

Anglo-Norse Review

Venskap og forstaaelse mellem Norge og Storbrittanien.

En norsk-britisk forening skal stiftes.

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ANGLO-NORSE REVIEW

THE ANGLO-NORSE SOCIETY - LONDON

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Hon. President: H.E. The Norwegian Ambassador.

Chair: Dr Marie Wells

web: www.anglo-norse.org.uk

NORSK-BRITISK FORENING - OSLO

web: anglonorseoslo.com

Hon. President: H.E. The British Ambassador

Chairman: Michael Brooks

Editor: Marie Wells

Oslo contact: Elisabeth Solem

marie.wells@btinternet.com

elisabeth.solem@gmail.no

Contents	Page
Editorial	3
Anglo-Norse Society Norway Centenary. 1921-2021 Revisited	3
Founding Fathers? Ella Anker	4
Fridtjof Nansen	7
1921 Getting started	8
Through the Past Brightly	9
It's Not All About Lectures	17
Not Always Smooth Running	21
Support Through the Years	24
A Few Highlights	26
Reflections	29

Editorial

Due to Covid the Anglo-Norse Society Oslo could not celebrate its centenary with a grand *fest* (with or without Chateau Mouton), and so instead it was agreed that they could have a whole issue of the *Review* to present some of the highlights from their history - and what a spectacular display of highlights they (Michael Brooks and Sybil Richardson) have managed to produce. What follows is a real history with analysis and comment, sometimes pointed, sometimes rueful. All credit to them, but also to those who have kept the archive over the years.

Anglo Norse Society Norway Centenary. 1921-2021 Revisited

It is, or seems to be, a rule applicable to the running of time that it runs all the faster when you are having fun. Thus, when attending the celebrations of the centenary held by the London Society in 2018 and noting that the younger sister in Oslo would reach the same milestone three years later, it should have come as no surprise that one hundred years of the Anglo Norse Society in Norway has come upon us rather quickly. So here we are, ready to mark the passing of 100 years since 18 farsighted worthies gathered in Kristiania on the 21st July 1921 to found the Anglo Norse Society in Norway. The Oslo Committee had several ideas to mark the occasion, but the unexpected happened to derail everything: COVID! With our normal meetings impossible if we are to follow lockdown rules (and we are, generally, law abiding in Norway), so too the planning for our 100 years, fell victim. Such are the plans of mice and men.

Barred from any physical gatherings, still we could not ignore the occasion. The result is a take over of this edition of *Anglo Norse Review* by the Oslo faction. We hope that you will enjoy the results of what has been possible in lockdown. What have we done? Well, probably what many reaching 100 years, or any goodly age would do; look back at the life so far and relive our glorious past. We have gone into the cellar and the attic, found the boxes yellowed with age, the curling labels in copperplate script, dusted them off and opened the archives. We have dipped into our history and bring you what we enjoyed from our past. Read on!

Founding Fathers? Ella Anker.

Most members of Anglo Norse will no doubt tell anyone within earshot that our Society was founded by the great Norwegian explorer, humanitarian and anglophile Fridtjof Nansen. A name to be proud of! If you look at the document announcing the inception of the Society, there is his name amongst all those meeting in June 1921 to steer the way forward. But wait! Amongst the list of the erudite, the professors, doctors and lawyers there is a single name unadorned by any profession: Ella Anker. By reason of the list being in alphabetical order she comes first. And so she should, not for that happenstance but because she was the driving force behind Anglo Norse. Without her vision and commitment, the Anglo Norse Society would in all probability, not have existed. So, who was this woman?



Founding Mother, Ella Anker 1870-1958

Ella was, as it turns out, a most remarkable woman, and in many ways, way ahead of her time. Born in 1870 into the wealthy Anker family, Ella was fortunate to be both highly educated and to grow up at the time of the swelling of ideas of an independent Norway. Attending university in the 1890s Ella developed a deep and passionate interest in Norwegian nationhood and women's rights. Her interests were however wide and those to which she turned her hand throughout her long life, included poetry, playwriting, biography, social reform, and even psychic research! She was clearly a woman of energy, and determination. One suspects too that she was not one who would suffer fools gladly. Following an unsuccessful marriage and reverting to

her maiden name, she turned to journalism. It was pursuit of this career that took her to London at the end of the first decade of the 20th century as London correspondent for *Dagbladet* and *Verdens Gang*. It was the decade of great social and political upheaval, the Great War being the catalyst, if not the cause. Journalism put Ella at the heart of Britain then at the height of Empire. She was not one to ignore the opportunities. Politics saw her frequently at

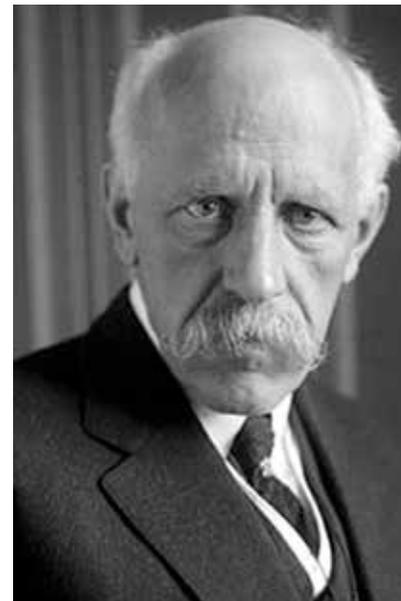
Westminster where she scored a win for the feminist cause, becoming the first woman member of the House of Commons press gallery. She became a stalwart supporter of the Allied cause as the Great War unfolded and her reports home were clearly valued by the great and good of Great Britain, who in thanks, bestowed upon her the newly created Order of the British Empire. In this she was again a leader, the honour in more recent years adorning recent past Chairmen of the ANS in Norway, Cato Hambro, Stephen Constant and Genevieve Jones. Her love of Norway saw her fight for the newly independent nation at every turn. Viewing certain 'Scandinavian interests' as not aligned with those of her homeland and equally anti British, the land to which she had become rather attached, she sought to counter what she saw as malign influences. She recognised that social, cultural and commercial links were the key to mutual respect, friendship and perhaps influence. That analysis is one now fully recognised by countries seeking to foster interests abroad through 'hearts and minds' programs. It was this that made her a driving force in the establishment of the Anglo Norse Society in London in 1918. The conditions in London were right. Norway was generally viewed positively. After all, the King's sister Maud was now Queen Maud in Norway, the young Norway was to back and join the League of Nations, and perhaps prudently, Norway looked for friendship with its close neighbour Britain as the only European Great Power to have survived the War politically and dynastically intact. Ella returned to Kristiania in 1920, and before long was turning her energies to establishing a similar organisation in her homeland. Looking for support from the top, Ella garnered it from Mrs Gray whose husband had been British Consul for some 10 years and hence would know anybody worth knowing in the British ex pat community. Mrs Gray, equally behind the idea, drummed up 125 names from the Brits in Norway for the blueprint society. Ella was on her way. And then a piece of luck, or careful planning? After taking tea with Mrs Gray, Ella headed for the University where she ran into none other than Fridtjof Nansen on the steps of the library. Now here was an opportunity! As is true today, so it was in 1921. If you want a successful launch, get a celebrity to endorse whatever it is you are doing. Here was Fridtjof, a national hero at the height of his fame, with the equivalent drawing power of John Lennon and David Beckham combined. He was also an anglophile to boot. His stature and support were bound to drum up support and interest from the Norwegian great and good, to say nothing of the calibre of speakers that he might entice to ensure the new venture really made its mark. A little arm twisting in the

shape of the promise of chairmanship of the prospective society and Ella had her man.

