

Forming The Federation

Representatives from thirty-five local societies and supportive organisations attended our inaugural conference which was hosted by the Route Naturalists' Field Club in Coleraine on 10th May last. As well as historical societies and field clubs we were supported by the universities, public record offices, library boards, and museums and it was apparent that the potential value to be gained from building up good and effective relationships between all these bodies is enormous. It is our intention to see that voluntary societies, who have a uniquely important role in local studies, participate as effectively as possible in future developments.

As an initial step the conference heard and questioned the report of the exploratory working party. After detailed and spirited discussion a Constitution was agreed and the first executive committee was elected. The whole exercise, although often apparently technical, threw up many valuable ideas and questions about policy and fields of action which will be with us for a long time to come.

The role of publications provoked great interest. This was reflected not only in discussion of the reasons for publication by societies themselves - its disadvantages and rewards - but also in the overwhelming interest in the bookstalls which were run in conjunction with the conference.

Intimately connected to discussion about publication is an even broader but elementary point which is fundamental to the existence of the Federation. Its significance lies in the simple value of communication between those people who, through local societies, are interested in the development of their community. We intend that with this Bulletin and through various gatherings the members of the Federation can meet together without either pretentiousness or false modesty to share the vitality which enlivens interest and increases effect. In the circumstances of Ulster at the moment we may well regard it as significant that local historical societies of various kinds are increasing in number. The superficial observer has often told us that we are too interested in our past. I believe that we can confidently answer that in looking back we are studying the only available explanation of the present. And when we seek facts, not merely to support or to condemn, but to understand, then our work can be of great significance for the future.

Finally, none of those present at the formation of the Federation, including himself, knew that Professor Edwin Rhodes, former Director of the Institute of Continuing Education at Magee University College in Derry, was soon to leave Ireland. As the guest speaker at the initial meeting in Ballybofey in May, 1974, as chairman of the working party which arose from it, and of our inaugural conference he can really be regarded as our founding father. He combined experienced guidance with a friendliness which will not be forgotten. As he adds to his distinction in his new task as Director of Extension Studies at the University of Liverpool members of the Federation will continue to regard Ted Rhodes with respect and affection.