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150
Belfast Naturalists'
Field Club

Citizen Science

150 years of the
Belfast Naturalists'
Field Club



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Peter Crowther
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Citizen Science

150 years of the

Belfast Naturalists' Field Club

The Belfast Naturalists' Field Club was established 150 years ago to promote the study of the natural history and archaeology of Belfast and its surroundings.

The *Citizen Science* exhibition at the Ulster Museum (8 March - 2 June 2013) and this companion booklet review the Club's origins and subsequent achievements by focussing on a few of the many individuals who have enjoyed being members.

Over the years, the Club has flourished and made a major contribution to the cultural life of Belfast. In the 1920s, it became the largest organisation of its type in the world.

Today, the Club still strives to attract people of all ages and from all walks of life. It helps experts to work and beginners to learn, while bringing both together on field excursions and at lectures and social events.

Setting the Scene



Belfast in the early nineteenth century, showing the Long Bridge (replaced by Queen's Bridge in 1849); watercolour by Andrew Nicholl (1804-1886).

'Athens of the North'

Belfast expanded dramatically during the nineteenth century. From a population of around 18,000 in 1791, it grew to become the largest urban centre in Ireland. By 1911 it had a population of 387,000 and was well established as a centre of manufacturing and heavy industry, standing alongside Manchester and Glasgow. Like these other industrial cities, Belfast supported a lively cultural and intellectual life. In the early nineteenth century, some had even described the town as the 'Athens of the North'. While something of an exaggeration, by then Belfast could boast a number of cultural and scientific societies, including the Belfast Society for Promoting Knowledge, the Belfast Literary Society and the Belfast Natural History & Philosophical Society.

The field club movement

The citizens of Belfast were not alone in establishing a field club dedicated to finding out about the natural history and archaeology of their neighbourhood. The first field club, the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club in the Scottish borders, had been founded in 1831. Many others followed as the century progressed. These clubs often emerged from older societies dedicated to the intellectual improvement of the middle classes. The field clubs helped to make science accessible to an even larger segment of society. While remaining predominantly male and middle class, the clubs were often more inclusive than their parent societies. Women were increasingly involved, along with members from the working classes. Concentrating on the geology, flora, fauna and antiquities of a local district created a manageable programme of research and helped to draw attention to an area's natural and archaeological riches.

Beginnings



The Belfast Natural History & Philosophical Society's Museum on College Square North opened in 1831. This photograph was taken about 1870.



Joseph Beete Jukes (1811-1869), from a photograph taken in Dublin about 1860.

Belfast Natural History & Philosophical Society

The origins of the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club can be traced back to the Belfast Natural History & Philosophical Society, founded in 1821. The Society, with its Museum and meeting rooms on College Square North, had contributed much to the cultural and intellectual life of Belfast. As well as attracting donations of specimens from across the globe and encouraging discussion on general scientific topics, the Society helped to sustain an interest in local natural history and archaeology. Missing from its programme of activities, however, were regular outdoor excursions, a trademark of the field club movement.

Science classes

In 1860, the Society decided to host a series of introductory science classes – part of a nationwide initiative sponsored by the government's Department of Science and Art. Joseph Beete Jukes, Director of the Geological Survey of Ireland in Dublin, delivered a remarkably

popular course in geology, which attracted nearly 400 people and included field excursions to Cave Hill and other locations around Belfast. Encouraged by this success, towards the end of 1861 the Society engaged a recent graduate from the Royal School of Mines in London, Ralph Tate, to give courses in geology, botany and zoology at venues in Belfast, Carrickfergus and Lisburn. This appointment was to prove crucial for the future establishment of the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club.

1860s



Club members on The Honeycomb at the Giant's Causeway, Co. Antrim. This famous image was taken on Thursday morning 11 June 1868 by 'the well-known photographic artist, Mr Mack, of Colrairie.' *BNFC Archives*.



This earliest known photograph of Ralph Tate dates from 1882. *State Library of South Australia*.