Ella lived until 1958, and even at the age when most prefer to enjoy a quiet retirement, she was still fighting causes, her final article discussing legalised abortion, being published in the year of her death. One can but admire the enthusiasm that got our 100 years under way.

Fridtjof Nansen

If you haven't heard of Fridtjof, you are probably not a member of Anglo Norse but it is worth dwelling on his why this immensely famous and influential man would get involved in the fledgling society. At heart, Nansen

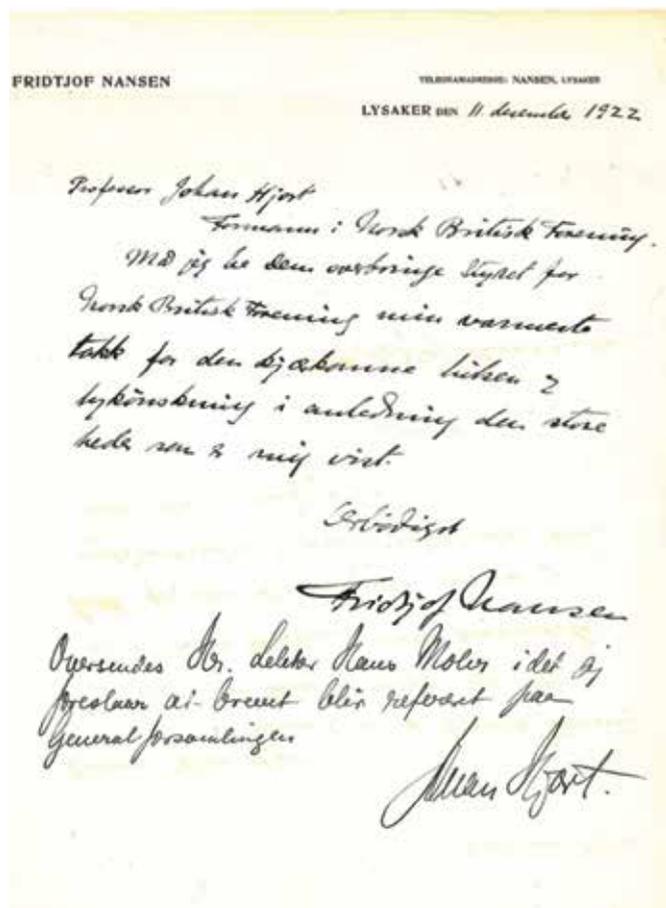


Fridtjof Nansen 1861-1930
Credit: Deutsche Bundesarchiv.
Wikimedia Commons

was a great humanitarian. Against the background of the Great War, he became a vocal advocate of the idea of what would become the League of Nations and through that, he hoped, world peace. As the first Norwegian to become accredited to the Court of St. James, he spent several years in London where he became a familiar and highly respected figure. In pursuit of his ideal for an international body of nations, he first met Ella in London. She was then working as the secretary to the Norwegian Colony' and shared Nansen's dream. The connection was certainly fortunate for Anglo Norse, for when Ella tackled him on the steps of the University library a few years later, he was openly receptive to a society that had as its objects the understanding and friendship between two nations through cultural, social, scientific and commercial

contacts. That he became the Society's first President gave the new venture more than a 'shot in the arm'. His stature, and who he knew lent a profile to ANS in Oslo that had the British Embassy promising to arrange several speakers annually drawn from the great and good of Great Britain, (Oh, for that today!) And of course, his personal connections with the high and mighty

drew a glittering array of speakers in the early years.



Nansen's handwritten letter of thanks to the ANS Committee for his Commission as President

1921 Getting Started

There is no doubt that the aims of the new Anglo Norse Society were high, and the 18 who formed the working group of 12 June were well connected and resourceful. With the launch of the new society being widely reported in the press in early September, there was talk of the inaugural meeting, planned for October to be given by none other than Lord Robert Cecil, the British politician and former Government minister who was the leading proponent in the United Kingdom of the League of Nations. The link

with Nansen, who equally supported the formation of the League is clear. A case of who you know. However, the events of October took place without Lord Cecil due to perhaps more pressing calls on his time but he did finally address the Society a few years later in 1925. Promises must be honoured!

The first talk was actually delivered by William Archer on 25 October 1921. Archer, then one of Britain's most famous and formidable theatre critics, held impeccable Norwegian credentials. Not only was he a pioneer, if not *the* pioneer, of translating Ibsen's works into English, but his uncle's name, Colin Archer, will be familiar today to all who sail. Colin, a Scot not only designed and built Nansen's arctic ship 'Fram' but also the iconic 'Colin Archer' sailing boat, with examples still seen on every fjord today.

The inaugural talk was a fine affair, held at the University, and on the popular (and no doubt politically astute) subject of 'The British Empire'. But this was not just a talk, it was a gala evening to be remembered, complete with dinner at the Hotel Bristol. Priced at NOK 15 per head, that dinner, including Chateau Mouton to wash it down, has been noted somewhat enviously by today's Committee when considering a similar dinner 100 years on!

However, that memorable night was not Anglo-Norse's first event. Perhaps, hearing of the dawn of the new society, the Admiralty, from the arch straddling the Mall at the corner of Trafalgar Square, and under the eagle eye of its most famous son, Nelson, ordered the Fleet to Christiania, where it arrived on 9 October. Rising to the occasion, the Society greeted the Royal Navy with an evening reception of music and song.

And so, our century got under way.

Through the Past Brightly

The Society, in its early years enjoyed spectacular success. The thrust of the campaign to foster the ties that bind was via its program of speakers. In that respect we might say that little has changed over the past 100 years. However, I must confess that our forebears were able to bring the international stars of the day to Oslo, which is more difficult to achieve today. Perhaps it was a combination of Nansen's stature, of Ella Anker's determination, and the high esteem many of the early Committee enjoyed. That and I suspect lack of competition from the forms of entertainment we enjoy today plus buoyant finances. But let us cast an eye over the list of those who have appeared before ANS in Oslo and pick out just a few. For example, William Archer's inaugural lecture was followed barely a month later by Sir Claude

**John Galsworthys foredrag
i Anglo Norse Society igaar.**
En spirituel skildring av den moderne roman og dens
tre forgrundsfigurer: Dickens, Turgeniev og Maupassant.

Souper på Grand 20-3-22.
NORSK-BRITISK FORENING
(ANGLO-NORSE SOCIETY) KRISTIANIA 1922

Souper paa Grand 20 Mars 1922.

