

## THE BORDER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

An overwhelming majority of our countrymen seem to have an ingrained notion that history is a dull and deadly subject — “something for the birds”. This profound misconception appears to spring mainly from recollections of painful and unimaginative school lessons. If this be so, our educational authorities may be assured that in due course they will stand for judgment before the bar of history! Those who strive to break down prejudice and quicken an interest in the past with all its colour and drama, humour and tragedy and its complex threads that shape to-day and to-morrow, cannot fail to be heartened by the growth of local historical societies in South Africa.

The labours of these societies, particularly when recorded in brochures or magazines, have a lasting value. With limited funds and few members, these societies often have uphill work; all too frequently their views are disregarded or even derided by those who smugly term themselves “realists”, those with whom “sentiment cuts no ice”. If their membership numbers are modest, let the local historical societies remember the men of Gideon and not despair.

The South African Historical Association has noted with pleasure the coming into being of local historical societies in recent years — among them Simonstown, West Rand (Krugersdorp) and Port Elizabeth. It now extends a special word of welcome and encouragement to a lusty newcomer, the Border Historical Society. An earlier attempt to form a branch of our Association at East London was unsuccessful but nevertheless the Border Historical Society, a bilingual body, born in July, 1960, has come into being to fill the gap. In March and June 1963 it issued the first two quarterly numbers of its publication, *The Coelacanth*. Modest in their format as becomes a pioneering venture, these issues contain much that is of an interest that extends beyond the purely local.

Miss M. Courtenay-Latimer has outlined the history of the East London Museum from its humble beginnings in 1921 to the present time when it enjoys substantial stature in the scientific world; she has recalled the epoch-making identification of the *Coelacanth* in 1938. The Museum too is the repository of many of the historical relics of old East London and, as is rightly the case in our age, science and history go hand in hand.

The Society's Chairman has recorded the story of valiant efforts still proceeding, in the teeth of apathy and opposition, to secure Gately House (1867), with its valuable period furniture, as the Town House of “the fighting port”.

Many of us have happy recollections of Orient Beach. Mr. H. H. Driffield, a former Town Clerk, has described the wreck of the Russian sailing vessel “Orient” in 1907 that give the beach its name. He has also given a graphic account of the weeks of effort that were required to free the “Galway Castle” when it ran aground near the same spot in 1917.

The Border Historical Society has arranged an interesting programme for the coming year with a wide variety of subjects to be discussed at monthly intervals. If you wish to join the Society there is the added inducement that its publications are likely to acquire value as rare items of Africana. The Hon. Secretary, c/o. The Museum, East London, will gladly furnish you with any other information. We hope that the Border Historical Society and *The Coelacanth* will thrive and, like "Old Fourlegs", live to a ripe old age!