by a printed card which they had to display upon entry (see below), that the first general meeting was to be held on the 29<sup>th</sup> April in the Burgh Court Room, City Chambers, and this attracted ‘a large attendance of Ladies and Gentlemen’. Mr William Cowan delivered a talk entitled ‘A Walk through Old Edinburgh’ starting from the West Port, then up the West Bow and down the High Street, Canon Gate to Holyrood, around the Trinity College Church and then back to the Cowgate and the Grassmarket via both Leith

Wynd and St Mary's Wynd. The lecture included illustrations of historical places passed during the walk and Mr Cowan highlighted the fact that many of the old houses had disappeared – expressing the view that ‘something should be done in future to preserve houses of historical interest’. Members were required to bring their invitation card and were entitled to bring a friend.

General Meeting (29<sup>th</sup> April) and Council was informed of the Annual Ramble of the Survey Section of the Edinburgh Photographic Society, on the 18<sup>th</sup> July, which was to be a walk around the Old Walls of Edinburgh and that an invitation had been extended to the Old Edinburgh Club. Members were advised, by card dated 8<sup>th</sup> July 1908, and a number took part.<sup>37</sup> These cards and other printed material in the records

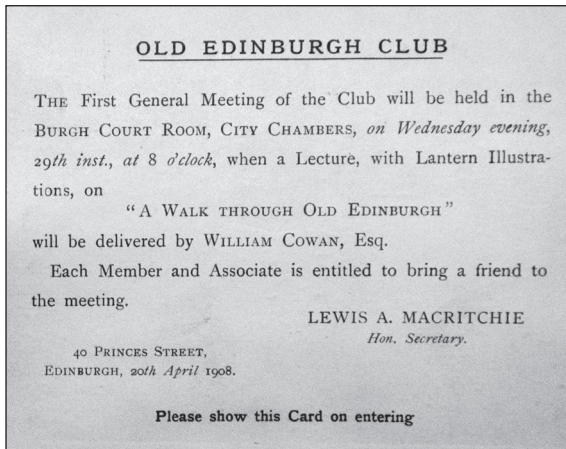


Fig. 3. The First General Meeting.

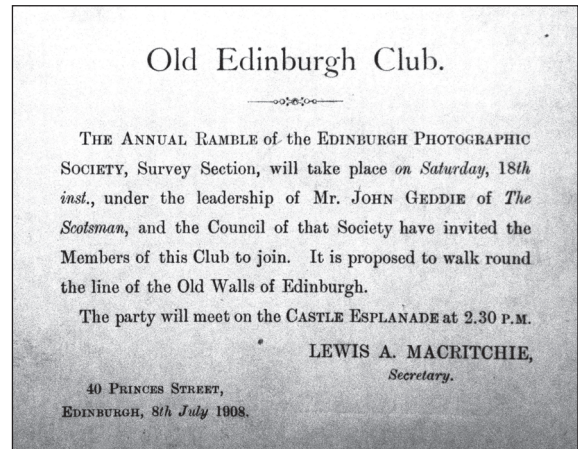


Fig. 4. The Annual Ramble, 1908.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> June, the Council met at the ‘President’s house at Barnton’ with the members of the Editorial Committee present.

The meeting focused on the development of the BOEC with Mr Hay, Convener of the Editorial Committee, reporting that only two papers had been received for the ‘Miscellany’ and that Mr William Cowan promised a paper. Mr Hay also raised the possibility of the Club’s purchasing, for the sum of two or three guineas, an ‘Edinburgh Merchant’s Accounts 1780/1830’. This possibility generated some discussion and the minutes note that Council ‘did not see their way to authorise Mr Hay to negotiate the purchase’. Mr Hay then offered to purchase these on his own right and make them available to the Club. Thereafter, three members promised to submit papers (Messers Geddie, Howie and Blanc) and the eventual size of the publication, some 230 pages – ‘or thereby’, was discussed. Council agreed “it was necessary that the volume (was) completed and in the hands of members before the annual meeting” with the Editorial Committee being charged with this responsibility.

Mr Cowan was thanked for his talk at the first

fitted easily into a world in which ‘At Homes’ and the leaving of cards was part of the genteel world of sociability.<sup>38</sup> These were the cards of insistent courtesy, invitations, inclusion and payments due. They were to be left on mantle shelves and the occasional tables in the entrance lobbies of the well-to-do houses of Edinburgh to announce identity as a member of the Club and the status that went with an interest in and knowledge of the history of ‘our’ city.