	Laevke	K. Melis
Byron Tommessen	[Empty Box]	Fr. Bull
Wetme		Bojer
Mariske Finlay		Mr. Galsworthy
ella Archer		Nansen
Galsworthy		Lady Finlay
Sigrid Undset		Raschaal
Chr. Collins		Fraugen Bosth
	P. Schloeff	K. Melis

Hill, Head of the newly formed International Red Cross. The 1920s, also saw John Galsworthy, creator of the *Forsyte Saga*, in Oslo for Anglo Norse. As usual the talk was followed by a decent dinner hosted by the Society, this time not at the Bristol, but at the Grand Hotel. The table plan of that night shows that the speaker was seated next to an equally formidable writer, Sigrid Undset. One can but wonder what passed between these two over the meal. Both were then at the height of their fame. Did Sigrid reveal a few chapters of her as yet unpublished *The Cross*, the then eagerly awaited final part of the stunning trilogy that is *Kristin Lavransdatter*? One can but idly speculate but enjoy the thought of ANS bringing these two titans of the written word

together. These early days saw science, religion the arts and politics equally represented. At the forefront of modernity ANS brought Nobel Prize winner Professor William Bragg, who explained molecular and atomic structure to the members. To balance the era of science the following talk had the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral and sometime Professor at Cambridge W.R.Inge give



'The Christian World View', with the poet John Drinkwater thereafter. Professors of Oxford and Cambridge, the art historian, Laurence Binyon from the British Museum, General Sir Ian Hamilton who commanded the Allied forces at Gallipoli, and for balance naval Captain Edward Evans a participant in the then famous 'Dover Patrol' incident. This visit may have had quite an impact on Evans, as he later married a Norwegian girl of a well-to-do family. There are many members today who will have shared his experience of finding the

The visit of Captain Evans on 29th January 1925, when he gave a talk on 'The Dover Patrol'. Photo and report from *Nationen* the next day

Norsk-britisk forenings medlemmer var forberedt paa en interessant aften igaar og var møtt fuldtallig op til kaptein Evans' foredrag om «The Dover Patrol».

Dette var navnet paa den del av den britiske marine, som under verdenskrigen hadde i oppdrag aa vogte Den britiske kanal mot tyskernes indtrængen med krigsskibe og undervandsbaater. Kaptein Evans hadde under hele krigen tjeneste i dette vakthold og det var om sine oplevelser her han fortalte igaar paa en fængende og underholdende maate. Foredraget var rikt illustrert med lysbilleder fra forskjellige spændende begivenheter fra patruljetjenesten om natten, fra bombardementet av de tyske linjer paa den belgiske kyst, fra kamp med tyske jagere og undervandsbaater og fra kohvoitjenesten over Kanalen. Tilslut fik man gjenuem levende billeder et gripende indtryk av hvad sjøkrig vil si i vore dager.

Professor Nansen, som introduerte foredragsholderen og tilslut bragte ham en varm tak for hans foredrag, aapnet møtet med en kort mindetale over foreningens æresmedlem William Archer.

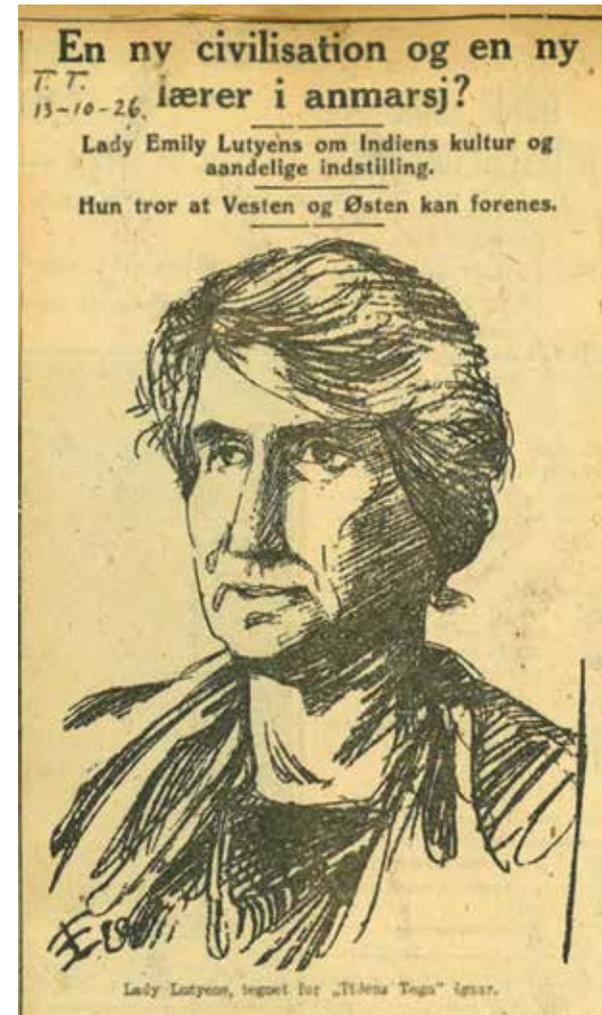
Special One on the other side of the North Sea.

High politics and international relations were ably represented in the shape of Sir Eric Drummond, then General Secretary of the League of Nations, and of course, Lord Cecil. His visit was seen as so important as to merit not only Nansen chairing the evening's meeting but the attendance at the Society's event of Their Norwegian Majesties King Haakon and Queen Maud. A larger



Lord Robert Cecil's visit on 26th May 1924

than usual post event dinner was hosted at the Grand for over 100 guests. Today, we look at that with some envy, with numbers at our current meetings running at between 30 to 40. If only the present King would drop in we would see attendances swell to former glories! There was even the prospect of a visit by Lloyd George, the only Welsh Prime Minister, but sadly that was a stretch too far even for Anglo Norse. And in case you were wondering, the influence of Ella and her drive for equality saw plenty of women invited to speak in these formative years, first off being Emily Lutyens. Emily was the wife of the celebrated architect who designed New Dehli, speaking, perhaps



unsurprisingly of 'The Political Situation in India'. Having viewed her husband's work in the shape of the Parliament buildings in India, I can say that they proved perfect, overrun as they are with local monkeys, whose constant raucous chatter many may say makes more sense than any politicians of whatever nationality or persuasion! You may not recognise all the names of these earlier speakers, but the roll call reflects just how varied and high ranking the speakers were.

In case you were thinking that this was all a bit of first blush, or the enthusiastic honeymoon of a new venture before the humdrum set in, not a bit of it! The roll call of

the erudite, or at least famous and possibly on occasions infamous goes on as the 20th Century rolled by. The renowned philosopher Bertrand Russell spoke twice. Sir William Beveridge, politician and author of Beveridge Report published in 1942 visited in 1946. His Report was perhaps the most highly influential on British life ever, forming the background to the development of the social welfare system in the United Kingdom, including the National Health Service. Life in Britain today simply would not be as it is without Beveridge, and there are many in this time of pandemic who owe their lives to his vision. We also had Sir Alec Douglas Home, later to become Prime



Invitation to Sir William Beveridge's talk on May 8th 1946

Minister, speaking on the 'EuropeaMovement'. One wonders quite what he would have made of the course Britain has charted over the past five years.

