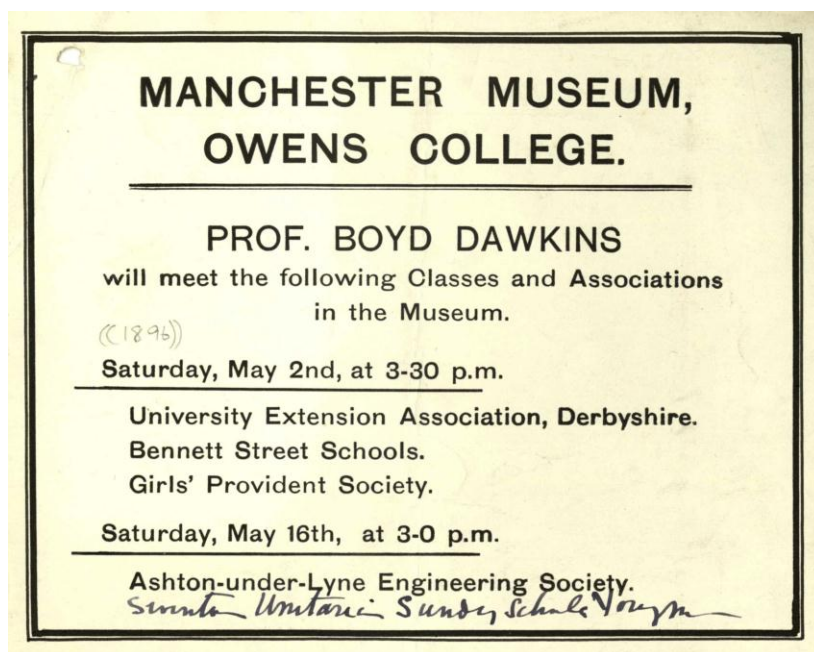


William Boyd Dawkins and Public Education

William Boyd Dawkins came into contact with Thomas Henry Huxley in 1861 when he was appointed to the Geological Survey of Great Britain (where THH held a special post as “naturalist to the Survey”) and it may be that some of Huxley’s zeal for ‘public education’ rubbed off on him while they worked in proximity. Dawkins, on Huxley’s recommendation, was appointed to the post of curator of natural history at the old Manchester Museum in Peter Street in 1869 where his duties also involved lectures in geology at Owens College.

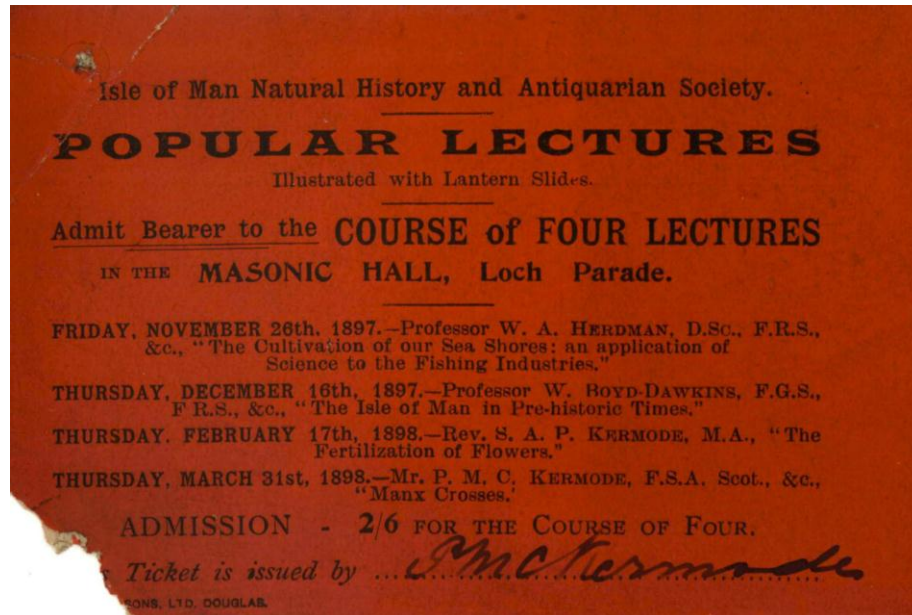
As his career developed, Dawkins also delivered lectures to other learned academic audiences including the Royal Institution (1897), the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and a special series of 12 lectures on ‘Prehistoric Man’ to the Lowell Institute, Boston, Massachusetts in 1880.

However, he was also strongly committed to education of the working classes and throughout his time at Manchester Museum delivered what were called ‘local lectures’, ‘public lectures’, or ‘lectures for the people’. Subjects were mainly archaeological and geological, and included ‘The Tertiary Period’, ‘Roman Britain’, and ‘The Relation of Geology to History’. Typically, there was a series of 6 or 8 evening lectures, held at places such as Withington, Warrington and Pendleton, together with two demonstrations at Owens College on Saturday afternoons. Prices for attendance were modest, usually a few pence. Dr. Wilfrid Jackson (1966), in his biographical sketch, noted that these lectures were “well before the days of lantern slides and cine-films”, and that “in the Museum he used large diagrams pinned over the cases and his audience stood around him.”



Perhaps in a similar vein, Dawkins held frequent sessions at Manchester Museum on Saturday afternoons, typically at 3.30pm for an hour or longer. In the documentary records, these were sometimes described as “engagements” or that “Professor Boyd Dawkins will meet with the Following Classes and Associations.” The exact nature of these meetings is not clear but probably involved some sort of lecture and/or demonstration. The recipients were varied and included Mutual Improvement Societies, Church groups, Literary Societies, Natural History Clubs, Co-operative Societies and Working Men’s Clubs. Numbers attending were not always recorded, but for three meetings in October 1892 Dawkins addressed 279, 150 and 66.

Dawkins also gave 'public addresses' to various societies, mainly local but also some further afield. Such bodies often had a diverse membership ranging from expert amateurs and professionals to interested, but more modestly skilled, members of the 'working classes'. For example, in 1910, he gave the Huxley Memorial Lecture at the Royal Anthropological Institute on 'The Arrival of Man in Britain in the Pleistocene Age', while many talks were given to more humble gatherings at various local archaeological and natural history societies. In his role as President at many of these bodies, Dawkins was often prevailed upon to deliver a 'Presidential Address' and many records of these exist in the BMAG archives including to the Cambrian Association, the Somerset Society and the Archaeological Institute.



As to Dawkins' style of lecturing, perhaps it is best to quote directly from a contemporary press article – the Manchester City News of 12th November 1904:

"Promptly at half-past three o'clock Professor Dawkins, in his bombazine gown, enters the room, places his watch on the bench near him, and enters upon his pleasurable task.

As a public lecturer his style is plain and unvarnished, slightly flavoured with an infusion of mild humour.

To his simplicity and clearness of verbal expression Professor Dawkins adds a certain briskness of manner, and he conveys the impression that he is thinking deeply on his subject whilst he is delivering the address. He usually winds up with a few words of repetition of the salient points which he wishes to impress upon his audience, and finally puts his watch in his pocket, which is the signal that the lecture is over."

Reference

Jackson, J. W., (1966). Sir William Boyd Dawkins (1837-1929) A Biographical Sketch. *Cave Science*, **5(39)**, p.397-412, 2 plates.

Dr. Brian Goodwin – June 2014
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