Council next met on the 16<sup>th</sup> October with the meeting being convened at 26 Alva Street. It was clear that the Editorial Board had been quite active during the summer as Council was advised, by Mr Hay, that six papers had been presented for publication. The meeting also approved that three hundred copies of the BOEC should be printed with two hundred being bound and Mr Blaikie was appointed to the Committee to offer his advice on its production. The entire matter was then remitted to the Editorial Committee but with the proviso, were it necessary, another meeting of Council could be held in December.

Clearly the Editorial Committee had felt confident. Council did not meet again until 13<sup>th</sup> January 1909. The meeting was held in the Dowell’s

Rooms, where it was reported that Professor Chiene, absent due to illness, had intimated that he wished to retire from the position. It was remitted to Mr Blanc and the Secretary 'to avail upon Professor Chiene to endeavour to get him to reconsider his resignation.' Hippolyte Blanc was appointed to the chair.

Mr Blaikie then reported that the Editorial Committee had selected five papers for inclusion in the first volume which was likely to comprise 160 pages and cost £80. By now the titles of some of the papers had changed and were reported to be, List of Historical Houses, Embalming of Montrose, The Pantheon, The Sculptured Stones of Edinburgh, and Houses at the East end of Princes Street. The arrangements were approved by Council and the Editorial Committee instructed to complete the task.

Attention then turned to the preparations for the first AGM which was to be held in the Old Council Chambers at 4.00pm on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 1909. As four Council members were to retire, the meeting proposed to nominate William Cowan, William Baird, John Hogben and John Geddie to fill these vacancies and the Secretary was also instructed to write to Lord Rosbery asking him to preside and also to write to Lord Guthrie inviting him to be present. It was also agreed that the Minutes of the AGM would be included in the BOEC as an Appendix.

Interestingly, whilst there had been considerable activity on behalf of the OEC Council over the year, a letter from Mr George Craig, Gorgie Road, Edinburgh was read out in which he expressed the view that 'as the Club did not give any evidence of its existence he would not pay his subscription'. Minutes of subsequent Council meetings, and the actions taken, demonstrate that this letter had had an effect but, as this Council meeting was just prior to the AGM, the minutes record that 'the letter was allowed to lie on the table'.

The First Annual General Meeting marked the end of a first year in which the Council had established a reasonable operational structure and was within weeks of achieving its primary objective – namely the printing and distribution of the *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club*. The annual report and Lord Rosebery's address indicated that the Council and officers together demonstrated willingness to address the expectations of Members together with a degree of public engagement.

FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,  
29 JANUARY 1909

The first AGM was held in the Old Council Chambers and convened at 4.00pm. Lord Rosebery K.G., K.T., Honorary President, presided and apologies were received from Professor John Chiene, Hon. Lord Guthrie, Sir Robert Usher, Col. Gordon Gilmour and Rev Dr Glasse.

The Club's new Constitution was approved and the printed Annual Report, a copy of which is contained within the Minute Book I, detailed the activities of its Council over the year and the events that had been organised. Two themes emerged from the listing of these activities. Walking the Old Town in lecture and in practice was central to their engagement with the town as was a concern for the destruction of old buildings. The important activity was the production of the *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club* (BOEC). This was almost ready and Members were advised that it was hoped to have this delivered 'to members within the next few weeks.'

Lord Rosebery then delivered a substantial address. The full address was printed in the Annual Report. Like the practised politician he was, Rosebery took hints from his 'civil servants' – in this case the officers of the Club – and added to them a flavour of his own. He gave special praise to 'Mr Hay of John Knox House' who had proposed the formation of the Club. Rosebery did not like the associate membership status and anticipated that the membership ceiling of 300 would soon be reached. At this time it was 173. This had already happened with the Scottish History Society. He stressed that Club had gained its members 'without any of the necessary process of advertisement' but this was slightly disingenuous of his Lordship since, within its membership, there was a significant network of patrons. Indeed, he himself was a leading United Kingdom political figure and therefore the Club hardly needed to advertise. They not only got full reports in the *Scotsman* and *Glasgow Herald* as well as *The Daily Record* but also in some London papers, notably *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*. Their patron clearly demonstrated his value. He emphasized the sense of privilege involved in being one of the Club's 300 members and informed the meeting that the Scottish History Society already had a long waiting list of those wishing to join and

of organisations wishing to add its publications to their libraries.