If your bent is more to the arts than politics, then you would have enjoyed the Society bringing the composer Benjamin Britten and tenor Peter Pears to Norway for a concert and talk. Britten was one of the world's leading composers at the time and it is



Oslø får om noen dager besøk av to berømteter innen den britiske musikkverden — komponisten Benjamin Britten og tenoren Peter Pears

Benjamin Britten skulle være godt kjent av Dagbladets lesere. Han er en av Englands store nye komponister. Sitt første verk fikk han oppført i 1933, da han bare var 20 år gammel, det var en strykekvartett og Sinfonietta for ti instrumenter. Året etter ble hans Phantasy Quartet oppført på den internasjonale musikkfesten i Firenze, og to år etter spiltes hans suite for fiolin og piano på musikkfesten i Barcelona (begge arrangert av Selskapet til fremme av samtidig musikk). Senere kom en symfonisk syklus for sopran og orkester «Our Hunting Fathers» bygd på W. H. Audens dikt. Han har også satt musikk til andre dikt av Auden. Ved festspillene i Salzburg i 1937 oppførtes hans berømte variasjoner over et tema av Frank Bridge. En må også nevne



Visit of Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears to Oslo in 1947, as reported by *Dagbladet* on February 19th.

a testament to the Committee that it was able to achieve such an event.

Our dip into the archives reveals that what was of interest in 1921 was still of interest as time passed. Almost as an echo of the visits of Sir Eric Drummond and Lord Cecil, the Society was host in 1969 to Lord Gladwyn. Principally a diplomat, Gladwyn was a key player in the British team that was instrumental in the establishment of the United Nations, becoming Britain's representative at the UN. He was equally important in the framing of the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO.) Naturally, his focus to the Society was on International Affairs. One cannot help but think that Nansen, had he been still alive, would have approved the choice of speaker and no doubt enjoyed the evening. Another echo of the early days were the talks given by Sir Harrie Massey in 1966 and Gunnar Randers a little later. Sir Harrie was Professor of Physics at the University of London and an authority on atoms and energy. Gunnar, the managing

director of The Institute of Atomic Energy and equally at home within the world of the small particle. Sir Harrie, former President of the European Space Research Organisation looked upward and outward in his discussion of the future of Space Flight. Gunnar was more worldly examining Atomic Power and World Peace. Perhaps his years as personal advisor to Dag Hammerskjold took his concerns in this direction. We were rather excited to note that the

Society had even managed to persuade Sir Charles Darwin to speak to ANS on the subject of 'Forecasting Man's Future', but soon realised that this was not THE Charles Darwin whose *Origin of the Species* changed the world forever (unless of course you come from certain parts of the US where his ideas are not permitted to be taught), but his grandson. Grandfather's theories of natural selection appear to have been born out by the grandson who rose to become an eminent physicist and director of the National Physical Laboratory during World War II and whilst his grandfather looked back, he was noted for looking ahead writing 'The Next Million Years'. Whether ANS will be still be here to witness the accuracy of his predictions remains to be seen

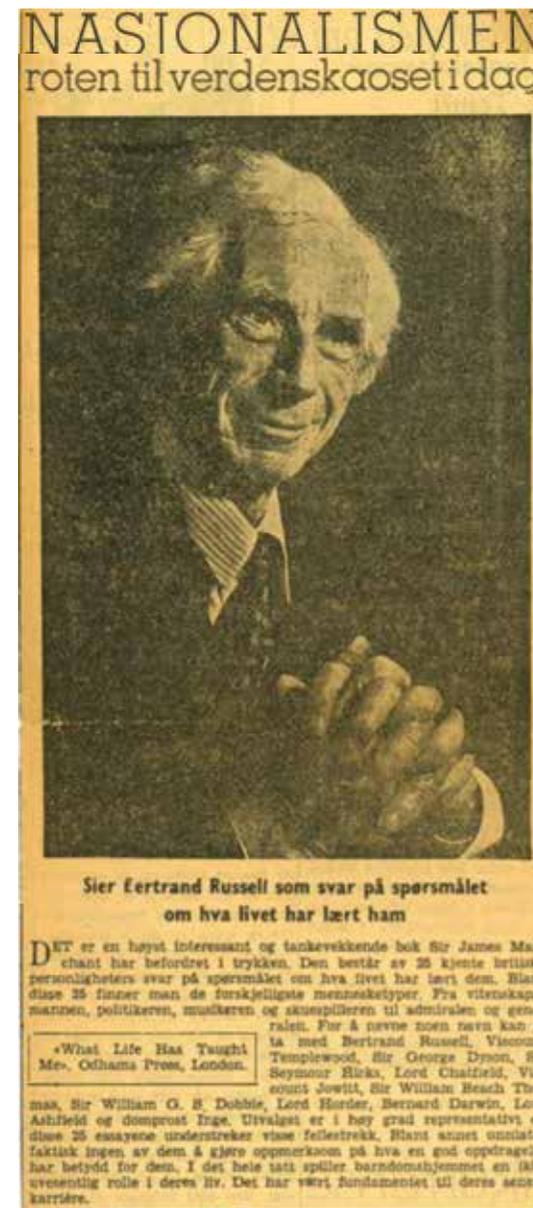
However high and mighty, influential, erudite and famous as this list of speakers is, my own favourite is the ability of Anglo Norse to bring Sir Edmund Hillary, conqueror of Everest to Oslo in December 1953. Hillary you may recall clambered to the top with Tenzing Norgay that year, the news reaching London on the very day of Queen Elizabeth's coronation. It was the cherry on the cake on a day of celebration, Britain having endured the war



Sir Edmund Hillary gave a talk on 4th December 1953 on the 'Conquest of Everest'. Photo credit: Reuters

and the following austerity of the post war period for over 12 years. The country looked forward to the new Elizabethan Age, and here was the achievement that had eluded man despite countless attempts before, heralding the upturn, ushering in the bright tomorrow. Hillary was, to most, a superhero, a global superstar. How on earth did the Committee of a small

society in Norway manage to get this icon to Oslo so soon after his triumph? One might put it down to a mountaineer being pulled by the landscape of Norway, or her history of adventure at the edge, Amundsen and our own Nansen bywords for the Norwegian spirit, but I think one must simply admire the tenacity of the organisers at the time.