Ralph Tate (1840–1901)

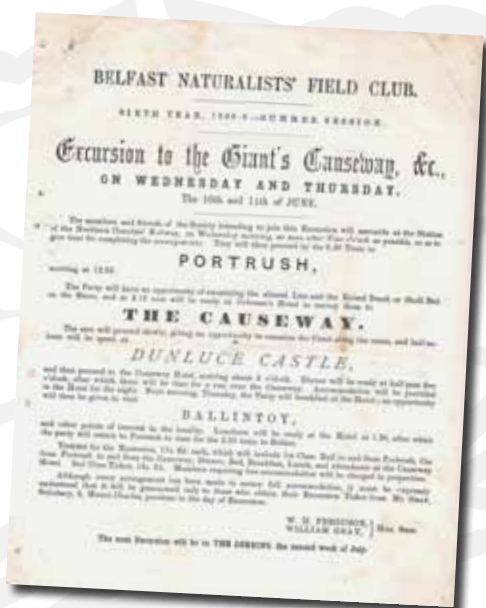
The knowledge and teaching ability of Ralph Tate inspired many who attended his science classes, both in the lecture room and in the field. In January 1863, letters appeared in the Belfast press about forming a Field Club to study nature and landscape outdoors. Tate supported the idea and organised a public meeting in the Museum on Friday 6 March 1863, when a draft constitution was agreed and officers elected. Tate and one of the letter writers, local businessman William Chew, became joint Secretaries - and so the Club was born.

Tate's involvement with the new Club was short-lived, as he left Belfast in spring 1864 to become Library and Museum Assistant at the Geological Society of London. In 1875, after spells exploring parts of South America and teaching in England, he was appointed the first Professor of Natural History at the University of Adelaide. Tate forged a distinguished scientific career in Australia, where he died in 1901.

Circular for 'Excursion to the Giant's Causeway, etc.', 10-11 June 1868. *BNFC Archives*.

Excursions, lectures and a conversazione

Today's familiar pattern of Club meetings - summer excursions, winter lectures and an annual conversazione (social evening and members' exhibition, with prizes) - was quickly established. The 88 members who joined the Club's first excursion on Easter Monday 6 April 1863, when Tate led them to Islandmagee, Co. Antrim, took advantage of the growing regional rail network. The nearby station at Ballycarry had been opened just six months earlier.



The Evolution Question



This striking piece of draughtsmanship was used on invitations to the Club's annual conversazione in both 1881 and 1882. The quality of the illustration suggests that Club member and head of the art department at Marcus Ward & Co., John Vinycomb, may have been responsible. The images of a chimpanzee-like animal holding a flint handaxe, a neanderthal skull and a mammoth all hint at ongoing discussions within the Club about human origins. *BNFC Archives*.

Darwin and natural selection

During the late 1860s and early 1870s, Club members participated vigorously in the debates ignited by Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (published 1859). Reflecting wider trends, some were critical while others responded positively. One prominent member, the Rev. William Maclwaine (President 1874-1879), objected to evolution and worried that the Bible's account of creation would be undermined. Others, like the linen manufacturer Joseph John Murphy, offered support for evolution but questioned the role Darwin had assigned to natural selection. It was a local jeweller, Robert Smith, who offered the most positive assessment of Darwin's ideas. Speaking to the Club in 1873, Smith argued that there was abundant evidence to support Darwin's theory of natural selection and suggested that worries over the negative impact on religious beliefs were misplaced.

Tyndall's Belfast Address

The Club's early engagement with Darwin and evolution did not continue in the same way after 1874. In that year, the physicist John Tyndall delivered a controversial address on evolution during the meeting in Belfast of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Many felt his address promoted evolution at the expense of traditional religious convictions. This made it difficult to talk about evolution in Belfast without inciting bitter controversy, something that Club members were anxious to avoid. Even so, they continued to explore issues related to evolution, including investigations into human prehistory.

Caricature of John Tyndall by Adriano Cecioni, published in *Vanity Fair*, April 1872.



1870s



William Swanston in the 1870s.

During a four-day excursion to Lough Erne, Co. Fermanagh and Bundoran, Co. Donegal (Tuesday 17 to Friday 20 August 1869), Club members pose for a photograph on the steps of their Bundoran hotel. Many are wearing sea-shell necklaces purchased from the young local girl holding a basket (right foreground). William Swanston stands on the far left, holding a geological hammer.