The OEC Council appreciated his support and had taken good care of their patron. Rosebery had been shooting on his Moorfoot estate the day before, and a copy of *The Book of the Old Edinburgh* had been sent out to him by motor car.

Being an accomplished public figure, he made good use of his copy and said -

Our annual volume will, I may safely predict from the specimen of the volume which lies before me, be of inestimable value to every citizen of Edinburgh who cherishes the traditions of this ancient city ... they will constitute I am convinced, volumes full of interest almost necessary to those who desire to live in Edinburgh enjoyably – that is to say enjoyably by enjoying the traditions as well as the climate of our ancient city

He also welcomed the links with the City Corporation saying

the ordinary patrons of the club are the Lord Provost, Magistrates and Town Council of the City of Edinburgh. I think that is not merely an important countenance for the club to receive, but it also indicates something in the nature of a pledge, which in view of the past is not wholly unnecessary, that the Lord Provost, Magistrates and Town Council of the City of Edinburgh will, so far as lies in their power; always respect the ancient monuments of this city.

This was a clear, if delicate, reference to the belief that the City Council was involved in the destruction of much of the historical fabric of the city. This theme took him straight to the first article in *The Book* by Bruce J Home who had trained as a draftsman with W & AK Johnson, Printers and Mapmakers before spending most of his working life as a printer and music engraver - first with the family firm and then briefly in London. On his return to Edinburgh he became Curator of the Edinburgh Municipal Museum. One outcome of his work there was the first article in the first volume of *The Book* which began with the much quoted sentence,

it may be safely affirmed that since 1860 two thirds of the ancient buildings in the Old Town of Edinburgh have been demolished.

Rosebery took this up as a ‘classic essay of reference’ and asked ‘our honorary patrons’ to use ‘their best endeavors’ to respect the remaining third.

Rosebery shared with Professor Chiene and many members of the Club an enthusiasm for the convivial and debating societies of the 18<sup>th</sup> century City<sup>39</sup>.

He ventured publicly to urge on Edinburgh the duty of trying to discover the innumerable records of these old clubs which must yet be in existence. The clubs were innumerable, and they usually

had records, and if those who possess them would come forward and place them at the disposition of our Society, I am quite sure we would be delighted to reprint them and preserve them, if only they were sufficiently correct, which I am afraid they are not all, for the purpose of publication. And that, leads me to a consideration which is perhaps almost as melancholy as the opening sentence of our volume. These clubs have vanished, and they will not be resuscitated. And why? The reason is simple enough, they were all supper clubs. The great meal of Old Edinburgh was the supper. It was there that the convivial exchange of wit and flow of soul took place of which we read in the memoirs of the period, described with an enthusiasm and ecstasy which is hardly possible for our degenerate people to understand. We cannot have these any more because under the municipal regulations we are forbidden to sup. I do not know that this would be the proper moment to introduce such an apple of discord as the question of our licensing regulations – I think perhaps it would not – and I see the Town Clerk has his eye fixed on me with some sternness and severity

Rosebery went on to mention a paper on the buildings on the east end of Princes Street, ‘on the boundary edge of the whole scope of our Club ... (but which) ... was rapidly becoming part of Old Edinburgh’ and warned against the ‘utilitarianism’ threatening the antiquity of Edinburgh before delivering another attack on the Town Council.

Edinburgh’s face is its fortune. I know in the Council Chamber here they have recently been urging schemes for converting Edinburgh into a manufacturing city. ... We are without them, (the manufacturers) while we remain our own grey historical city, while we are privileged to enjoy it without any unnecessary admixture of smoke save that which is used for domestic purposes, let us take care, at any rate, that as trustees for posterity we preserve the ancient historical metropolis as untouched as possible.

