



GUEST EDITORIAL

THE SCIENCE OF JOHN LUBBOCK

Coffee drinkers in St Andrews routinely find themselves sitting in the shadow of John Lubbock, first Baron Avebury (1834–1913), a banker, politician and scientist. Although the Old Union building at the University of St Andrews now operates as a café, it has retained some of its original architectural features. Among these is an impressive ceiling beam, inscribed with the names of Lord Avebury and other former rectors of the university. In 1907 John Lubbock was returned, unopposed, as rector of the University of St Andrews. Twenty years earlier he had not been so successful: he lost the rectorship to the Conservative Arthur James Balfour. Arriving for his installation at 2.00 p.m. on 10 December 1887, Balfour had departed two and a half hours later. In the interim he delivered an address on the pleasures and benefits of reading, which was inspired by a widely covered lecture that Lubbock gave at the Working Men's College earlier in the previous year.¹ Perhaps fittingly, even in his defeat, Lubbock made his mark.

When Lubbock assumed the rectorship in 1907 he was more generous with his time. He dined with both students and professors, attended a dance, and took in a round of golf the following morning. His rectorial address expounded on happiness and duty, themes that he had explored at length in his exceptionally popular didactic books, *The Pleasures of Life* and *The Use of Life*. Sensitive to the lie of the land, however, he couched his moral advice in an appropriate sporting analogy:

I have often thought how closely the maxims of golf apply to real life. Keep your eye on the ball. Keep in the course. Take time. Do not lose heart. Keep your temper or you will lose your game.²

He warned students of the dangers of alcohol, and implored them to pursue a rounded education—one that included both the classics and the sciences. In one of his much-repeated phrases, he observed, ‘Science is more exciting than a fairy tale, more brilliant than a novel’.

In 2013, the year of the University of St Andrews's 600th anniversary, I recount the tales of the rectorial elections to mark another anniversary, the centenary of John Lubbock's death. In some respects, Lubbock's association with St Andrews captures the multiple facets of his life and work. In an often-repeated and perhaps apocryphal story, a young John Lubbock purportedly confided in Charles Darwin that he aspired to become President of the Royal Society, Lord Mayor of London and Chancellor of the Exchequer. Darwin later reflected that Lubbock could have achieved any one of these heights had he been willing to forgo pursuit of the other two.³ The historical reality perhaps renders this an especially piquant tale: Lubbock became Vice-President of the Royal Society, second Chairman of the recently constituted London County Council, and a Member of Parliament for Maidstone, Kent, and then the University of London. But we should resist the impulse for a Kiplingesque biography of a ‘first-rate second-rate man’. Most of all,

the apocryphal reminiscence of Darwin, and Lubbock's association with St Andrews—indeed, his ubiquity in the late nineteenth century—highlight the difficulties and considerations that confront any proper treatment of the varied meanings and uses of the life of scientist John Lubbock. As a supporting actor in several historical contexts, he repeatedly surfaces as a prominent member of a multiplicity of social and intellectual groupings. Despite this, John Lubbock is in danger of becoming best remembered for having been forgotten.⁴

After Lubbock's death in 1913, a rationalist publication, *The Freethinker*, declared: 'Although not great in the sense in which Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin were great, Lubbock was still a very big man.'⁵ He was a wealthy banker, responsible for the introduction throughout England of a clearing system for cheques; and he was the architect of bank holidays, which for years were known affectionately as St Lubbock's Days. As a prominent archaeologist and anthropologist, he was one of the earliest proponents of a new science of prehistory. He was responsible for the preservation of the Avebury stone circle and of Silbury Hill. And he was a leading entomologist who made lasting contributions to the scientific study of insects and to the relationships between insects and plants. Perhaps less appealingly, his popularization of the 'best hundred books' established an enduring and exasperating legacy of perpetual 'best 100' lists. In a career that spanned half a century, Lubbock contributed countless papers to learned societies and their journals, made frequent public lectures, and produced some 20 books.

Residing at High Elms, near the village of Downe in Kent, Lubbock enjoyed a close relationship with Charles Darwin. Several of the contributors to this special issue of *Notes and Records* highlight the prominent role that Lubbock took in the discussions about human origins and the 'antiquity of man' in the wake of the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Alison Pearn draws on her intimate knowledge of the Darwin correspondence to re-evaluate the personal and intellectual relationships between Darwin and Lubbock; and, importantly, demonstrates that these developed and changed over the long period of their association. Pearn contends that the close physical proximity of the two neighbours may have rendered Lubbock, who was one of Darwin's greatest collaborators, less visible historically: countless conversations have left few archival traces.

Janet Owen reminds us that manuscript materials are not the only valuable sources for understanding the breadth and complexity of Lubbock's contributions to the prehistory movement. Through an insightful analysis of a sample of Lubbock's archaeological and ethnographic artefacts, Owen demonstrates how his collecting activity coincided with, and underpinned, his writing on human antiquity: his most active periods of collecting directly coincided with his years of engagement in relevant debates. Moreover, his acquisition of his biggest 'artefacts'—namely Avebury and Silbury Hill—helped to focus his attention on ancient monuments legislation to protect prehistoric sites.

Paul Pettitt and Mark White assess Lubbock's contributions to the discipline of archaeology. As the first published author to use the terms 'Palaeolithic' and 'Neolithic', Lubbock perhaps has a claim to an enduring place in the history of archaeology. But *Pre-Historic Times* (1865), the book in which Lubbock introduced his variant on the nascent and contested 'Three Age System', has fared less well. Pettitt's and White's quantitative analysis of peer citations indicates that *Pre-Historic Times* had all but disappeared from the canon of archaeological literature by the second decade of the twentieth century. Although Pettitt and White assert that Lubbock played a significant role in the synthesis and dissemination of others' fieldwork, and in the formation of a discipline of

archaeology in Britain, they offer a valuable corrective to Glyn Daniel's earlier claims of precedence and originality for Lubbock.

