

that the number of academic exhibitors has remained buoyant because the institute allows them a certain amount of free bench space, makes no page charge for entries in the handbook and makes some contribution to out-of-pocket expenses.

Just before the 1970 exhibition, the worrying lack of industrial exhibitors prompted the setting up of a working party to make recommendations for improving the situation. The working party decided that certain changes could be made without destroying the essential *raison d'être* of the exhibition and the chief of these has been put into practice at the 1971 exhibition. This is the creation of a new category of exhibits which do not have to be refereed and which can be shown for commercial reasons alone. The number in this new category is, however, restricted because exhibitors must have at least one refereed exhibit accepted before they are allowed to display products in the second category and even then, no more than twice the number of refereed exhibits is allowed. This commercial category accounts for about 130 of the 490 exhibits at this week's exhibition, but the number of companies exhibiting has only shown a slight rally and is still less than a hundred.

In many ways, the institute is following the example of the French Physical Society but with some reservations. The French Physics Exhibition, held in Paris, at about 18-monthly intervals, is about the closest to the British exhibition in concept and aims. The French have for several years adopted a policy of allowing commercial exhibits and exhibitors to display only one novel device or instrument in order to be allowed to exhibit any number of commercial items. Although the presentation of the French exhibition is of a high standard, it does suffer to some extent from an over emphasis on commercialism. At the other extreme, the scientific exhibitions held in the United States bear little resemblance to either the French or the British. Both the Physics Show, which forms an integral part of the annual meeting of the American Institute of Physics, and the Electronics Show run by the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers are principally commercial functions; but even these displays have shown signs of erosion in the last year or two.

In spite of several years of apparently depressing exhibition statistics, the Physics Exhibition is basically quite sound financially, although a superficial look at the accounts of the Institute of Physics can give a misleading impression. Until 1968, the excess of exhibition expenditure over income was rarely more than £100 or so but since

then, losses of about £4,000 have been recorded. The explanation of this sudden downturn in the fortunes of the exhibition is, however, nothing to do with the exhibition itself but simply reflects a change in the institute's accounting procedure—the exhibition now has to shoulder a proportion of the normal overheads. One of the necessary consequences of this development (which is equivalent, of course, to requiring that the exhibition itself make a profit) is that charges for bench space at the 1971 exhibition had to be raised by about 30 per cent. This was obviously an awkward thing to have to do while trying to attract exhibitors, but it does ensure that the 1971 exhibition will break even.

LEARNED SOCIETIES

Geologists on the Rocks

THE Geological Society of London, the oldest company of geologists in the world, has fallen upon hard times and there are stern lessons to be learned from its present plight. When learned societies in general are suffering from a deceleration in the rapid rate of expansion which took place after the Second World War, the performance of the geologists stands out as being particularly poor. Although finance is clearly the most important and serious of the society's worries, there are also signs that it is losing its appeal for many of its present and potential supporters.

In 1968, the society's balance sheet showed a deficit of almost £800, and this grew to more than £1,500 by 1969. The accounts for 1970 show that this deficit is now running close to £2,400, and that the accumulated fund, the reserve which functions to cushion the society against financial shocks has fallen to only £12,784. These are dismal disclosures for an organization whose total income from subscriptions is only £22,000 and there are now clear indications that the disquiet which many of the fellows have felt in the past about the society's affairs is making itself plain in concrete terms. But it would seem that the geologists must tread a flinty path for the next few years, before their present efforts to atone for their past mistakes show signs of success.

The obvious reasons for the geologists' financial discomfort are plain enough; they have attempted to diversify their activities too rapidly and on too grand a scale from a base which is becoming increasingly precarious. It would be hard to find fault with the council's plans for the future development of the society except, perhaps, to say that they are not exciting enough; but the roots of the problem run very much deeper than that.

The chief cause seems to have been a degree of lethargy in the running of the society's affairs which has resulted in failure to keep up to date with the more controversial trends in modern geology—indeed the Royal Astronomical Society (RAS) now seems to have arrogated to itself the role of keeper of the geological conscience in such matters as plate tectonics and sea floor spreading.

But another cause for concern has been the depressing delay which has characterized the Geological Society's publication record in recent years. In some cases, communications have been published as much as two years after the date on which they were first received. Learned societies rely heavily on finance from publications, which, together with subscriptions, constitute the bulk of their income.

This is well illustrated in the accounts of societies such as the RAS and the Royal Statistical Society (RSS). The publications account of the RAS for the year 1969, for example, shows a surplus of more than £10,000 which comfortably offsets the deficit of £3,899 on the general account. In comparison, the most recent figures for the Geological Society show that it spent over £21,000 on publications in 1970 to bring in £12,485, a sad and indefensible loss.

The society is looking in two chief directions in belated attempts to restore its fortunes. First, the entire publication programme has been overhauled. To this end, responsibility for production of the society's official organ, the *Quarterly Journal*, has been handed over to Scottish Academic Press, so that responsibility only for the scientific content of the journal remains with the society. The *Quarterly Journal* itself will soon close, and will be replaced by a new publication which will appear six times a year.

The second line of attack is to repair the society's dowdy image. There are newly created specialist groups in engineering geology, volcanic studies and marine studies. Sedimentology, micropalaeontology and structural geology will soon be added. The hope is that this move will help to rejuvenate membership, and reverse the present trend indicated by the large numbers of fellows who fail to pay their dues and are removed from the society's list.

Although the geologists have special problems, most learned societies are having to prepare themselves for squalls ahead. Finance is not always the most urgent problem; professional societies, for example the chemists, are frequently very wealthy, and the RAS and the RSS are good examples of organizations who can balance their books. The necessity to plan ahead for suitable accommodation, however, is high on the list of priorities in the minds of many secretaries.