This was an interesting misrepresentation of ‘auld reekie’ which by 1901 was second only to Glasgow in the number of people engaged in ‘manufacturing’. Walks had already become an established part of the Club’s activity and Rosebery finished with a odd mixture of advice and Edwardian sense of humour which revealed the goodwill and social distance between himself and the listening members.<sup>40</sup>

The elections were also covered in the printed Report but, despite the efforts of the Council, Professor Chiene’s resignation was tabled and Mr Walter B Blaikie elected as President of the Club. The nominations of Council, as tabled at its meeting on 13/01/09, were duly elected and the Treasurer, Mr Hugh Carbarns, reported the Club’s financial position stood at £60 6 7d.

BOEC, LIBRARIES AND THE FIRST 300  
MEMBERS OF THE CLUB

The Council had given considerable attention to the production of *The Book of the Old Edinburgh Club*. In April 1909, the Honorary Secretary, Lewis A. MacRitchie issued a printed notice to libraries advising them of the availability of completed Volume I of the BOEC and this notice read: –

Dear Sir,

The first publication of this Club, a quarto volume of 170 pages, is now ready, and is being issued to the members on its roll for 1908. The membership of the Club is limited to 300, and no copies of the book will be printed for sale. The Council, however, have the power to provide additional copies for supply to public bodies, and I shall be glad to know whether I may place your library on the list of subscribers for the Club's publications, the annual subscription being 10s 6d.

If you desire this, kindly fill up and return to me the enclosed form with a remittance of the subscription for 1908.

The publication of the BOEC was identified as the Club's primary function and commanded Council's attention in the first year but the reports of the developments to subsequent editions became more sporadic in later years. Clearly the Editorial Committee was left simply to 'get on with it'.

The minute book of the provisional committee included a list of libraries which subscribed to *The Book*, as well as a list of members. The Library list provided an important record of the geographical reach of the Club as well as a catalogue of leading cultural institutions of Scotland.

Harvard University.

The Philosophical Institution, 4 Queen Street.

Edinburgh Free Library.

University Library, Aberdeen.

Bodleian Library, Oxford.

The University Club, 127 Princes Street.

The Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

Signet Library, Parliament Square.

Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

The Edinburgh Architectural Association.

John Rylands Library, Manchester.

The Public Library of Toronto.

The Library of the Theological College of the Episcopal Church in Scotland.

Public Library, Aberdeen.

The New Club, Princes Street.

The Speculative Society, The University.  
The Reform Club, Pall Mall, London.

MEMBERSHIP

As indicated earlier, the Provisional Committee Minute Book contained a list of the early membership of the Club. It recorded that 298 of the 300 membership places were filled although in fact there were 308 names. This discrepancy arose as when members either resigned or did not renew their membership, their names were simply crossed off and the names of the new members inserted immediately with that specific membership number being reassigned to that new member.

It is also noticeable that there was a change in the person recording this information as the handwriting changed from member number 169 onwards and the date of this specific change is open to speculation. However, Mr Smail, Secretary during the Club's formative period, had informed the Inaugural Meeting that the membership stood at 82 with 3 associate members and, as the Provisional Committee minutes and membership list were recorded 'in the same hand', it is reasonable to assume that he compiled both and did so up to Member 169. At this point the new writing appears to be similar to that of Lewis A MacRitchie, the Secretary elected at the Inaugural Meeting. Hugh Carbarns, the Treasurer, issued a slip reminding members that their subscription were due and therefore he was also involved in maintaining the accuracy of this membership list. The list was a very functional one recording just names and addresses. Linking this list to information in *The Edinburgh and Leith Post Office Directory for 1907-08* provided an outline of the nature of the initial membership of the Club. The information provided by the membership record keepers was enough to ensure that links with the Directories could be made or rejected with reasonable certainty.<sup>41</sup>

Once the links have been made a very distinctive group emerges. 271 of them lived in Edinburgh and another 14 in the immediate environs. This latter group included Rosebery himself, as well as the 'secretary of the Scottish Salt Works at Pinkie' and the manager of the Clydesdale Bank in Portobello. Another 15 lived elsewhere in Scotland but often had Edinburgh connections such as the minister who had recently moved to Glasgow and Miss

OLD EDINBURGH CLUB

JOHN KNOX'S HOUSE, HIGH STREET,  
EDINBURGH, *January 1908.*

DEAR SIR,

I beg to inform you that your Subscription for the current year is now due. Payment may be made to me at the above address.

