

# SCIENCE IN LANCASTER IN THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY: THE FRANKLAND SOCIETY

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The past closes its doors with surprising speed. A chance encounter in the ENT department recently rekindled memories of the Lancaster Frankland Society – a society dedicated to maintaining a group where scientists could hear speakers drawn from the forefront of current research and be provided with ample time for discussion.

Edward Frankland was born in Churchtown, two kilometres southeast of Garstang, on 18th January 1825. He attended Lancaster Grammar School when it was a small stone building situated just below the west side of Lancaster Castle. Next, he was apprenticed to Stephen Ross, a pharmacist practising in Cheapside. The huge mortar and pestle used in an attic room by the apprentices to produce mercurial ointment, can be seen in Lancaster Museum. Frankland recorded mixing 14 pounds of hog's lard with six pounds of mercury for two or three hours each day for three months to achieve a satisfactory dispersion!

He moved from Lancaster to study chemistry at Owen's College, later to become Manchester University, where he subsequently occupied the chair of chemistry. He met Kolbe in London and travelled with him to Marburg to meet and work with Bunsen on the synthesis of fatty acids and on the newly-recognised organo-metallic compounds. It was here that he was awarded his doctorate in chemistry. Back in London he became deeply involved in founding the Royal Institute of Chemistry in 1877 and was its first president.

Despite his prominence he was a shy and retiring person and it has been suggested that his characteristically meticulous recording of his work arose from his great sensitivity to criticism and professional attack. He was by no means restricted to his laboratories and worked actively with developing Victorian industries, receiving his knighthood as a reward for his work towards providing a clean and healthy water supply to London and other large cities.

The accompanying photograph of Sir Edward Frankland was taken by a professional photographer in Fleet Street, London during April 1878 and has been lent to us by the Lancaster Reference Library, who have kindly allowed me to use their considerable archive on Frankland's life and achievements for this article.



## THE FORMATION OF THE FRANKLAND SOCIETY

Towards the end of the Great Depression of the 1920's Lancaster's industries were expanding again. Storey's and Williamson's were still the largest employers and Nelson's and Lansil had set up factories to utilise the pure water of the River Lune to produce cellulose acetate for textile and plastics applications. With the influx of new chemical graduates Mr EH Stansbie of Nelson's shared with other industrialists the vision of the need to form a group through which scientists could maintain contact with the increasing flood of scientific research and discoveries being reported. They did not wish Lancaster to fall behind in the expansion of the science-based industries and their concerns were shared by educationalists, too, as the numbers in secondary and further education began to rise.

In January 1933, therefore, a meeting was held in the Storey Institute and the Frankland Society was formed to organise monthly winter meetings to be addressed by leading scientists. Chemistry was the major impetus of the initial meetings but the subsequent programmes list speakers representing a wide range of disciplines, both academic and practical. EH Stansbie, chairman at Nelson's Silk, chaired the society throughout its life and early officers were JIM Jones of Standfast Dyers and CL Lewis of Joseph Storey's. Formal membership numbered between 30 and 40 from the start, with members being encouraged to bring guests to the lectures, for which impressive invitation cards were issued.

Members attended an informal dinner before the meetings, latterly in the Conservative Club in Church Street. Discussion was always lively and by no means restricted to scientific matters though the problems and scandals of the day were subjected to fairly rigorous scientific examination. The lectures were delivered in the Storey Institute up to the 1940s but although I was a member in the 1960s I find that I am completely unable to remember the venues that were then used. One outstanding character, the treasurer at this time, was Dr Sedgwick of Nelson's. By this time becoming elderly and of magisterial deportment, his aim was to supply the first question at the lecture's end. He usually opened the discussion period with a question of breathtaking simplicity, perhaps by requesting enlightenment on some fundamental assumption used by the speaker at the start of his work. It

certainly set the tone of the evening's discussion and disconcerted a number of eminent speakers! Dr Paish of the College of Further Education was a regular attender, as were two well-remembered medical personalities – John Dyer and Granville Freeman – whose combination of sharp wit and Yorkshire directness could reduce the tension at critical moments.

When Lancaster University was founded the whole balance of intellectual life altered. Joint meetings were held on university premises but it was realised that the time had

come to hand over this section of Lancaster life to the university. This was no sad occasion. There was increasing contact with the larger scientific world and a smooth transition was achieved. The huge developments in the way information is passed around, led by the internet and emailing, have continued into this new century. I find that I have new friends and correspondents all over the world and I am constantly reminded of the continuity of history when I e-mail two new ecological friends who work at Marburg University, where Sir Edward Frankland received his doctorate a century and a half ago.

### THE LANCASTRIAN FRANKLAND SOCIETY

#### ADVANCE NOTICE OF LECTURE PROGRAMME FOR SESSION 1975-1976

24th October 1975	Professor F. Oldfield, University of Lancaster "The Chemical Analysis of Lake Sediments"
14th November 1975	Dr A. B. Hart, Central Electricity Research Council, Leatherhead, Surrey. "The Hydrogen Economy" Joint Meeting with S.C.I., Liverpool Section.
5th December 1975	Dr Small, Chemistry Department, Lancaster University "Pot Making – Art or Science?" Joint Meeting with the Chemical Society, University of Lancaster.
January 1976	Details will be notified later.
February 1976	Professor A. Gemmell – title will be notified later.
5th March 1976	Dr D. V. Jackson, Materials Recovery Division, Warren Springs Laboratory, Stevenage, Herts. "Recycling of Metals from Waste Materials"
2nd April 1976	Dr C. H. Giles, University of Strathclyde. "The Fraulein's Button, or How we got our Surface Chemistry" Joint Meeting with the Society of Dyers and Colourists (Manchester Region)

All Ordinary Meetings are held in the Chemistry Colloquium Room, Department of Chemistry, University of Lancaster, Bailrigg and start at 7.30 p.m., except that on 5th December 1975, which will be held in the Chemistry Lecture Theatre.

Visitors are welcome to all ordinary meetings.