

'GEORGE W. TEMPERLEY ~ HIS LIFE'

INTRODUCTION

George Temperley was not only a nationally recognized ornithologist and a very good botanist he was a competent and fully rounded naturalist. During his later life he worked on both the botanical and conchological collections of the Natural History Society in the Hancock Museum. He was also the author of *'A History of the Birds of Durham'*, published in 1951 (as Vol. IX of the Transactions of the Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, New Series).

To date, this is the most modern and complete avifauna of the County of Durham. This work has been, for over half a century, the standard reference on the ornithology of Durham. Amongst natural historians of the north east region, this book bears a rare accolade. It does not go by its title, it is known simply as 'Temperley'. At the time of publication, Temperley's work was at the 'cutting edge' of documenting the natural heritage of the area. It was compiled with, as Fred Grey wrote in 1988, "*The detailed and painstaking research typical of the man whose informed love of the natural world his friends were privileged to share*".



George Temperley with 'Robert of Restharrow'. This well known image shows George W. Temperley in his garden at Stocksfield, in 1937, with a tame Robin. Every year he would tame a new Robin which would become 'Robert of Restharrow'

Image courtesy of the 'Natural History Society of Northumbria (NHSN) Archive Collection

GEORGE W. TEMPERLEY (1875 -1967)

EARLY LIFE

George William Temperley was born on 29th October 1875, the second child of Nicholas and Alice Temperley. The Temperleys were a Victorian family living at that time in Chester Crescent, Newcastle upon Tyne. Shortly after George was born they moved to Low Fell where a sister Elizabeth Ellen and a brother Nicholas Ridley arrived to join George and his sister Margaret Alice. By 1879 the family was complete. George's infant years were therefore spent with his three siblings in their nursery at Low Fell.

EDUCATION AND BEYOND

George was a delicate child and did not attend school until the age of twelve. His formal education took place at Gateshead High School for Boys becoming, for his last year, Head Boy.

During all of this time his father took a most active part in his life. Although a business man directing the family wholesale provision importers located in Newcastle, actively involved in social reforms, Gateshead Council, magistrates duties and numerous natural history societies, Nicholas found time to take his children into the country and to the sea-side. He read serious books with them and involved them in discussions on many topics so setting the basis from which the young George would grow into the learned and greatly respected ornithologist, botanist, educator, social worker and friend to all who loved the natural world that he became.

It was his profound love of the natural world that prompted him to join the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle when he left school, aged 17, in 1892. From joining the Natural History Society in 1906 he remained a lifelong member, actively contributing through the various posts he held and in the work he did at the Hancock Museum, where he was eventually one of the honorary curators.

This photograph of him (courtesy of Newcastle Libraries), in his early to mid-twenties, was taken between 1898 and 1900 when he was the Honorary Editor of the Sunday Lecture Society in Newcastle upon Tyne.



George W. Temperley.
Hon. Editor 1898 to 1900.

WORKING LIFE & LEISURE

Throughout most of his long life he was associated with the Newcastle and Gateshead area and more widely the north east of England. For the years from 1914-1919, he lived in Scarborough, East Yorkshire, and worked for the Council of Social Welfare in that town.

In 1892, on leaving school at seventeen and instigated by his father, who imported wholesale provisions from Europe, he and a friend signed on as assistant stewards



on a voyage of the tramp steamer 'SS. Ben Ledi' out of North Shields. Rounding off an extraordinary trip, calling at ports on the Mediterranean and Black Sea, he returned via Oslo, to join the family company. In 1896, after working his way through the business he was taken into partnership with his father. Secure in his profession in 1901, he married Marguerite Matilda Eyres, known as 'Madge' who lived close by in Low Fell. His only child Bernard Nicholas, who was to become a hydro-geologist, and work most of his life in Kenya and South Africa, was born in 1903.

During his young adult life he was actively and passionately involved in a raft of organisations: the Literary and Philosophical Society in Newcastle; the Newcastle Liberal Club; the Gateshead Stop the War Committee; the Sunday Lecture Society and, of course, the Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle upon Tyne. In 1906, George won the prestigious Hancock Prize, for the best essay submitted on a natural history topic.

His father retired from the family business in 1908, which was sold, as George decided that he wanted to follow a career in social work. From 1909 to 1913, he lived in Sunderland and during this period he became one of the founder members of the first Sunderland Naturalists' Association (founded in 1911).

In 1913, he was offered the post of Secretary to the Council of Social Welfare in Scarborough, and the family spend five years in that area. During this time George honed his lecturing skills, and with the aid of 'lantern slides' he involved many people in the greater appreciation of wildlife, in particular birds and plants.

He returned to Newcastle in 1919 to undertake the post of Secretary of the Citizens' Service Society, until his retirement in 1928, when he devoted himself to his lifelong interest in natural history.