William Swanston (1841–1932)

A keen geologist and zoologist, William Swanston was in the Belfast linen trade. Swanston and several other prominent members of the Club became 'honorary curators' of the Belfast Natural History & Philosophical Society's Museum, to help the Society's curator upgrade the displays in readiness for the visit by the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1874. The same people compiled a handy *Guide to Belfast and the Adjacent Counties* for delegates to the meeting. This initiative established what became a British Association tradition, that the host town publishes a guide to the natural and human history of its region. Swanston served as the Club's Secretary (1875–1890) and President (1893–1894). He remained a stalwart supporter of the Club until his death in 1932, aged 91.

Research and recording

One of the Club's achievements was to publish supplements to its *Annual Report and Proceedings*, which reviewed local plants, animals, geology and landscape features. In the mid-1870s, Swanston had been studying the ancient rocks and

fossils of Co. Down, particularly along the coast at Donaghadee. His results were published by the Club in 1877, as a supplement authored jointly with Charles Lapworth – an English school teacher working in Scotland who later became the first Professor of Geology at Birmingham University. Lapworth had already shown that fossil 'graptolites' were the key to unravelling the complex geology of the Southern Uplands. Swanston's detailed recording of similar fossils in Co. Down enabled Lapworth to extend his ideas across the North Channel to Ireland.



Title page of guide published for British Association meeting in 1874.

1880s



Several prominent members of the Club were appointed to investigate evidence of early man discovered near Larne, Co. Antrim. The Larne Gravels Committee, photographed here in 1889, included (left to right) Samuel Stewart, Joseph Wright, William Henry Patterson, William Swanston, [unknown], Robert Praeger and William Gray.



Samuel Stewart, painted in 1896 by another member of the Club, Sydney Mary Thompson.

Samuel Alexander Stewart (1826–1910)

Samuel Stewart overcame humble origins to become one of Ireland's foremost botanists. Leaving school at eleven, he worked in the family trunk-making business on North Street, Belfast, while taking every opportunity to improve his understanding of the natural world. Stewart attended Tate's science classes and was one of the founders of the Field Club in 1863. Later in life, his knowledge was put to good use in the Belfast Natural History & Philosophical Society's Museum, where he first assisted (from 1880), then succeeded (in 1891) the elderly curator William Darragh (1813–1892). Stewart helped to inspire the next generation of naturalists and Field Club members, such as the geologist Robert Bell and botanist Robert Lloyd Praeger.

The Flora

Stewart's encyclopaedic knowledge of the Irish flora was summarised in a book in 1888. *A Flora of the North-East of Ireland* was authored by Stewart and Thomas Hughes Corry (1860–1883), and published by the Field Club, with financial help from the Corry family. Stewart's co-author had been a Belfast-born and Cambridge-educated botanist of great promise. Tragically, Corry was

drowned on Lough Gill, Co. Sligo when the book was still in its early stages and Stewart had to complete the project alone. For more than a century, the *Flora* was kept up-to-date with supplements and new editions, authored and edited by some of Ireland's finest botanists.



Memorial to Samuel Stewart in Belfast City Cemetery, as erected by the Club in 1911. The original bronze plaque by Rosamond Praeger has been missing for many years.

1890s



This excursion along the Lagan was captured by Robert Welch near Drum Bridge, Belfast, on Saturday afternoon 27 August 1892. *Sentry Hill Collection, Newtownabbey Borough Council.*



Sydney Thompson at Murlough Bay, Co. Antrim, in 1898.

Sydney Mary Thompson (1847–1923)

Sydney Thompson was the daughter of a Belfast linen merchant, James Thompson, and niece to one of Ireland's finest naturalists, William Thompson (1805-1852, author of the four-volume *The Natural History of Ireland*). She grew up in a large house overlooking Belfast Lough at Macedon Point, and trained to be an artist in Belfast and London. In 1893, Thompson and her friend Mary Andrews helped to establish the Club's Geological Section. As Secretary of the new Section, she became the first woman to serve on the Club's General Committee – highlighting the active role women played in the Club from an early period. Her short but happy marriage to a younger Swiss artist, Rodolfe Christen (1859–1906), and their decision to live in Scotland, limited her involvement with the Club after 1901.