Yours faithfully,

Subscription  
10/6

*A. Carburns*  
*Hon. Treasurer.*

Fig. 5. Your Subscription is now due, January 1908.

Barbara Peddie, the architect's daughter based in Blair Atholl. Another four had addresses in England. There was no attempt to limit membership to those who lived in and around Edinburgh.

There were 50 members who cannot be traced in the Directories and another group of 46 whose names and addresses were in the Directory but who gave no occupation. This suggested that a significant number of members saw no need to indicate their profession or business and probably lived on investments of one sort or another. It was an indication of the high status of the membership and also the importance of those who had retired from an active role in the economy. One or two can be traced in other sources such as Bruce J Home who worked with Geddes in the Outlook Tower and published that important article on the buildings of the Old Town in the initial *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club*.

The Club had taken care in its initial rules not to exclude women after the manner of many clubs. Nonetheless there were only 18 women in the first 300. This was somewhat surprising as Edinburgh had a generation of educated relatively privileged women who were active in associational and public life. Efforts were made to involve Rosaline Masson on the Editorial Board but she had declined. However she was a member and an active supporter of female suffrage and daughter of David Masson, one of the first Professors in the University to lecture to women, albeit before they were eligible to register for a degree. Her own book on *Edinburgh* presented the city as a place of poets and novelists.<sup>42</sup> She may well simply have preferred this to the city of documents and old buildings. Other publically active women, like Elizabeth Haldane and Flora Stevenson were more interested in welfare and education.<sup>43</sup> Some of

the 18 were active in public and associational life. The Club included the Secretary of the Church of Scotland Women's Association for Home Missionary and the Matron of the Deaf and Blind Institution.

The great majority of the first 300 were male and gave an indication of their occupation in the Directories. Of those who named an occupation over half, 118, were in the major professions. Of these 47 were lawyers of one sort or another, 13 were medical men and 15 were ministers. The finance sector, bankers, insurance men, stockbrokers and accountants came next with 23. There were other smaller but significant groups. W J Hay is often given credit for initiating the Club and he certainly provided accommodation for initial meetings in John Knox House. He was one of eleven booksellers in the first 300. They were joined by six printers and publishers. The Club attracted people of the document and the book. The University played a key role. There were five professors, a tutor and the lecturer in economic history. Most took a central part in organization. They were: -

Peter Hume Brown , Professor of Ancient History and Palaeography.

John Chiene CB FRCSE, Prof Surgery.

Professor G Baldwin Brown, Professor of Fine Art.

Professor I. B Balfour, Inverleith House, Prof of Botany in the University: Regius Keeper of Royal Botanic Gardens.

George Chrystal, Professor of Mathematics.

Archibald B Clark MA, University Lecturer on Economic History.

W Ross Cooper MA, University Tutor.

There was a representative selection of ministers of the various Protestant churches, several of whom were out of town members. The ministers of both Old and New Greyfriars and two United Free Church ministers were amongst them. In common with much of the Scottish middle classes there was an assumption of Protestantism as a basis of Scottish History. W J Hay was closely linked to John Knox House which celebrated both the antiquity of Edinburgh Old Town buildings and the faith of the Free Church. One of the original members, Alex Profit was Secretary of Loyal Orange Lodge, No 5 District [John Knox] Edinburgh, and a useful builder and sanitary engineer. He was also Recorder of the

Ancient and Illustrious Order of Knights of Malta which met in Jacobs Land Hall on Calton Road. Hume Brown himself saw it as part of his mission as Professor of Scottish History to demonstrate the importance of the Reformation in creating the identity and character of Scotland.

There was a significant group of some 17 men who had some connection with that growing and complex entity, the state in and of Scotland. There were those who served the United Kingdom in Scotland such as William Oldrieve, principal architect for the Office of Works in Scotland, with his offices at 3 Parliament Square, and James Steedman of the General Post Office. The Earl of Rosebery and Charles Price, MP for Central Edinburgh both served in the Westminster Parliament. Others served the Scottish State as a sheriff and a JP. The Club recruited a key group from the Record Office, the Deputy Keeper of the Records of Scotland, the Chief Clerk of the Records Office and an official from the Historical Department of Register House. The Lord Lyon King of Arms came from New Register House. The Secretary of Northern Lights and H M Senior Chief Inspector of Schools in Scotland carried out duties specific to the Scottish State. Links with the local state were equally important and in many ways more various. The deputy town clerk and the city architect were there as was the eminent and by now elderly Medical Officer of Health, Henry Littlejohn.<sup>44</sup> The City Chamberlain and the Lord Provost's Secretary were members. These were all part of the interlocking networks of power, influence and knowledge which were typical of Edinburgh.