NATURAL HISTORY ACTIVITIES

His association with the Hancock Museum and the activities that go on within it commenced when he was just nine years old, in 1884, the year of the Museum's opening when he recollected watching the first curator, Richard Howse, laying out the first specimens in the empty wall cases of the geology room.

There are few published references to his earliest birdwatching or natural history activities. In both early and later life he spent some considerable time birdwatching in the Team valley, largely in the Ravensworth Estate, before his move to Stocksfield, Northumberland in the late 1930s.

On returning to the north east from Yorkshire, he re-joined the Natural History Society.

As recorded in the section relating to Shore Lark in *The Birds of Gateshead* (Bowey *et al.* 1993), "In the winter of 1890, after a severe snowstorm, George Temperley found two birds in a field somewhere between Gateshead and Low Fell". This record would have dated from a time when he was 15, so it would seem that the family home in Gateshead probably helped delineate the focus of his early wanderings and concentrated his activities on what would then have been a relatively bird-rich area in and around the Team valley.

The first ornithological note he is known to have published nationally was on the subject of Fulmars at Bempton, in Yorkshire, observations of which he made in



spring 1919 made during his sojourn in Scarborough, and published in *British Birds* (Vol. 13:2, pages 56-64).

He had active links to both the Vale of Derwent Naturalists' Field Club (founded in 1887) and the Weardale Naturalists' Club (founded 1896). Later, he was an active and founding member in 1923, of the Wallis Club (which was named after one of the north east's first great natural historians, the Reverend John Wallis), becoming its president in 1936. A little later, he became a regular contributor to the publications of the Northern Naturalists' Union, which was formed in 1924, for a time being on the editorial board of its publication, *The Vasculum*.

In the February 1929 edition of the *Vasculum*, GW Temperley wrote an article pleading for a survey of the bird life of Northumberland and Durham. He stated that it was now more than half a century since John Hancock had written his "*Catalogue of the birds of Northumberland and Durham*" and he also referred to even earlier studies. He referred to the difference from the time of John Wallis, in 1769, when "Flocks of Kites stole the farmers' chickens, Hen Harriers nested on Newcastle Town Moor and Ravens bred in the tower of St Nicholas Church". He bemoaned that the example set by "these ornithological pioneers has not been followed". He was concerned that changes were taking place that could affect the bird life of both counties and as a result the present status of birds should be more faithfully recorded and documented. Clearly, he was putting down a marker for future work.

He long harboured an ambition to work as a museum curator but, as he himself wrote, he had to wait until 1930 when as Honorary Secretary of the Natural History Society he worked on several of the Society's collections, as Honorary Curator.

Temperley's interest and active observations in the Team valley would last for at least another forty years, from his discovery of that inland Shore Lark, to when in 1934 he documented the first known breeding of Willow Tit in County Durham and published his sightings of this event in 1935, in *British Birds*. Some of his other earlier published observations include his noting of breeding Curlews in the Team Valley (in 1923) and at the other end of the county's recording area, his finding of three flocks of Snow Buntings on a walk from North Gare to Greatham Creek in 1928, when visiting Teesside.

Over the period 1920 to 1954, he was a regular correspondent to the Editors of the journal, *British Birds*. He contributed to a number of national species reviews and surveys (e.g. herons, grebes, and corncrake) and published numerous notes on subjects as varied and widely ranging as: breeding Montagu's Harriers in Durham; Influxes of Waxwing to the north east of England; the song of Italian Chaffinches; and, the first occurrence of Ferruginous Duck in Durham, at Hebburn Ponds, in 1947.

In 1931 he became the Joint Honorary Secretary of the Natural History Society, a post he held until 1951. From 1933 to 1939, he was also one of the Honorary Curators of the Hancock Museum. In 1935, he became the Recorder to the Ornithological Section of the Hancock Museum. In this capacity he compiled and edited, for twenty one years, the Ornithological Reports for both Northumberland and Durham, which were published in the *Transactions of the Society*, before 'handing over the baton' to Fred Grey. In 1945, he was appointed one of three Society representatives on the Museum Management Committee, holding this post until 1950 when on his retirement he was elected Vice-president, and in 1955 made an Honorary Member of the Society.

In support of this work, he had extensive contacts with other ornithologists around the north east. He got to know the late Peter L. Hogg during the 1930s, whilst birdwatching at Hartlepool. In May 1931, Temperley recommended Joseph Bishop, one of the acknowledged expert ornithologists of the Teesside area, as Teessmouth's Authorised Watcher for the RSPB, a position that observer retained until his illness and untimely death in 1939.