Sections

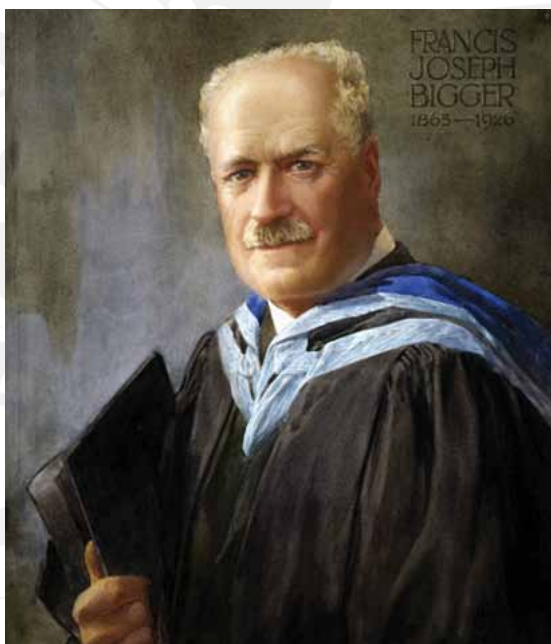
The establishment of a specialist Section within the Club was usually triggered by the needs of a special project. The Geological Section was

set up to locate and identify so-called 'erratic' rocks in the north of Ireland and to report the results to the British Association for the Advancement of Science, as part of a national recording scheme. 'Erratics' are rocks that were left behind by moving ice sheets during the last Ice Age, sometimes far from their place of origin. If the source of any especially distinctive rock type can be identified, then erratics can be used to work out the direction of ice flow. Ailsa Craig in the Firth of Clyde is one such source, and fragments of its distinctive microgranite were found scattered across the Ulster landscape by members of the Geology Section.



Sepia drawing by William Arthur Fry, showing *Macedon*, the Thompson's family home at Macedon Point, Whitehouse, Co. Antrim.

The Gaelic Revival



Francis Joseph Bigger (1863–1926), painted by William Arthur Fry from a photograph taken in July 1926, when Queen's University Belfast awarded Bigger an honorary degree for services to archaeology and local history.



William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), photographed in 1911 by George Charles Beresford. One of the greatest Irish writers, Yeats enthusiastically supported the Gaelic Revival in the 1890s.

Folklore and language

Beyond geology and natural history, the Field Club also fostered an interest in archaeology and ethnography. Archaeology had formed an important part of the Club's activities from the start and, in January 1893, an ethnographic committee was established to encourage and oversee research in folklore and language. This coincided with the broader rediscovery of Irish culture and language known as the Gaelic Revival.

Bigger, Yeats and Hyde

Francis Joseph Bigger, who later became Club President (1901–1903), was a key supporter of the Gaelic Revival. The Club also hosted lectures by two of the Revival's most prominent figures,

W. B. Yeats and Douglas Hyde. Yeats addressed the society on the subject of 'Irish Fairy Lore' in November 1893, while the following year Hyde spoke on 'Celtic Language and Literature'. Hyde urged his audience 'to study the Irish language, and thus preserve to the race one of the most cherished heritages'. Such encouragement was scarcely necessary, for the Club had already established an Irish class, taught by Patrick J. O'Shea. This class ran until 1895, in which year it formed the first Belfast branch of the Gaelic League, an organisation dedicated to promoting Gaelic language and culture. By 1900, the Club's interest in folklore had declined, only to be reawakened half a century later when a Folklore and Dialect Section was established in 1951.

1900s



Robert Praeger, painted in 1931 by Sarah Cecilia Harrison.

The Irish Field Club Union spent a week touring the Sligo area in 1904. Here, after exploring Knocknarea Glen, the party enjoys lunch in the grounds of Glen House, overlooking Ballysadare Bay, on Saturday 16 July. Robert Praeger stands second from the left.
Sentry Hill Collection, Newtownabbey Borough Council.

