

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIETY

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The Scottish Society for Northern Studies originally sprang from a desire to have, in Scotland, a society which should have much in common with the well-known Viking Society for Northern Research, which despite its title, was based largely in University College London. It was felt that it would be very useful to have a purely Scottish branch of the Viking Society, and a first meeting to consider this move was held in the David Hume Tower of Edinburgh University on February 14th, 1967. The president of the Viking Society, Dr. A. B. Taylor, was in the chair and a paper, appropriately entitled 'Scotland and its Northern Setting' was read by Professor Gordon Donaldson of the Department of Scottish History at Edinburgh University. Despite initial difficulties, and much debate as to what form the new body should take, it was decided that it should emerge as a society independent of the Viking Society, yet closely linked with it as regards common objects and interests.

A constitution was finally adopted on November 16th, 1968. It was decided that the new body should be called 'The Scottish Society for Northern Studies'.

It outlined its objects as follows: '... to provide a Scottish meeting-ground for papers and informal discussions on subjects in various fields concerned with Scandinavian and related cultures; to interest University students in such studies with a view to encouraging them to pursue them after graduation; and to further such studies by such other means as the Society may determine.' An arrangement was concluded whereby the new group's members could become members of the Viking Society at a reduced subscription rate. The office-bearers elected were Dr. S. P. Oakley, President; Dr. A. B. Taylor, Secretary; Miss Margaret Orme, Treasurer; and Professor D.M. Mennie, Newcastle, Mr. Hermann Palsson, Edinburgh and Miss Irene Scobbie, Aberdeen as members of the Committee.

One of the most important functions of the Society was to provide opportunities for young scholars to read papers and engage in discussions with a wide variety of people from different academic backgrounds. In most academic years, four papers had been read, mostly in Edinburgh, but sometimes by invitation in Newcastle or Aberdeen. Despite the fact that membership remained fairly small, attendances at these papers were usually good, and the response to speakers often enthusiastic. Subjects have ranged from 'The Historical Stability of Iceland' and 'Aspects of Food-Supply Pressures in

Northern Sweden in Historical Perspective' to 'Life in the Faroes' and 'Norse Fortification in Scotland'.

Since its inception, the Society has been fortunate in having a number of distinguished scholars in the president's chair. These have been Dr. S. P. Oakley (1968-69), Professor Duncan M. Mennie, Newcastle (1969-70) and Mr. Hermann Palsson (1970-71). Up till the end of 1970, the post of Secretary was held by the late Dr. A. B. Taylor, formerly Registrar-General of Scotland, and a man who can be considered to be one of the founding fathers of the Society. Dr. Taylor's death in March 1972 was a great loss to scholarship, and to the Society in particular.

If the past history of the Society has focused on lectures and discussions, it is only natural that in future these should be extended to include field excursions to various parts of Northern Scotland. It is to be hoped that as the Society grows and prospers, the scope of its activities will expand accordingly.