The first 300, as they came together in those years before the great fracture of the First World War, were in many ways characteristic of key aspects of the high status ranks of the Edinburgh middle classes. The flavour of Protestantism was assumed rather than aggressive. They were dominated by the professions and the professions by the lawyers and keyed into the networks of University and the growing and multi layered state. There were minority spaces for the financial sector and a number of manufacturers as well as elite retail and wholesale merchants. There were, however, several distinctive features, notably in the major representation of booksellers, publishers and printers and all those who dealt in documents and books. This was a significant and very important industry in Edinburgh and beyond.



This account takes us to the end of the first full year of the Club. A regular pattern of activity was established. Walks, visits, lectures and publication were crucial. A distinctive and high status membership had gathered. There was a leadership which was not afraid of controversy nor of challenging the activities of local and state government. No Edinburgh achievement would be complete, however, without some genteel ‘flyting’ with Glasgow. There was no better location for this than the review and correspondence columns of the *Glasgow Herald*

the Old Edinburgh Club by its first publication – “The Book of the Old Edinburgh Club – First Volume” – has left its older congener far behind. Against the insignificant little volumes, wretchedly edited and largely composed of comparatively trivial matter, of the Old Glasgow Club, the Old Edinburgh Club presents a stately quarto volume, beautifully printed – which is to say it comes from Constable’s – and containing five authoritative articles on matters relating to the history of the City, one of them elucidated by a map and another by numerous drawings. With such a volume at hand one feels that something is really being done for the history and topography of the capital of the other side of Scotland.<sup>45</sup>

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- 10 P Hume Brown, The Teaching of Scottish History in Schools, *The Scottish Historical Review*, vol.5, no.17 (Oct 1907) pp.41-51.
- 11 W Hamish Fraser and Irene Maver (eds.), *Glasgow vol.II: 1830 to 1912*, Manchester 1996, esp. pp. 441-485.
- 12 John Gifford, Colin McWilliam and David Walker, *The Buildings of Scotland. Edinburgh*, London 1984, p.178.
- 13 Gordon F. Millar, 'Marwick, Sir James David (1826-1908)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34913, accessed 15 June 2015]; J D Marwick, *Charters and other documents relating to the City of Edinburgh. A.D. 1143-1540*, Scottish Burgh Records Society, Edinburgh 1871.
- 14 John S Gibson, *The Thistle and the Crown. A History of the Scottish Office*, HMSO, 1985; Ian Levitt (ed.), *Treasury Control and Public Expenditure in Scotland, 1885-1979*, Oxford 2014.
- 15 *The Scotsman*, 29 January 1908.
- 16 Guidebooks were always a place to see pride in both old and new. See John Reid, *The New Illustrated Guide to Edinburgh*, Edinburgh 1903, notably his account of Princes Street.
- 17 Jim Johnson and Lou Rosenburgh, *Renewing Old Edinburgh. The Enduring Legacy of Patrick Geddes*, Glendaruel 2010; Lou Rosenburgh and Jim Johnson, 'Conservative Surgery' in Old Edinburgh, 1880-1940, in Brian Edwards and Paul Jenkins (eds.), *Edinburgh. The Making of a Capital City*, Edinburgh 2005, pp.131-149; Richard Rodger, *The Transformation of Edinburgh. Land, Property and Trust in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge 2001, especially, pp.415-458.
- 18 Owen Dudley Edwards, Rosebery and the Old Edinburgh Club, *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club*, new series vol.7, 2008, pp.3-42 gives a central role to W J Hay as well as Lord Rosebery.
- 19 Our thanks to Karen O'Brien and staff of the Scottish and Edinburgh History Room in the Central Library, Edinburgh. Also to James Hogg, long standing custodian of Edinburgh material in the Central Library, who gathered the OEC material into public care.
- 20 We provide a full transcript of the 'minutes' of the first five meetings together with the early press cutting. The account of the later meetings involves extracts and summaries. The full text can be consulted on the web as detailed above.
- 21 W J Hay established himself as a bookseller and museum curator in John Knox House in Edinburgh's Netherbow. Donald Smith, *John Knox House*, Edinburgh 1996, p.49.
- 22 Robert Chambers, *Reekiana. Minor Antiquities of Edinburgh*, Edinburgh 1833. This was published anonymously
- 23 Adam Smail did not detail his occupation in the directories but he was already active in public life as treasurer of the Sanitary Association.
- 24 The meeting was also reported upon by a number of other newspapers including the '*Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*', '*The Glasgow Herald*' and '*The Athenaem*'.
- 25 Despite the care taken to follow due procedure this approval looked like an afterthought as it was added in a different hand and ink, probably at a later date.
- 26 Again this were inserted later. The group was still learning the formalities of 'the meeting'.
- 27 This text was all 'in line' and in the same hand.
- 28 John Harrison was treasurer of the Town Council of Edinburgh. Amongst his responsibilities he was treasurer and committee member for the Edinburgh Free Public Library. Harrison and son were leading clothiers and outfitters with shops on St Andrew Square and South Saint David Street. They already had their own telegraph and telephone.
- 29 There is a hint here that as the first public meeting approached there was considerable work done behind the scenes.
- 30 Maud Pember Reeves, *Round About a Pound a Week*, London 1979, first published 1913; J A Banks, *Prosperity and Parenthood*, London 1954.
- 31 The printed circular is given in full and the constitution summarized.
- 32 Chiene was the much respected Professor of Surgery at Edinburgh University 1882-1909.
- 33 This line has attracted much interest. Did they really intend three such committees or was this an elaborate Edinburgh joke?
- 34 These are now online [see earlier footnote] and therefore have not been quoted in full as have the minutes of the pre formation meetings.
- 35 Old Edinburgh Club Minute Book, 1908-1915. Signet Library Edinburgh.