Robert Lloyd Praeger (1865–1953)

The naturalist and writer Robert Praeger was one of the finest natural scientists that Ireland has produced. The grandson of Robert Patterson (1802-1872), a founder of the Belfast Natural History Society in 1821, Praeger was born in Holywood, Co. Down. He was an engineer by qualification (Queen's College Belfast), a librarian by profession (at the National Library of Ireland in Dublin) and a naturalist by inclination. Praeger credited the Field Club, and the botanist Samuel Stewart in particular, with inspiring his enthusiasm for the natural world. He served as a Secretary of the Club in the early 1890s and as President in 1914–1916. The Club awarded Praeger its highest honour in 1927, when he became the fifth recipient of the Commemoration Medal. The artist and writer Rosamond Praeger (1867–1954) was Robert's sister and she illustrated some of his books.

Membership certificate from 1906, when Margaret Anne Campbell (Meg) McKinney, daughter of William Fee McKinney of Sentry Hill, joined the Club. *BNFC Archives.*

Mutual support

One of Praeger's many achievements was to organise the Irish Field Club Union, which encouraged cooperation between field clubs across Ireland. From 1895 (Galway) to 1910 (Rosapenna, Co. Donegal), the IFCU arranged Triennial Conferences, at which members of different clubs could share a few days of field study. While the IFCU did not survive the trauma of the First World War and partition, its spirit of mutual support lived on; joint meetings with other clubs continued to feature in the summer excursion programmes.



1910s



This excursion to the Giant's Ring, Belfast, on Saturday 10 May 1913, was part of a week of celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the Club's foundation in 1863.

Sentry Hill Collection, Newtownabbey Borough Council.



Sidney Stendall on a Club excursion to Purdysburn Glen, south of Belfast, Saturday 29 September 1923. BNFC Archives.

Jesse Austin Sidney Stendall (1887–1973)

In May 1910, the young Sidney Stendall, from Chester in Cheshire, began a new job at Belfast City Art Gallery & Museum. He had been appointed Assistant to the Museum's Curator, Arthur Deane, to begin cataloguing the collections of the old Museum which had just been donated to Belfast Corporation by the Belfast Natural History & Philosophical Society. Stendall made an immediate impact on the Club by setting up its Junior Section in 1911 and by helping to organise the Club's Jubilee celebrations in 1913. He served as President in 1923-1925.

When Deane retired in 1942, Stendall succeeded him as Curator, eventually becoming the Museum's first Director before retiring himself in 1953. He was awarded an OBE and received an honorary degree from Queen's University Belfast for services to the arts, sciences and museums.



Members of the Junior Section explore Purdysburn Glen. Photo by Sidney Stendall. BNFC Archives.

The Juniors

As the new Junior Section's Secretary, Stendall nurtured it so successfully that, by the late 1920s, the Juniors alone mustered over one hundred members. There was an attempt in early 1913 to establish a small *Quarterly Proceedings* for the Juniors, but the timing was unfortunate. After eight issues in two years, publication ceased at the end of 1914 – a few months after the outbreak of the First World War. For more than half a century, the Junior Section (later Division) encouraged an appreciation of the natural world amongst hundreds of young people in and around Belfast. Stendall returned to Belfast in 1961 from his retirement in Chester to attend the Division's Jubilee Supper, as the guest of honour.

Final issue of the Club's short-lived *Quarterly Journal*, published October 1914. BNFC Archives.



1920s



The charabancs parked outside Belfast Technical College are about to take Club members on an excursion to Slemish, Co. Antrim, on Saturday 16 June 1923. *BNFC Archives*.



John Vinycomb, painted in 1892 (when he was Club President) by Ernest Taylor.

John Vinycomb (1833–1928) Rewards for excellence

Born, educated and design-trained in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, John Vinycomb joined the art department of the Belfast printer and publisher Marcus Ward & Co in 1855, as an engraver. He was a superb illustrator, remaining chief designer and head of Marcus Ward's art department until the company was liquidated in 1899. A typical late-Victorian cultural all-rounder, Vinycomb's enthusiasm for the Field Club (he served as President 1891–1893) was matched by his vigorous promotion of the arts in Belfast, as a founder and first President of the Ramblers Sketching Club (1879) and its successor, the Belfast Art Society (1890), and of the Ulster Arts Club (1902). He was an authority on heraldry, illumination and book-plate design. After moving to London in 1909, he continued to work until his death, aged 94, in January 1928.