As well as watching birds in the Gateshead area, with a distinct focus on the Ravensworth Estate (or Ravensworth Park, as he knew it), George Temperley was in regular contact with local people, in the Gateshead and lower Derwent valley, such as the Hutchinson family of High Horse Close, Rowlands Gill, who provided him with much information about local Waxwing movements. *"During the 1930's Waxwing visited the High Horse Close area, to feed on Guelder Rose berries, more regularly than anywhere else in the region. Temperley documents a series of sightings from there in the winters of 1931/32, 1932/33, 1935/36, 1936/37, 1937/38, 1941/42, 1946/47, and 1949/50"*, (Bowey et al. 1993).

From the formation of the ornithological section of the Society, in 1935, he instituted the meticulous keeping of records and he compiled the annual Ornithological Reports for Northumberland and Durham between the years 1935 and 1956, when that task was inherited by Fred Grey.



George Temperley and Philip Stead on a NHSN ornithological field trip to Teesside (date not known)

Image courtesy of the 'Natural History Society of Northumbria (NHSN) Archive Collection

George Temperley was 'well known and respected' in the ornithological world being acquainted with such naturalists as Viscount Grey of Fallodon, George Bolam at Alston and Abel Chapman at Houxy on the North Tyne. As a consequence of these northern relationships, it seemed inevitable

that his emphasis in ornithology would be upon Northumberland and that County Durham would be

merely a *"poor cousin"*. In respect of this, George Temperley was urged by George Bolam, author of *'The Birds of Northumberland'*, published in 1932, to, in similar fashion write up the history of the birds of Durham. On the death of Bolam, in 1934, his sister Edith gave Temperley volumes of Bolam's manuscript notes on his north country records. No doubt these facts helped prompt him to fulfil the omission of an authoritative avifauna on the apparently neglected county. After all, he was in touch with people who could keep him informed of ornithological events in County Durham, notably with Dr Hugh Blair an ornithologist of repute, based in South Shields, who had a wide circle of correspondents.

When setting out to work on this volume, he published the following request in *British Birds* (*British Birds* 40:6, 191-192).

"A HISTORY OF THE BIRDS OF CO. DURHAM. SIRS,—I am collecting material for a History of the Birds of the County of Durham and shall be most grateful for any notes or records that any of your readers may be able to send me which contribute information with regard to the past or present status, distribution or habits of any species therein. The County has been much neglected by ornithologists in the past. The only published list of its birds of any note was that compiled by Canon H. B. Tristram for the Victoria County History of Durham in 1905, now long out of date. It is true that P. J. Selby, in 1831, and John Hancock, in 1874, included Durham within the scope of their respective " Catalogues " of Northumberland and Durham ; but as they both lived and worked in the former county they paid scant attention to the latter and gave it no separate nor detailed consideration. Two hitherto unpublished MSS. on the birds of the County have recently come to light, one dated 1834 and the other 1840, so with these as a basis I propose to show the changes which have taken place in the course of a century, as well as the present status of each species. Notes should be sent to me at the address given below. GEORGE W. TEMPERLEY. The Hancock Museum, Newcastle-upon-Tyne."



23rd March 1951 - 'A Memorable Day.' from right to left, Roger Clissold, N. Southern and T. Hird with GWT (looking through the telescope) 'watching a flock of 250 Barnacle Geese and some Pink-footed Geese on the Solway Marshes'

Image courtesy of the 'Natural History Society of Northumbria (NHSN) Archive Collection

George Temperley was not only a very good ornithologist but a very capable botanist and even published on the mammals in the region. His paper about the Status of the red squirrel in Northumberland and Durham was published in the *Transactions of the Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle Upon Tyne (New Series)* Vol. X No 4, in July 1953. He was appointed the regional representative of the British Trust for Ornithology in 1948 a position he retained until 1956. In 1953, George Temperley was awarded the British Trust for Ornithology's highest award,



the Bernard Tucker Medal, for his services to ornithology and his contributions to the BTO's field investigations. A greater recognition still was the honorary degree of Master of Science conferred upon him in 1952, for his contributions to natural science, by the University of Durham.

George Temperley's greatest legacy to the bird watching world, *A History of the Birds of Durham* was published in 1951 in the Natural History Society's Transactions. This fine work, the result of many years' effort, was the first and to date, the only fully complete avifauna for County Durham.

HIS LATER YEARS

The years from 1936 to 1967 were spent at Restharrow the house in Stocksfield where he chose to spend his later years. In 1965, he celebrated his 90th birthday in St. John's Church Hall, where a large company of family and friends gathered to pay tribute to him. It was at this gathering that his nephew, Harold Eyres reminded everybody of his meticulous integrity in recording and life, when he said, "*He (GWT) has never allowed the dim light of autumn to turn an ill-lit sparrow into a rare winter migrant*". Two years and one month passed when, on 29th November 1967, George Temperley slipped peacefully away in Hexham General Hospital. At his request there was no open funeral or memorial service, just a private cremation.