- 36 Rosalind Masson was an active campaigner for women's suffrage and prolific writer notably of literary criticism. Her father was Professor of English Literature at Edinburgh University and an early supporter of women's suffrage and university education for women. Elizabeth Ewan, Sue Innes and Siân Reynolds and Rose Pipes (eds.), *The Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women*, Edinburgh 2006, pp.258-259.
- 37 This "Rambling around the Wall" walk was replicated as part of the Club's Centenary Programme (2008), with Graeme Cruickshank providing a very enlightening, informative and colourful evening. *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club*, vol.8, 2010.
- 38 Leonore Davidoff, *The Best Circles. Society, Etiquette and The Season*, London 1973.
- 39 This is a curiosity which continues and was reflected in many articles in *The Book*.
- 40 Copies of Rosebery's address were printed in the *Report of the First Annual Meeting of the Old Edinburgh Club* which was pasted into The Minutes of the Old Edinburgh Club, 1908-1915 held in the Signet Library. Our thanks to James Hamilton, librarian and archivist of the Signet Library who let us see these Minutes and has provided on line versions for those who wish to look at the full version of the documents quoted here. <https://archive.org/details/OECMinutes19081915>
- 41 The on line digital version of the Directories, now available on the National Library of Scotland web site has made searching the Directories easier and more productive. Many members including most of the women gave no occupation. The status of members could be identified through the listings by address and by occupational group as well as in the details of other institutions and associations.
- 42 Rosaline Masson, *Edinburgh*, with paintings by John Fulleylove, London, 1904
- 43 Elizabeth Ewan, Sue Innes, Siân Reynolds and Rose Pipes (eds.), *The Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women*, Edinburgh 2006; Helen Corr, An Exploration into Scottish Education, in W Hamish Fraser and R J Morris (eds.), *People and Society in Scotland, vol.2, 1830-1914*, Edinburgh 1990. Pp.290-3008; R J Morris, White Horse Close, Philanthropy, Scottish Historical Imagination and the rebuilding of Edinburgh in the later Nineteenth Century, *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 33.1, 2013, pp.101-128.
- 44 Paul Laxton and Richard Rodger, *Insanitary City. Henry Littlejohn and the Condition of Edinburgh*, Lancaster 2013.
- 45 *Glasgow Herald*, 3 April 1909. These cuttings were carefully gathered in the records of the Old Edinburgh Club.