

opening of the Mechanics' Institute in 1849. These came nearer to meeting the needs of the newly literate of the mid-nineteenth century, and were more in spirit with the age and with the locality.

III

THE ST. HELENS BOOK CLUB

BY FREDERIC CROOKS, J.P., F.S.A.

ON 15 January 1813 fourteen members founded The St. Helens Book Club. A constitution was agreed upon, and after the Club had been in existence fifteen years, the annual general meeting, held on 28 March 1828, decided that the twenty rules of the Club should be printed, and that a copy should be sent to every member. From the rules quoted below it is easy to see how the Club conducted its business.

1. There shall be an Annual Meeting on the Friday nearest the full moon, in March, when the books shall be sold, and every member not attending such meeting shall be subject to a fine of ten shillings. This rule not to extend to Ladies.
2. At such an Annual Meeting a President shall be elected for the ensuing year by a majority of voices then present. The Gentleman who has been President for the preceding year may be re-elected.
7. At the Annual Meeting, the majority of Members then present shall fix what periodical publications shall be circulated in the Society and upon their omitting so to do, the President may order such works at his own discretion not exceeding two Reviews and two Magazines.
8. Any Member may order what book he or she chooses, such book not exceeding two guineas in value, and the Member so ordering the book being bound to pay half the cost, if no one bid a higher price for it at the Annual Sale; and any Member not ordering a book, after receiving three months' notice from the President, shall be liable to a fine of five shillings, and the President has then the privilege of ordering one in his name. The title and price of the book so proposed must be inserted on paper, and given to the President.
9. No books larger than octavos to be ordered in the Society.
11. No novel or professional book be introduced into the

Society, unless approved of at an Annual Meeting, except those published by the Author of *Waverley*, which may be ordered without the acquiescence of the Members.

[In 1815 the Members had agreed that *Waverley*, anonymously and newly published, should be "adopted for circulation in the Club". Four years later they had purchased *Guy Mannering*.]

13. Five days be the time allowed for the perusal of each book, and any Member not inserting the date when he forwards the book to the next Member shall forfeit one shilling, and any one detaining a book beyond the time limited shall forfeit two pence per day.
16. The Members of this Society shall not exceed twenty in number.
17. Any member may resign in favour of his Son, provided that his Son be eighteen years of age.
18. All fines levied on the Members of this Society to go towards paying the Bookseller's bill.

During the period from 1829 to 1847 the Club spent an average of £26 a year on books and magazines. At the annual meeting on 16 March 1832 it resolved "that Mr. Sharp be again requested to cut open the leaves of the Books, and in the event of his not complying, the orders from this Book Club to be transferred to some other Bookseller".

From 1848, when it was resolved "that the President do order for the Annual Meetings a Dinner, the expense of which shall not exceed 3s. for Dinner and 1s. 6d. Dessert", the annual meeting became a social occasion as well as a business meeting and an auction sale of books. Up to 1877 it would appear that all annual meetings had been held at the Raven Inn, Church Street, St. Helens, and the Club returned there from 1884 to 1888, and again in 1931 and 1932. All its other annual meetings were held at the Fleece Hotel, St. Helens. For the centenary meeting, held at the Fleece Hotel on Friday, 11 April 1913, a special souvenir booklet was printed.

The following gentlemen have filled the office of president of the Club:—Thomas Mercer, 1813-19; Thomas Gaskell, 1819-68; Dr. Richard Allanson Gaskell, J.P., 1868-1913; Charles Joseph Bishop, J.P., 1913-23; Dr. James Reid, 1923-35, and Dr. Robert Jackson, who was elected in 1935.

[When the late Frederic Crooks wrote this account of the St. Helens Book Club, the Club was still in existence, but I am informed by H. C. Caistor, the librarian of St. Helens, that the Club was an early casualty in the 1939-45 war. Ed.]