Unsurprisingly for somebody who had dedicated his working career, and much voluntary time, to the benefit and welfare of others, he was always willing to advocate and express his views, not always conventionally, on subjects that affected his love of birds and those who studied them. Upset at the closure of the Monk's House Observatory in Northumberland in 1960, he memorably wrote to Bird Study and must be one of a very select band (of one?) to have had a poem published in that august Journal. In his correspondence, he stated:

"Sir, Every ornithologist and bird lover must be keenly regretting the closing of Monk's House Bird Observatory on the Northumberland coast and the departure of its charmingly hospitable founders, Dr. and Mrs. E. A. R. Ennion. The following lines attempt to express that regret, though perhaps in a too imaginative manner for publication in so serious a journal as Bird Study."

THE HOUSE ON THE SHORE - A LAMENT

*The ragwort dejectedly hangs its damp head;
The last of the poppies its petals has shed;
The whole scene is gloomy, as if to deplore
That the Ennions are leaving the House on the Shore.*

...

*The castle of Bamburgh stands stately and still
On the crest of the rock which is known as whin-sill;
But the fulmars around it now silently soar,
For the Ennions are leaving the House on the Shore.
I weep as I write these long lines of lament,
But the tears will not loosen the trusty cement
Which binds me in friendship, by which I set store,
To the Ennions who are leaving the House on the Shore.*

Yours &c. GEORGE W. TEMPERLEY, Retired B.T.O. Regional Representative for Northumberland and Durham."

In 1988, Fred Grey wrote, "One's abiding memory of George William Temperley is that of a kindly and courteous gentleman infinitely helpful and patient with beginners on field outings and delighting in the Hawfinches that annually visited the single cherry tree in the garden of his lovely house at Stocksfield, fittingly named Restharrow".

This glowing opinion was confirmed by a number of the county's ornithologists who met him in their earlier, and his later, years. For example, David Simpson of Shotton Colliery described Temperley as a 'gentleman' and that when George was in his late seventies and early to mid-eighties he was still a strong walker. His friendly way with fellow enthusiasts was illustrated by the story of Graham Bell, one of the founders of the Teesmouth Bird Club, who telephoned him to ask about the passing-on of Teesmouth sightings, and Graham was promptly invited to breakfast at Temperley's home in Stocksfield. During his Stocksfield days many friends and birdwatchers visited him or took him on day trips.

It is clear that 'Temperley', George Temperley's Durham avifauna and his efforts in encouraging other ornithologists in the region, provided the spur for the development of subsequent individual county recognition and ornithological recording in the north east of England. The people inspired by Temperley, for example James Alder, Fred Grey and Brian Little, (also a recipient of the Bernard Tucker Medal) in their turn inspired the people who were instrumental in setting up the region's ornithological infrastructure: the Northumberland & Tyneside Bird Club, the Teesmouth Bird Club and the Durham Bird Club, over the period 1960 to 1974.



George Temperley in his garden at Resharrow, with another 'Robert' (date unknown)

Image courtesy of John Proudlock.

No greater praise, or fulfilment of vision, can there be, than for the baton that you have carried to be passed on to your pupil, and your pupil's pupil in turn. The mark of the man is in how far, and how rapidly, that baton has progressed, since the time of his passing.



GEORGE W. TEMPERLEY ~ HIS LIFE'
THE BIRDS OF DURHAM HERITAGE PROJECT
'Bringing the wildlife of the past, to the people of tomorrow'



As George Temperley wrote, in June 1965, "*The rich and beautiful natural treasures of the two Northern Counties have inspired many generations of field naturalist and nature preservers whose records have been handed down to us and are still treasured. I have been privileged to have known a number of those who were at work during my lifetime. I cannot too strongly stress the necessity for carrying on their labours with the same zeal and devotion*".

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The *Birds of Durham Heritage Project* (2010-2011) is a multi-faceted project that sets out to '*bring the wildlife of the past to the people of tomorrow*'. The Birds of Durham Heritage Project is a joint initiative between, the:

- Durham Bird Club (the Lead Partner)
- Durham Upland Bird Study Group
- Durham Wildlife Trust
- Natural History Society of Northumbria
- Teesmouth Bird Club

As part of the Birds of Durham Heritage Project Durham, it is the Partners' aspiration to create an all-new, 'Temperley' fit for the 21st century, ready for publication in 2011.

The Birds of Durham Heritage Project Durham is a partnership project supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

2011 marks sixty years since the publication of George Temperley's ground-breaking '*A History of the Birds of Durham*', in 1951. Copies of this are available (for £15) from the Natural History Society of Northumbria based at the Great North Museum at the Hancock, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne.