

**THE BRISTOL SCIENTIFIC CLUB**  
Celebrating 130 Years (22 October 2016)  
By Raymond Holland  
(Narrated by Brian Vincent)

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honoured to be invited to briefly review the Bristol Scientific Club's history over the past 130 years and to make a toast to the Club. To meet this requirement I shall 'Cherry-Pick' from my *'Record of the Bristol Scientific Club. No Rules, No Minutes! 2002'*.

First I quote from Arrosmith's Dictionary of Bristol 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 1906:

*'The Club owes its initiation, in 1886 to several of the leading scientific men, who felt that it was desirable to bring together those who took interest in any of the branches of science. The members - limited to fifty in number - dine together and afterwards discuss some subject which is introduced by one of their number and by these means all the scientific topics of the day have been brought before the members of the Club'*

Thus it started as a Gentlemen's Dining Club. It is assumed that the founding members did not feel any need for having Minutes, but appointed a Secretary to book a venue and a meal. From 1900 there were two Secretaries, who consulted Past Presidents. There were problems for the Secretaries due to the fluctuation of membership numbers over the years, requiring smaller or larger venues (50 to 150).

Now Paul Smith is the Hon. Secretary and John Phillips is the Assistant Secretary. Largely thanks to Paul the Club now has a website.

The Club has always had a strong University bias but includes others from local industry, commerce, schools and colleges. Two leading founder members were **William Ramsay**, the Professor of Chemistry & **the** Principal of Bristol University College and **William Ashwell Shenstone**, the Head of Science at Clifton College,

William Ramsay moved to University College London in 1887. He was knighted in 1904. On 12th November 1907 he was invited back to celebrate the 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the Club. He did not present 'a subject for discussion', he merely called it 'An Address'!

On 21st November 1987 John Littler invited me as his guest to hear *'One Hundred Years of the Bristol Scientific Club'* presented by Professor Bruce Perry (Medicine), Professor Sir Alfred Pugsley (Engineering) and Professor Sir Charles Frank (Physics). It was a fascinating evening but I was disappointed to learn that the Club had no Rules, no Minutes and that the Programme Cards before 1900 no longer existed. I was proud to be elected to membership of the Club on the 5<sup>th</sup> November 1988.

In 1960, a number of members questioned the Secretaries why no woman scientist had been elected to membership. (I am sure Sir Charles Franck reminded everyone that *'Thou shalt not create a precedent'*.) A discussion among Past Presidents concluded that there was no constitutional procedure by which the established customs of the club could be changed. The law

appeared to be in the hands of the Secretaries. Aitken Couper was the Secretary 1959-70 and luckily he had kept personal copies of the correspondence, which he shared with me,

It took two referendums and five years before the election of women scientists was unanimously agreed and five were invited. There was a further twist to this major decision, when four accepted and one declined!

The first lady to present a discussion paper on 2nd November 1968 was Dr Beryl Corner, the Paediatrician who looked after the Goode Quads. Her topic was 'Born too small'.

The most important and up to the minute talk was at a Special Meeting held on 24th January 1970 when Professor Geoffrey Eglinton spoke about 'The Chemical Composition of Lunar Rocks'. This was the analysis of dust brought back to Earth from the Moon.

Recently a decision has been taken to allow topics of scientific interest to be presented by inviting some non members.

It would be invidious for me to talk about individual members but one notable member of the Club must be Professor Wilson Baker FRS. He died on 3rd June 2002 at the age of 102! Not only was he the oldest member of this Club but he had achieved 56 years as FRS and was the longest lived FRS.

Tonight we celebrate the past 130 years of the Bristol Scientific Club. Now I ask you to stand and join a Toast to the future success of the Bristol Scientific Club.

*Raymond Holland*