Legacies of Vinycomb's association with the Field Club include his distinctive badge design and illuminated addresses. The badge first appears on official publications about 1900, replacing a simpler lozenge-shaped design. The badge was used most effectively for the Club's Commemoration Medal, inaugurated on the suggestion of Sidney Stendall during his first year as President in 1923. The first few presentations of the medal by the Club in the 1920s were made to recognise the past achievements of senior members, with the 82-year-old William Swanston being the first recipient. By the end of the decade, the Club could claim to be the largest Field Club in the world, with over 700 members.



The Club's Commemoration Medal, designed by John Vinycomb, was first awarded in 1923.

The first issue of *The Irish Naturalists' Journal*, another Club initiative, appeared in September 1925. *BNFC Archives*.



1930s



Club members return from an excursion to Ballyalloly, near Comber, Co. Down, in the early 1930s. *BNFC Archives.*



Robert Welch, photographed in 1897 by Allison & Allison of Belfast.

Robert John Welch (1859–1936)

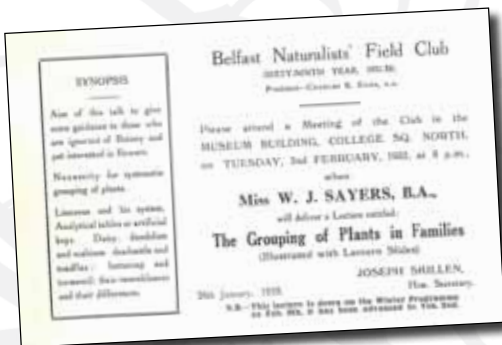
Robert Welch joined the Field Club in 1889, served as President in 1910–1912, and remained a member until his death in 1936. His passion for nature enthused young and old alike, while his photographs have continued to inspire an appreciation of the Irish landscape to this day.

Welch was born in Strabane, Co. Tyrone, where his father, who had been in the shirt industry, became a professional photographer in 1863. As a boy, Welch accompanied his father on photographic trips and developed a keen interest in photography himself. Based in Belfast, he became a professional photographer of great skill and originality, specialising in outdoor work and landscape views. Welch traced his love of the Irish countryside and natural history to family holidays spent in Bundoran, Co. Donegal.

Lasting legacy

Field Club members have always been generous in their support for museums in Belfast. In 1929, when Belfast's new Museum & Art Gallery opened in Botanic Gardens, the Club donated most of its library and herbarium. On Robert Welch's death in 1936, the Club launched a subscription fund to acquire his photographic and zoological collections and present them to the Museum. The £300 raised proved sufficient not only to buy his glass-plate negatives and cabinets of mollusc shells, but also to commission a bronze portrait plaque from the artist Rosamond Praeger and to have the family gravestone inscribed with a suitable epitaph.

Cartoon by Rosamond Praeger, showing Robert Welch battling against the Connemara weather in 1894.



Circular for a botany lecture given in January 1932 by Williema Jane Sayers who, in 1929, had become the Club's first woman President. *BNFC Archives.*

1940s - 1950s



Club members line up for the camera in front of Kate Kearney's Cottage at the Gap of Dunloe on Easter Saturday 5 April 1958, during a long excursion based in Killarney, Co. Kerry, and led by Richard Hayward. Partly obscuring the cottage's sign are Hayward (right) and Brendan Adams (left). *BNFC Archives*.



Richard Hayward in the late 1950s.

Richard Hayward (1892–1964)

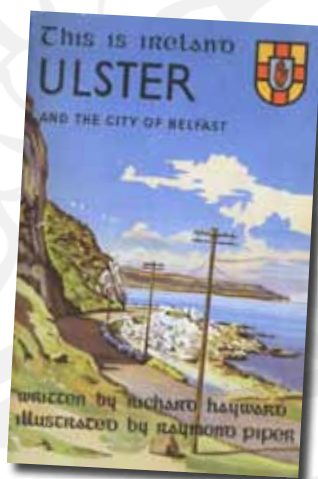
Richard Hayward was born in Southport, Lancashire, but raised and educated in Larne, Co. Antrim. He first joined the Field Club in 1921 but allowed his membership to lapse. He became well-known as a singer and actor, starring in stage plays as well as early Irish films, and he was a regular broadcaster on BBC radio. After rejoining the Club in 1944, Hayward became increasingly involved and served as President in 1951–1952. He regularly led well-attended excursions to the remoter parts of Ireland's south and west. He also wrote travel books on Ireland which were illustrated by another Club member, Raymond Piper. Hayward was awarded an OBE in 1964 for services to art and literature. Later that same year, he was killed in a car crash.