Sir Bertrand Russell's second visit to Oslo in 1951 when he talked about his contribution to the book *What Life has Taught Me*

Although much focus has been on the lecture throughout our history, the remit of the Society stretched (and still stretches) far wider. It is all very well listening to solemn men with grand titles and a place on the world stage. Sometimes you want a bit of fun, relaxation and pure entertainment. Of course, you can call it culture and give yourself Brownie points for being immersed in it, but underneath it is entertainment pure and simple. What are we speaking of? The stage, the stage! Treading the boards, not playing the United Nations or G7. Notably the very first speaker, theatre critic William Archer, donated GBP 50 to a project to bring English actors to Norway to instruct them how to portray Ibsen's original intentions on stage. Apparently,

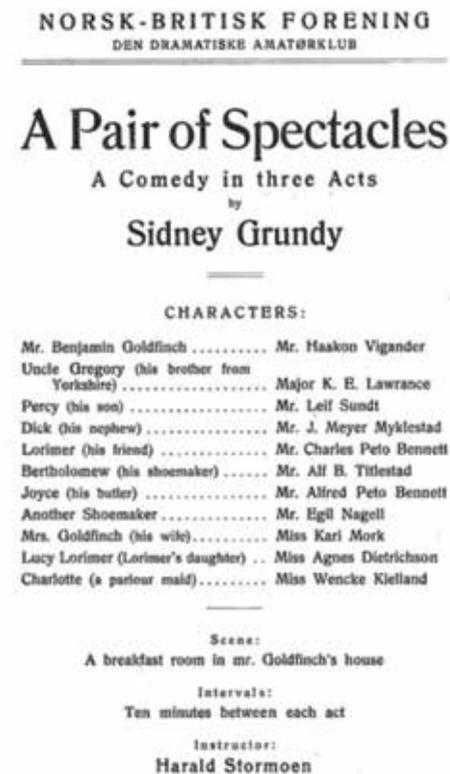
the then existing portrayals were not good enough for the Ibsen aficionado. It was, however, not exactly Archer's idea. Once again it was Ella Anker, who, having inherited her love of theatre from her godfather, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson the Nobel prizewinning poet and playwright, got together with renowned actress Johanna Dybwad and Halfdan Christensen at that very first meeting in October 1921. They twisted Archer's arm. We don't doubt that Archer was enthusiastic about the project, but it may have seemed a bit much to have come all the way to Christiania on an invitation to speak, then to be relieved of what was then a sizable sum. You have to hand it to Ella. She was not a woman to whom 'no' was an acceptable answer. One suspects that she and her co-conspirators waited until the Hotel Bristol fine dinner, especially the Chateau Mouton, had created a benign sense of wellbeing within Archer before the subject was broached.

From the very start ANS got involved in bringing actors and plays in English to the Norwegian audience. Archer, on agreeing to fund the Ibsen project planted the idea of a Shakespeare season in Oslo within the Committee. He thought that it might 'advertise the season'. Whether he was referring to the time of year or the social program is a little unclear, but the idea took hold. Indeed, so enthusiastically was the idea embraced that by the summer of 1922 the New Shakespeare Company were on stage at the National Theatre, delighting the Christiania public with performances of *Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. Nothing too heavy and no unhappy ending to start with. Why export tragedy to the land of Ibsen? The season was a resounding success, with the Royals attending the performances, and a gala dinner presided over by Nansen. One can imagine Queen Maud being particularly delighted with a season of plays in English. And it seems that the Norwegians or yore really did enjoy the chance of a good dinner. If current members are hoping for a return to the post-lecture four course meal with wine at the Grand after every meeting the Committee must now dampen that, at least until the Hotels return to offering the fare at NOK 15 per head. How did ANS achieve this festival in such short a time from foundation? Apart from the obvious hard work of the Committee, much of the cost was met by the Wilson Line (which is still in operation today) providing transport on its ships free of charge, including the stage props, with members finding accommodation for the entire cast and crew across Oslo and the British Ambassador Lindley pledging NOK 40,000 to underwrite the project. Regrettably the days of the British Foreign Office having that level of funds for

cultural projects have long gone, more's the pity. However, we are pleased to report that interest and support for Shakespeare in Norway is still alive and well in the 21st Century, and in conjunction with the Shakespeare Society in Oslo, ANS hosted a reception for the visiting troupe who perform Shakespeare *al fresco* at the Akershusfestning each summer. Tradition is tradition after all.

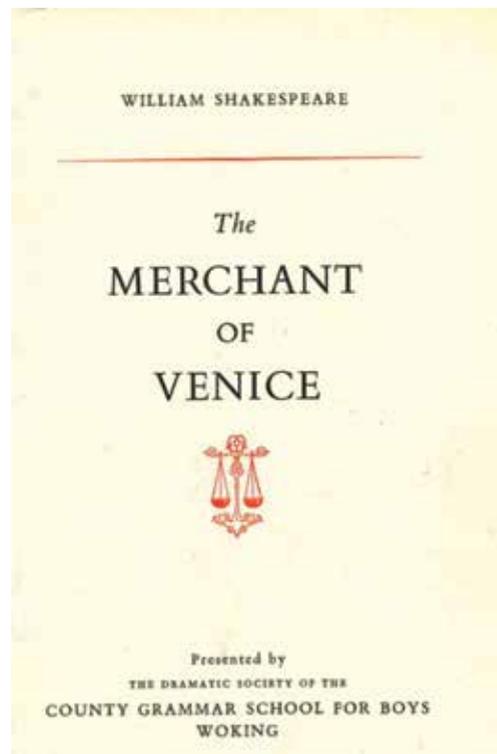
Promoting culture has never been just about professional players strutting their stuff. It has been about promoting engagement, one culture with another, and there is no better way to achieve that than forming your own amateur players or encouraging those in the United Kingdom to come on tour. Ella was instrumental here too, forming an amateur dramatic club, ostensibly for the younger members of the ANS, partly on the premise that this would permit a better understanding and use of English amongst the youngsters. This too had its success, the first production seeing the light of day in 1924 performing the comedy *A Pair of Spectacles* to packed houses at the

Røde Lygte. Whether the houses were full because ANS members were permitted free entrance, history does not record, but in case you were wondering, it is recorded that one member of the group was the daughter of the British Ambassador, and that the Residence was therefore available for much rehearsal. In these days of heightened security coupled with the modern trend to fear lawsuits, we suspect that such generosity is no longer in the hands of the current Ambassador. We cannot report that the local club was a great success, for there is no mention of



it in the archives in the 1930s or thereafter. Was it a case of going out on a blaze of glory, or the amateur actors simply making too much of a 'Spectacle' of themselves?

The Amdram club may not have been an ongoing feature of ANS life, but theatre, and of the amateur persuasion was. On various occasions the ANS sponsored or assisted in the tours of British schools both Public (or fee paying) and State, of their school productions, usually of Shakespeare. It is not hard to imagine the excitement of British school children embarking on a trip to Norway to play, not in the school hall in front of forgiving parents, but on real stages in proper theatres before fee paying audiences. This is the real stuff of a cultural society. A two-way street of these young players experiencing, perhaps for the first time foreign travel to follow their love of theatre and the audiences in Norway seeing Shakespeare in English in their home town. One cannot believe that for those British teenagers these trips were not the start of an affection for Norway fated to last a lifetime. As one looks at the cast list of the County Grammar School, Woking, who toured Oslo and Bergen in 1948 with Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* it may be now too late to



ask. They must all be around 90. I can but relate at second hand the effect of a trip to Norway on a schoolboy. My own father came in the 1930's by sea on a school trip landing at Bergen. He must have been about 15 or 16. At 83 he visited for the first time since then and travelling solo, took the circuitous route home by train across the country; Oslo to Bergen and thence by boat down the coast and by ferry to Newcastle. He spoke of the memories it evoked and how the scenery and people of Norway still had the magic to transport him back to being 15 again. One cannot say fairer than that I suppose. If Anglo Norse has achieved this for others too it is a

worthy undertaking. And with the tradition of supporting players still strong at the end of the 20th Century, in the mid 1990s, Giggleswick School came to Oslo and presented *Macbeth* so we could get a younger perspective on the question.

Not Always Smooth Running

It would be tempting to believe that ANS in Norway has been one long success story. That would be wrong, for, as in all the best histories, there have been downs as well as ups. Times when survival was on a knife's edge. The Archives tell of the darker times as well as the light.

The first real threat to the Society arose in the early 1930s. The Society had lost its famous Chairman with the death of Nansen in 1930. The Wall Street Crash had rippled from New York to Europe, just as would the economic crisis of 2008. However, in the Thirties it was worse, and the Society faced economic woes. Hard times were causing retrenchment as families struggled to make ends meet. Early victims of economy were leisure activities, such expenditure deemed not essential. Membership fell and so too the membership fee income. From the giddy heights of over 1000 members in the mid 1920s, by 1931 this roll stood at less than half of what it had been 10 years earlier. It didn't stop there. On top of this many countries including Norway abandoned the 'gold standard'. This was a system of backing your currency by holding gold and setting the value of currency at a fixed price related to gold. Remove the tried and tested system and currency values became volatile to say the least. ANS funds were affected as its bankers were wobbling in the financial conditions. The Society was for the first time seeing expenditure rise above income, and as Mr. Micawber will tell you, that spells misery. On top of that Ella Anker quit in 1933, caused, she said, by the determination by the International Court in the Hague of who was to control Greenland. A staunch supporter of Norwegian interests she was appalled by the decision in Denmark's favour. The blame she decided fell on Anglo French interests. There was no possibility of being associated with a pro-British society in those circumstances. Shortly thereafter in 1934 the second Chairman Johan Hjort resigned. Dark days indeed. And yet there remained sufficient support and interest to keep going. The appointment of a banker, J.M. Sejersted Bødtker, as the new Chairman was probably an astute move. People continued to step up to manage the Society, and the program of events was planned and executed. The erudite and famous kept crossing the North Sea to educate and entertain:

John Masfield to read his poems, Bertrand Russell made the first of two visits, the conductor Sir Thomas Beecham, Dr Hewitt Johson, the so called 'Red Dean' of Canterbury Cathedral, Jean Batten the pioneer of long distance flight (who hailing from New Zealand seems to have demonstrated her flying skill by merely arriving). Lord Cecil, having been tardy in the 1920s, rewarded ANS with a second address in 1938 as he collected his Nobel Peace Prize. The gala events were still occasionally taking place despite the austerity. The focus was a talk by Captain Evans on Scott's ill-fated South Pole expedition. Why this generated so much interest that the Royal Family attended both the talk and gala dinner is unclear. Were the Norwegians revelling in a victory over Great Britain - a precursor to Bjørn Lillelien's 1981 great football commentary? (If you haven't heard this it is worth a listen even though it is probably excruciating to both nations, but for different reasons). Perhaps, it was the empathy with man against the odds, the noble struggle against the elements, so much a part of Norwegian life in the 1930s winters, that struck a chord. No matter. The underlying point is that despite adversity the Society soldiered on and attracted top drawer speakers from all walks of life.

But if the early 1930s were tough, it got tougher. As the decade came to a close the dark clouds of war gathered. Even in 1938 upon his visit, somewhat ironically to receive the Peace Prize, Lord Cecil reflected that in Scandinavia war was by this time regarded as almost inevitable, with both citizenry from the lowest right up to the King wondering which of the uncertain paths ahead they should be taking. Of course, when war broke out in September 1939 Norway was not immediately drawn in. That event lay in store beyond Christmas. However, in October the ANS Committee met to consider the future. Was it right to continue the obviously pro British Society given the hostilities? What was Norway's stance to be? What account should be taken of the rise of the right wing, pro Nazi NSF in Norwegian politics? The Committee one concludes felt rather exposed. Acting prudently, perhaps one might say cautiously, the Committee determined to take advice from both the Norwegian and British governments on what to do and until that guidance was received, to suspend all meetings for the foreseeable future. It turned out to be a rather long suspension. In effect the ANS, if not dead, was certainly in a coma, and who knew in 1940 as the invasion and occupation took place whether it would ever again see the light of day?

Today the ANS is again in dark days, having suspended all meetings since the spread of the Covid Pandemic. The current Committee have

experienced a little of what its forbear faced and there is always the fear that without meetings the life of the Society may ebb away. However, with a fairly high average age, much of the Membership came to be designated as 'vulnerable' by the powers that be, and so cessation of meetings pro-tem was the only sensible path even before the diktat of the lockdown rules. Fortunately, there is hope that science and good behaviour will keep the present hiatus somewhat shorter than the six years endured in the 1940s. The Chairman certainly hopes his fate during the current suspension is less traumatic than that of his predecessor Sejersted Bødtker, who endured three years in Grini Prison camp, having opposed the Nazification of the National Theatre.

The impact of suspending meetings is difficult to ignore. After the war when meetings were resumed, a huge effort was put into reviving the Society.



ANS chairman J. Sejerstad Bødtker honours the memory of King George VI at the opening of a meeting 11 February 1952

Funds advanced from Britain and branches established from Trondheim and Bergen in the north and west to Fredrikstad, Drammen and Porsgrunn in the east and south. The climate should have been almost perfect given the joint struggles through the war years, the Norwegian Royal family taking refuge in Britain for much time and with many Norwegians either serving the cause at sea or receiving military training in the United Kingdom. The ties that bind were, perhaps, deeper than ever, boosted even by the number of war brides that were brought home be those young servicemen (or in the case of at least one current member being captured by a Norwegian maiden on

his service in Norway). However, despite these favourable conditions, and although immediate post war membership reached the dizzy heights of over 2,000 members in 1945, it proved short lived and within two years the Society had dropped to below the membership levels enjoyed immediately pre-war. Indeed, decline was ongoing into the 1960s and although branches in Bergen and Trondheim were still active, they appear to have fallen in the 1970s and the membership hit around 150. The times were beginning to change. In the immediate post war people struggled with recovery, and other forms of evening activity were making inroads into people's leisure choices. The days of the erudite lecture and informing society as a primary form of diversion once the working day was done was perhaps at an end. Let us hope the rise of Netflix is not a similar harbinger of extinction in the present age.

Support through the Years

One thing that stands out in reviewing the archives is that the fortunes of the Society are linked not only to the ambition and dedication of the Committee through the century, although that is the primary driving force, but also the support it receives from outside sources. At the outset the British Foreign Service, particularly through the Embassy or its predecessor the Legation together with the British Council and its forebear was firmly behind the Society, not only with words but with real and practical support and assistance. Ambassadors or Heads of Legation were there to support all aspects of British interests, cultural as well as political, commercial and military. Sir Francis Lindley and his wife are recorded attending the majority events in early years. Such was their support that when Sir Francis tour of duty ended in 1929 the couple were sent off in style by the Society with the now traditional gala dinner at the Grand Hotel, hosted by Nansen. Of course, with many high profile visitors particularly politicians, lending a hand might be seen as just part of the diplomat's job but the sense is that support was forthcoming rather than sought. That the British Legation undertook to ensure that at least two visiting speakers from Britain came annually to Oslo to speak to the Society gives an idea of how important it was then to be seen to 'Wave the Flag'. The responsible secretary once wrote to the Society apologising for the cancellation of one of the two arranged speakers but offering an alternative whom the Council assured the Society was at least as good. We were there to be courted!

When the new Embassy was completed in the 1960s the Society

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Festen for Sir Francis og lady Lindley.

Norsk britisk forening gav igår kveld en meget vellykket middag for den britiske minister Sir Francis Lindley og frue på Grand hotell. Et stort og meget representativt selskap hadde innfunnet sig.

Foreningens formann professor Fridtjof Nansen ønsket gjestene velkommen og utbragte ved steken kong Haakons og kong Georxs skål. Han gav derefter ordet til viceformannen professor Johan Hjort, som holdt en utmerket tale for hedere-

gjeften. Han nevnte de mange forhold som bandt de to folk sammen, de nye problemer som årene efter krigen hadde skapt og den sympati og dybe forståelse for vårt land som Sir Francis hadde vist og som i et høi grad hadde gagnet hans arbeid her.

Minister Lindley svarte med en meget spirituall tale, hvori han omtalte ly- og skyggesider ved alle menneskelige forbindelser og konkluderte med en skål for Norsk-britisk forening.

Derefter talte professor Nansen under sterk tilslutning for lady Lindley.

Den vellykkede fest fortsatte derefter lenge utover i den beste stemning.

Middagen igaar for minister og lady Lindley.

En vellykket fest hvori deltok omkring 100 damer og herrer.

Professor Hjort taler for hædersgjæsten som svarte med en sympatisk og humorfyldt „after dinner speech“.



Minister og lady Lindleys fotografert av »Morgenbladet« i den britiske legation.

Newspaper report on the ANS farewell dinner for Sir Francis and Lady Lindley in May 1929

was offered the Assembly Room as a home for meetings. This was the state of play into the 21st Century, Sir Richard and Lady Dales being the last to ensure that the Society had a permanent home, complete with wine and canapes at each meeting. That arrangement thereafter fell by the wayside as cost cutting and increased security concerns saw the Society asked to make alternative arrangements.

The impact was not immediate, but negative, nonetheless. Deprived of what some members saw as the prestige of meeting at the Embassy attendance at meetings dropped from 50 plus to around 35, and some memberships were not renewed. Finances were affected as other venues charged rent, and now canapes were catered by the Committee. In short costs rose, and finances became pressed. That meant less funds to support speakers from the UK. Gone the days of the Embassy ensuring the speakers were there. Then there was the Christmas Party. This event held at the magnificent Residence, the former country home of Thomas Heftye, and which traditionally attracted well over 100 attendees, has since the 1960s been at the invitation of the Ambassador. The 21st Century saw it morph into an event run commercially, not so different from hiring the Grand Hotel. Several Ambassadors worked hard to cushion this financial blow by not charging the required rent or insurance, but the bean counters in Whitehall eventually gave sympathetic diplomats in Oslo little room for manoeuvre. Perhaps it is not the need to self fund these events that is cause for concern, but the impression is that to some running the Foreign Service, winning hearts and minds through promoting culture is no longer on the agenda. The reduction in the office of the British Council is but an example. In short, to some in Whitehall, societies such as ANS are no longer relevant. We would argue the complete opposite. Generally, it is easier to achieve what you want if you ask an understanding friend. If you make no effort to become friends at all levels of society, the empathy is not there. Ella and Fridtjof knew this when setting up the Society. It was part of the *raison d'être*. One cannot but think our Royal patrons would share the Anker/Nansen view.

How, one may ask, has this self-evident truth been lost in Whitehall and measuring success in terms of money replaced it?

A Few Highlights

Don't get too gloomy! Looking back there are plenty of events that stand out. ANS has had its moments over the years, even of a permanent nature. Walk through the Vestre Gravelund and you will find the Commonwealth War Graves. Each year ANS attend on Armistice Day to keep the bond of friendship through that adversity alive for modern Norway. It is with some pride that the graves are overlooked by the statue of 'Mother in Sorrow' placed there via the efforts of past Chairman Johannes Meyer-Miklestad, and thanks must go to our Committee a few years later, for keeping



'Mother in Sorrow' monument, in Vestre Gravlund erected by the citizens of Norway in grateful memory of the Britons who lost their lives in Norway during World War II.

it there facing those from the British Forces who lie forever in a foreign field, as other interests wished it moved to the general area for memorialising the war dead of other nations. The Society and its members contributed to the funding of the statue of Churchill in Solliplass, unveiled by King Olav in 1976 attended of course by ANS. These trials of war that gave rise to these memorials are also happily revisited annually. For those members of ANS fit enough to do so, out in the cold of a November morn into the woods we go, seeking a location only released the day before to see Oslo's gift to London, the Christmas Tree for Trafalgar Square being cut and sent on its way. It is of course too easy to think back to the War as a catalyst for Anglo-Norwegian inter-action but the truth is that today the links are forged more by students attending University in Britain, economic interests in the North Sea and job mobility. And the Society is still providing for the demand in Norway for

links, cultural and otherwise with the United Kingdom. The Committee in 1993 was bringing theatre to Oslo as the fat file detailing the performance of Prunella Scales in 'A Night with Queen Victoria', reveals. To keep things popular the last Christmas Party in 2019 was attended by Lady Caernarvon,



The statue of Winston Churchill in Solli Plass, Oslo. (The pink blob is in fact a rose attached to his walking stick).

whose home is familiar to most as 'Downton Abbey' and which we learned is possible to run with half the staff required by its fictional family.

We also regard it as a strength that the ties with the London Society developed. Astonishingly, at the outset there was little link between the two societies, and it was only in the 1970s that liaison got under way and the two Societies shared the *Anglo Norse Review*. We may not meet that often, but sharing a publication brings the body of like-minded across the sea into sharing views and thoughts. That is what it is all about. That, and getting to go to their BIG Party! We hope a few from London will make it here once conditions permit.

A final highlight is perhaps that dipping into the archives has shown that membership and contact with ANS is often longstanding. Celia our Treasurer was auditing the accounts in 1988, and Elizabeth Solem was on the Committee from that time too. Sybil our current secretary was singing at the Christmas Party in 1993 and still going strong 26 years later performed her cabaret 'We'll Meet Again -The Vera Lynn Story' on both sides of the North Sea: for the Anglo-Norse Society London at The Norwegian Seamen's Church and Mission in London in 2019 and again at the ANS Christmas Party. Now that is dedication! Whatever the ups and downs something is still going right. Given

Covid, one can't help but adopt Vera's iconic song 'We'll Meet Again' as our own anthem.

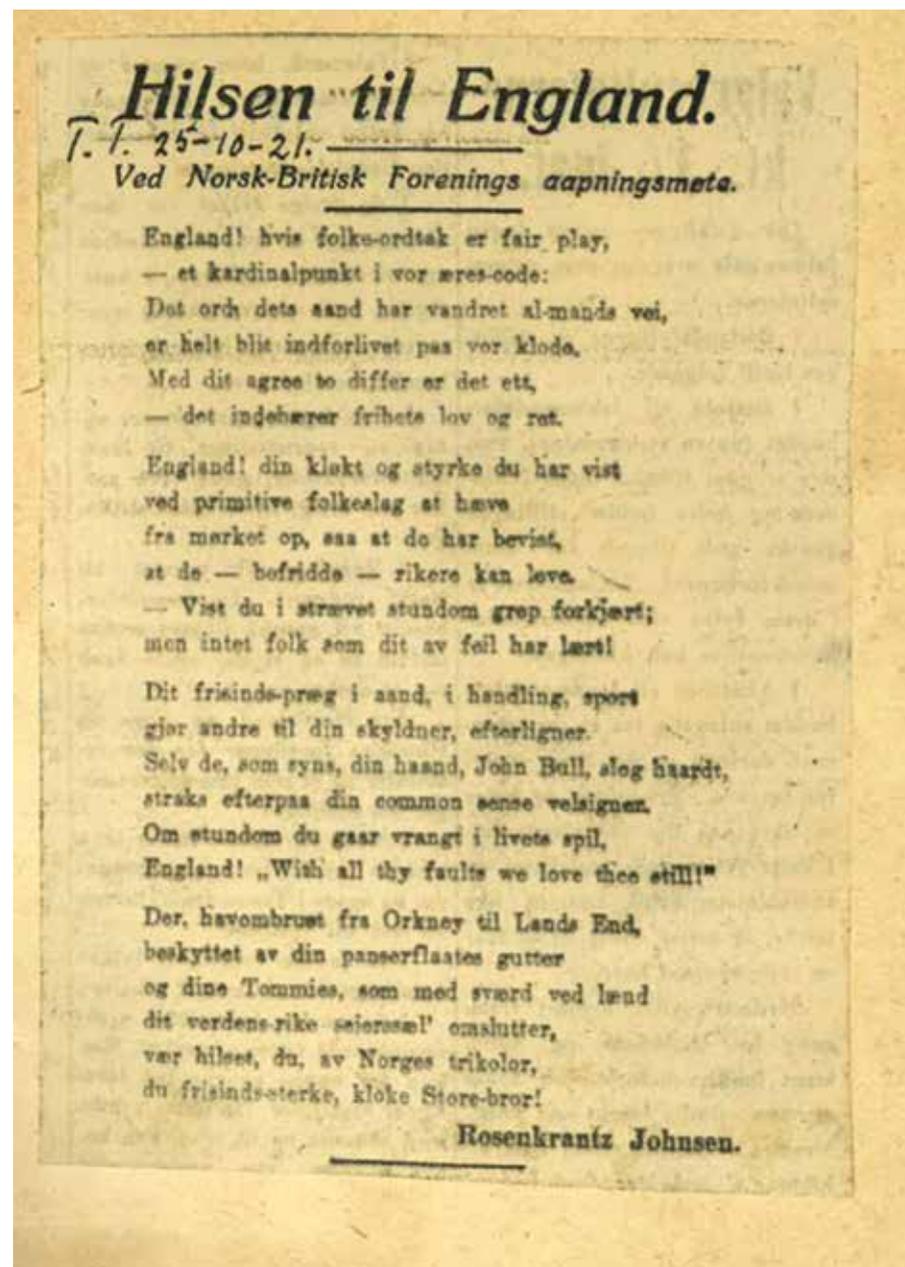
Reflections

There is little doubt that the Society today reflects the changes of the past century. At the start, radio was in its infancy, television perhaps a spark in the mind of Logie Baird, and the cinema flickering in silent black and white. The idea of a tablet in your back pocket giving access to Netflix, Spotify, gaming, and the World Service- pure fantasy. Even in the 1970s we marvelled at the idea of Captain Kirk's 'communicator' as he and Mr. Spock boldly went where no man had gone before. And who does not remember the excitement of 'Space Invaders' usually played on a machine in the pub as it gobbled your change. In the 1920s ANS was a considerable force to be reckoned with. Led by the stars of society, it was at the cutting edge of education, entertainment of the highest quality, plus friendship. In the 2020s we compete for peoples' time and interest against a vastly increased array of beguiling alternatives, most of which do not require the effort of leaving the comfort of your own home. On a winter's night in Oslo, as the snow whirls out of the night sky, it would be understandable that braving the streets for Anglo Norse is seen to be the less palatable option. And yet our members still come. Perhaps the past year of Covid lockdown has taught us that in electronics there is isolation. What we crave is contact and the real vastly outperforms the virtual. At Anglo Norse there is intellectual curiosity bolstered by the immediacy of meeting in person, plus the friendship and a chat over a glass of wine. Today, whilst we do not have the 700 members of 1921, or that 2000 plus of 1945, we have no fewer members than we had in the mid 1960s. (Our trawl through the archives revealed that in 1966, just as England were winning the World Cup, the ANS Chairman was urging members to get out and bring in new members. Current members may find that call a familiar one from the current Committee at every AGM and I still have hopes for England's footballers too!). An anniversary is always a time for reflection and taking stock for asking the question: are we still relevant and viable today? We have no hesitation in saying that a society that promotes friendship and understanding between nations, particularly close neighbours will always be relevant. As to viability, on that we have been in the hands of our members for 100 years. Remarkably, perhaps, we are still here, and whilst our Committee may not be as illustrious as Nansen, we have a team as dedicated and driven as Ella Anker. But it

will be for the membership to decide the future. May our membership look forward, for whilst the past is past, one cannot rest on our laurels. The future is your oyster.

The Archives were trawled by Michael Brooks and Sybil Richardson and our thanks go to all those on past Committees who put together the press cuttings, menus, programs, AGM notes, Newsletters and photographs to permit us to have had such fun with our history. And especial thanks to the thoughtful archivist who included a copy of Dr. Kingston Derry's booklet "A History of the Anglo-Norse Society, Oslo in one of the folders, and of course to Kingston Derry himself, who's earlier research pointed us very often into the more interesting years to explore. If readers noted the lack of 21st Century history, the writers are too close to that era to count it as history, quite apart from natural shyness and modesty!

Photo of Polhøgda on the back cover is by courtesy of www.fni.no. The frieze between the image and the text is from the mural by Erik Werenskiöld in the dining room of the house.



Poem 'Ode to England' read at the inauguration of the Society on October 25th 1921



'Polhøgda' was Fridtjof Nansen's home from 1901 until his death in 1930. He designed and built the house himself in collaboration with the architect Hjalmar Welhaven. It was Nansen's wish to have his urn placed under his beloved birch tree in his garden. The Fridtjof Nansen Institute established in 1958 now uses the building as a research center for energy and environmental studies.