

THE SOCIETY FOR THE
HISTORY OF
NATURAL
HISTORY

Newsletter

DIARY

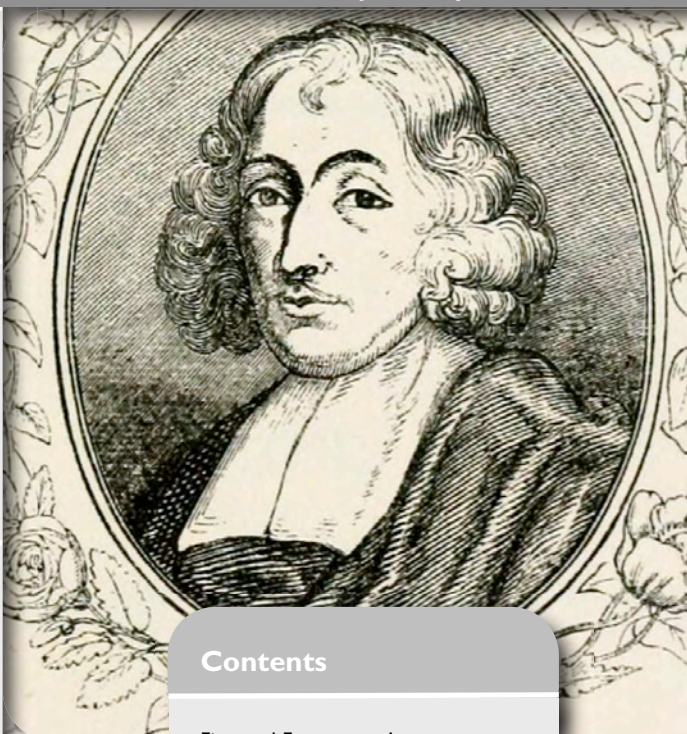
Number 97
January 2010

Spring Meeting and AGM
Philip Henry Gosse
Bicentenary Celebration
Torquay Museum
May 14–15 2010
See Item 2

Joint Meeting
The First
English “County Flora”
Cambridge University
Library
3 November 2010
See Item 3

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Above: John Ray, See Item 3

Society for the History of Natural History

The Society was founded in 1936 by a small group of scientists, librarians and bibliographers centred on the British Museum (Natural History) in London. The Society is still closely associated with the Museum, which contains the national collection of natural history specimens and has a strong tradition in the historical study of these specimens.

Since its modest beginnings, the Society has grown in membership and international standing. It is known for its friendliness and its meetings combine intellectual excellence with opportunities for informal exchange of ideas. It is a focal point for the history of all aspects of natural history. This includes biographical accounts and bibliographic reviews of literary and artistic aspects of natural history, as well as more extensive and investigative historical studies.

Although it maintains strong links with the Natural History Museum, London, the Society also has a thriving international membership. Representatives in North and South America, Europe, Asia and the Antipodes organise local meetings and an International Meeting is held every other year, the most recent being in Edinburgh, in May 2008.

The Society produces two regular publications: *Archives of natural history*, a refereed journal, and the more informal *Newsletter* which is published three or four times a year.

For more information contact the Secretary, Society for the History of Natural History, c/o the Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD, UK or search on www.shnh.org

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COPY DATE

The copy date for the next Newsletter is 1 April 2010

23. The archive of Marcel de Serres



Marcel Pierre Toussaint de Serres, or Marcel de Serres (1780–1862) was a French evolutionist and Darwinist. Hailing from a rich family of drapers, he studied in Paris between 1805–1808 at the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle under Haüy, Cuvier, Lamarck and Geoffrey St. Hilaire, and became friends with Alexandre Brongniart and Constant Prévost. He received the first chair of Mineralogy and Geology at the University of Montpellier in 1809, but only assumed the post in 1814. This was the second such chair in France, and he remained there until 1862.

De Serres was an exponent of the “Ecole du Midi”, an anti-catastrophist and almost evolutionist movement. He took a position between Lamarck and Darwin, stressing the continuity in life against Cuvier and the discontinuity of the living against Lamarck.

He was greatly influenced by his friend Constant Prévost and by André de Fenissac. He published most of his smaller contributions (about 250 titles) in French scientific journals. Many of his ideas were first written down in manuscripts that are of great historic and scientific interest as they include numerous corrections and additions to his printed oeuvre and many undiscovered treasures, which could possibly shed some new light upon the history of several sciences.

De Serres left an extensive collection of manuscripts comprising of at least 227 items, including five very large sets. Only 64 of these

were actually published and therefore the remaining 159 manuscripts (71 per cent) were almost certainly never published. There are also a few letters by Boué and Vals, and an annotated copy of Lamarck's *Philosophie Zoologique*. De Serres had a wide-ranging interest in many branches of natural history. His palaeontological researches led him to name the Quaternary period and to suggest that human beings were contemporary with mammoths and rhinoceroses in Europe. Furthermore he wrote on the formations of mountains, on minerals (proposing a new method of classification of the several systems), on the chemistry of rocks and minerals, on the first synthesis of knowledge of animal migration (especially of birds), on early dating of fossil bones by fluorine concentration (1817), on the evolutionary aspects of the forms of our continents, on temperature through geological times, on the atmosphere of the globe and stratosphere, on water wells, balneology, glaciology, oceans and their temperatures, coral islands, dunes, chemistry and, within zoology, on shells and extinct animals (such as the dodo), on plant classification systems, the regional origin of plants and their distribution, and on many other kinds of living systems on the globe.

This collection of manuscripts potentially will clarify many issues of the history of science, paleontology, geology and evolutionary studies in 19th-century France. De Serres was a contemporary of Charles Darwin, working on similar issues in a different environment.

The collection has been partly catalogued by the firm of Dieter Schierenberg (Zamenhofstraat 150, Unit 320, 1022 AG Amsterdam, Netherlands), who can provide further details. There is a need to find a safe depository for this important and large archive.

Dr Kees Rookmaaker

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