Ulster Dialect Dictionary

As far back as the 1890s, Club members had been keen to initiate folklore studies in the field, but by 1900 the project had collapsed. In 1951, during Hayward's year as President, a new Folklore and Dialect Section was formed, with the President and his nephew, Brendan Adams (1917–1981, Club President 1952–1953), providing the driving force. The new Section set about compiling a dictionary of Ulster dialect words. About 900 questionnaires were sent out to teachers, retired civil servants, even lighthouse keepers, and to many community organizations. The results contributed to what would eventually become the Concise Ulster Dictionary, (Oxford University Press, 1996). The project's surviving material is now part of the Ulster Dialect Archive at the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum, where Adams was Curator of Language.



The Rules of the Club were updated and issued to members in 1951. *BNFC Archives*.

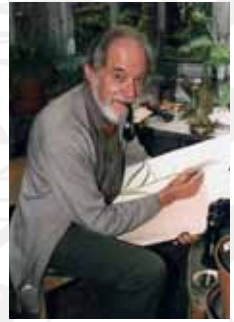


Hayward's book *Ulster and the City of Belfast* was published in 1950 by Arthur Barker, in the series *This is Ireland*.

1960s - 1980s



On The Honeycomb at the Giant's Causeway on Saturday 26 May 1962, Club members pay tribute to the famous image taken there in June 1868. This excursion, in the Club's 100th year, was led by the President, Pat Kertland (left foreground, wearing hat), a botanist at Queen's University Belfast, assisted by Survey geologist Peter Manning (centre foreground, with geological hammer). *BNFC Archives.*



Raymond Piper at home in 1985, working on an orchid drawing.

Raymond Piper (1923-2007)

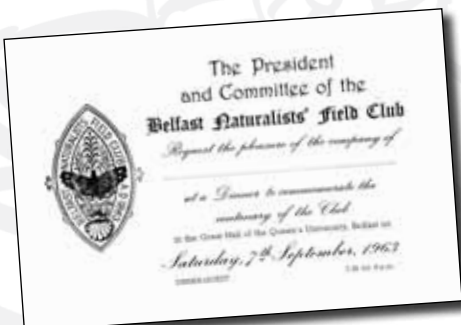
When the artist Raymond Piper joined the Field Club in 1946, he was beginning an outstanding career as a Belfast-based portraitist and botanical illustrator that would span sixty years. During his membership, he played an active role in many Club activities, served twice as President (1971-1972 and 1983-1984) and was made an Honorary Member in 1990.

Piper became interested in the natural world through his connection with the travel writer Richard Hayward (President 1951-1952), whom he had met at a Club event. He travelled around Ireland with Hayward, illustrating his books with evocative sketches. Piper became fascinated with Ireland's wild flowers, especially orchids, which he drew with precision, particularly those of the Burren in Co.Clare. In 1974, Piper's orchid studies were exhibited at the British Museum (Natural History) and he was awarded the prestigious John Lindley Medal by the Royal Horticultural Society for his orchid research.

Club Centenary

The Club celebrated its one-hundredth anniversary in 1963 with a Centenary Exhibition at the Ulster Museum and a Commemoration Dinner in the Great Hall of Queen's University Belfast. Both were held in early September. The dinner was attended by the then new Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Terence O'Neill, who proposed one of the toasts.

Pencil portrait of the eminent naturalist Robert Praeger (Club President 1914-1916), drawn by Raymond Piper in 1948 and presented to the Club by the artist in 1962. *BNFC Archives.*



Invitation to attend the Club's Centenary Dinner on 7 September 1963. *BNFC Archives.*

1990s - 2010s



Suffering mixed weather, as usual, Club members gather around the lychgate at Drumballyronee Church and School (now the Brontë Homeland Interpretative Centre) during Joan McCaughey's presidential excursion to the Banbridge area, Co. Down on Saturday 16 May 2009. *Liam and Joan McCaughey.*

Stan Beesley (1926–2005) and John Wilde (1917–2009)

Born and educated in Lancashire, Stan Beesley came to Northern Ireland in 1970 as a manager for Courtaulds (once dominant in the man-made fibre industry). Already a keen botanist, he soon joined the Field Club (serving as Secretary of the Botanical Section and as President 1978–1979) and later became Co. Antrim Recorder for the Botanical Society of the British Isles.