David Bridgland provides a similarly nuanced historical evaluation of a relatively neglected facet of Lubbock's contributions to prehistory. In the company of Charles Kingsley, Lubbock found the fossil skull of a musk ox while 'geologizing' on 30 May 1855.⁶ Significantly, Lubbock used this kind of evidence to speculate on human-induced animal extinctions at the beginning of the interglacial period. More importantly, as Bridgland demonstrates, Lubbock's speculations on glacial–interglacial transitions were aspects of his perception of river terrace formation and archaeology. Combining his knowledge of erosional terraces in Switzerland with his understanding of landscape and river terrace evolution in England, Lubbock made prescient observations and speculations in *The Beauties of Nature*, *The Scenery of England* and *Pre-Historic Times*. Bridgland highlights the way in which Lubbock provided informed and innovative scientific knowledge in some of his ostensibly popular publications.

In the final contribution, I examine Lubbock's combination of original research and public dissemination of science within the context of his role as a liberal intellectual. Lubbock spent his entire intellectual career promoting meritocracy and the gradual reform of traditional institutions. He actively engaged in rigorous experimental science to achieve his ends—and he tamed a wasp and taught a dog to read. Significantly, Lubbock promoted a professional ideal of a science of progress. Disinterested, secular, rational observation and experimentation—in banking and in (proportional) parliamentary representation; and on wasps, dogs, bees and ants—would lead a progressive march towards the 'moral regeneration of mankind'. In 1890 Lubbock took great delight in his discovery that an American author, John Hittell, had placed him in the company of Bentham, Marcus Aurelius, Cicero, Emerson, Franklin and Seneca as one of the seven great moralists of the ages.⁷

J. F. M. Clark

jfc2@st-andrews.ac.uk

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This special issue arose out of a conference to mark the centenary of John Lubbock's death. A group of scholars and of Lubbock's descendants met at the Royal Society on 22 March 2013 to reassess the science of John Lubbock. As one of the invited speakers, I must acknowledge our debt of gratitude to Katherine Ford, Dianne Edwards, Keith Moore and the events team at the Royal Society for their design and delivery of an informative and stimulating interdisciplinary conference. Katherine Ford in particular worked tirelessly before, during and after the conference to make the event a success; and she helped, in the early stages, to coordinate contributors to this special issue. Dianne Edwards, President of the Linnean Society, chaired proceedings with insight and aplomb. The conference was enhanced by a prior private viewing of a fascinating English Heritage exhibition—'The general, the scientist and the banker: the birth of archaeology and the battle of the past'—held in the wonderfully unique space of the Quadriga Gallery of Wellington Arch. All of the speakers at the conference profited from the questions of the attentive audience. Robert Fox saw the potential for a special issue: I thank him for the

invitation to act as guest editor. Jennifer Kren's experience and efficiency, as Editorial Coordinator, were invaluable.

NOTES

- 1 Donald Wintersgill, *The rectors of St Andrews University, 1859–2005* (Dunedin, Edinburgh, 2008), pp. 48–51; Greg P. Twiss and Paul Chennell, *Famous rectors of St Andrews* (Alvie Publishing, St Andrews, 1982), pp. 44–45; Arthur J. Balfour, 'The Pleasures of Reading', in *Essays and Addresses*, 2nd edn (David Douglas, Edinburgh, 1893), pp. 1–37.
- 2 John Lubbock's rectorial address, quoted in Wintersgill, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 78.
- 3 Sir Bernard Mallet, 'Political and economic', in *The life-work of Lord Avebury (Sir John Lubbock) 1834–1913* (ed. Ursula Grant Duff), p. 63 (Watts & Co., London, 1934).
- 4 R. J. Pumphrey, 'The forgotten man: Sir John Lubbock, FRS', *Notes Rec. R. Soc.* **13**, 49–58 (1958); *idem*, 'The forgotten man: Sir John Lubbock', *Science* **129**, 1087–1092 (1959); Eynon Smart, 'Bank holidays—and much else', *Hist. Today* **21**, 870–876 (1971) ('that remarkable and now strangely forgotten man', p. 871); Phillip Steadman, 'John Lubbock, forgotten polymath', *New Scient.* **85** (10 January), 84–86 (1980); Mark Patton, *Science, politics and business in the work of Sir John Lubbock: a man of universal mind* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2007), p. 9 ('How is it . . . that Lubbock has been largely forgotten?'); and Janet Owen, *Darwin's apprentice: an archaeological biography of John Lubbock* (Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2013), p. ix ('tells the story of an important yet forgotten Darwinist, John Lubbock').
- 5 T. F. Palmer, 'A scientific and sceptical saint', *Freethinker* **37** (4 February), 75 (1917).
- 6 Saturday, 30 May 1855, Sir John Lubbock, 1st Lord Avebury Diary, 1853–1863, *Supplementary Avebury Papers*, British Library, ADD MSS. 6279, f. 58
- 7 Saturday, 26 April 1890, Sir John Lubbock, 1st Lord Avebury, Diaries 1883–1894, *Supplementary Avebury Papers*, British Library, ADD MSS. 62683, f. 101; and John S. Hittell, *A Code of Morals*, 2nd rev. edn (The Bancroft Company, San Francisco, CA, 1890), p. 11 fn.