

A Brief History of the London Mathematical Society

Despite its name, the London Mathematical Society (LMS) has, almost since its foundation, served as the national society for the British mathematical community. Its establishment in 1865 made Britain one of the first countries in the world to have such an organisation, prompting and/or influencing the formation of several other national societies worldwide, such as the Société Mathématique de France (1873), the Circolo Matematico di Palermo (1884), the American Mathematical Society (1888), and the Deutsche Mathematiker-Vereinigung (1890).

Before its creation, other mathematical societies had existed in Britain, such as the Manchester Society, founded in 1718, and the Oldham Society of 1794. But these were very much local bodies, more akin to working men's clubs than learned societies. Moreover, although they flourished for a time, none of them survived; even the famous Spitalfields Mathematical Society of East London [1], which dated from 1717, was forced to dissolve in 1845, due to a rapid decline in membership.

The formation of the LMS was inspired by the increasing need for specialised scientific outlets during the 19th century. In Britain, this resulted in the foundation of national societies specifically devoted to geology in 1807, astronomy in 1820, statistics in 1834, and c

volume of the Society's *Proceedings*, covering the period from January 1865 to November 1866, containing just 11 of the 37 papers presented during that time. The need for financial retrenchment was to be a characteristic feature of the Society's formative years.

Even an increase in members' subscription from its initial 10 shillings (50p) to one guinea (£1.05) in November 1867 proved insufficient, and by 1873 the Society found its balance in the red for the first time, due to its ever increasing publication of papers. The Society was thus faced with surviving on an even tighter budget than before. Money-saving ideas such as reducing subscriptions to certain journals, cutting back on printing, and charging members for copies of papers were seriously considered until the applied mathematician Lord Rayleigh (1842-1919) made a generous bequest of £1000 in 1874. The gift was gratefully accepted, the financial mc

Thus, as this brief survey has shown, since its foundation in 1865, the LMS has grown steadily in size and importance. From an initial size of 27, its membership swelled to 250 by 1900, and currently stands at well over 2000. From a college club, it has grown into a learned society, incorporated as a limited company in 1894, and finally granted a Royal