Stan's good friend and fellow Lancastrian, John Wilde, was another Courtaulds man with a passion for plants. Deeply committed to the Club, John served as Archivist and President (1981–1982). Stan and John worked together on many botanical ventures but are best known for coordinating the Club's recording project on the wild plants of urban Belfast (1993–1995).

The resulting *Urban Flora of Belfast* was published in 1997, for which they were each awarded the Club's Commemoration Medal in 1998.

The Future

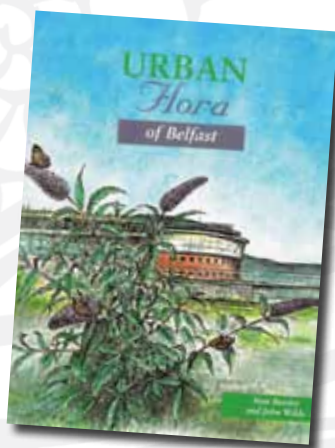
Looking forward as well as back in this anniversary year, the Club is partnering with the Dublin Naturalists' Field Club to champion a new Federation of Irish Field Clubs – hopefully a worthy successor to Praeger's Irish Field Club Union (1895–1910). The Club faces the future in good heart, building on its past achievements and confident that its mission to promote a better understanding of the world around us remains more relevant now than ever before.

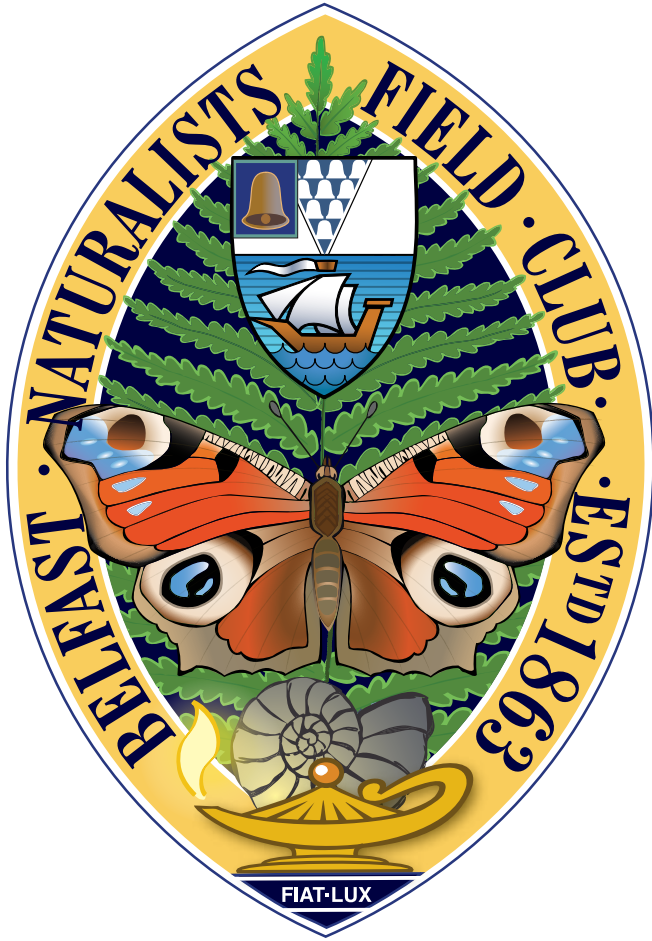
For information about the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club and its anniversary celebrations in 2013, see the Club's web site www.bnfc.org.uk



Home page of the Club's web site in February 2013.

Beesley and Wilde's *Urban Flora of Belfast* was illustrated by Diana Oxlade and published by the Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University Belfast.





The BNFC logo is a variation of John Vinycomb's original black and white design (from about 1900), made colourful and web-friendly for the twenty-first century by the Club's webmaster, Alastair McIlwain, who also designed the 150th anniversary motif.



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