

A short history of the British Bryological Society

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Like its big sister, the Botanical Society of the British Isles, the British Bryological Society began as a club for exchanging botanical specimens (Allen, 1986; Foster, 1979). Unlike that society, it has never had its records destroyed by an enemy bomb, nor did it suffer the stifling domination of 'King Druce' in the 1920s. If the BBS had a king, that person was Paul Richards (1908-1995), who joined as a boy in 1920 and was twice its president. Unlike Druce, Richards was an academic botanist, who fostered a collegiate culture in his kingdom.

The Moss Exchange Club began in 1896 with 23 members (Figure 1). It grew slowly, dividing for a period into two separate sections, one for experts and the other for beginners. The MEC held its first field meeting at Dolgellau in 1922. Following this, the BBS was formally constituted on 1 January 1923. It brought together the two sections of the MEC and provided for two principal activities, the continuing annual exchange of specimens and an annual field meeting (Richards, 1983). Until 1939, the BBS remained an amateur society, though with an increasing number of professional scientists and overseas bryologists.

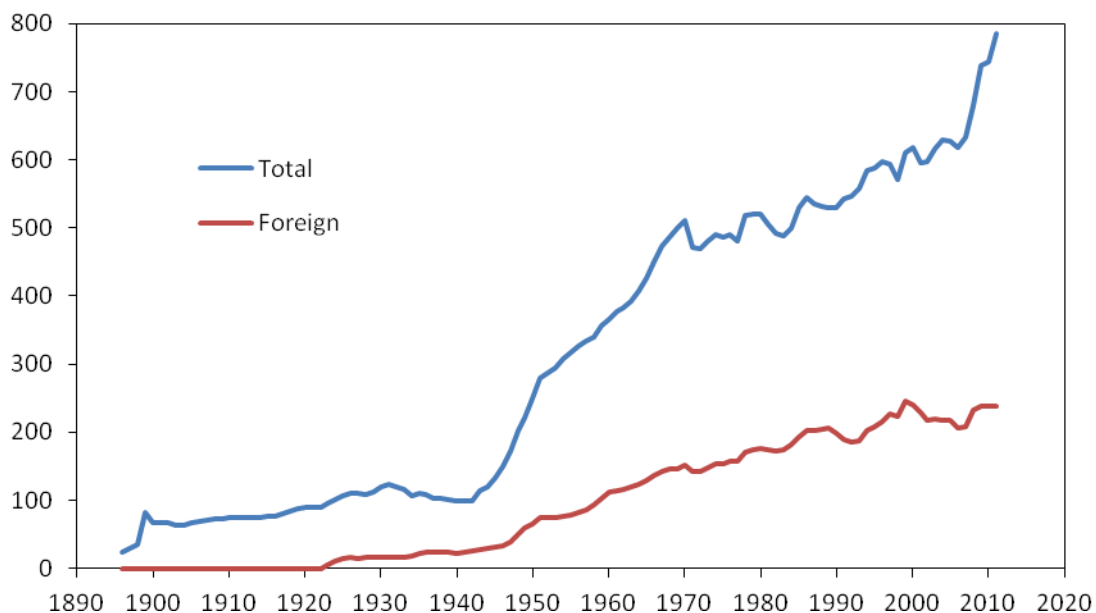


Figure 1. Membership of the Moss Exchange Club (1896-1922) and BBS (1923-2011)

During the Second World War, meetings were suspended but new members were still actively recruited. Many older members died. An informal gathering in Borrowdale in June 1945 heralded the new dawn. The BBS was reinvigorated by younger members such as Paul Richards and E.C. (Ted) Wallace and by keen newcomers such as Alan Crundwell and E.F. ('Heff') Warburg. The journal was established. Numerous academic botanists joined the society. Warburg, based in Oxford University, was Recorder of Mosses from 1946 to 1965. He checked thousands of specimens and encouraged

amateur recorders. During this period, Ted Wallace was BBS Secretary (1948-69). Many new mosses and liverworts were discovered. Bryologists' expertise in the field grew rapidly.

From 1959, the society held regular paper-reading meetings. These now coincide with the AGM. A major new venture in 1960 was the Mapping Scheme, coordinated by A.J.E. Smith. It culminated with the publication of the society's atlas (Hill *et al.*, 1991-1994). The underlying database, managed since 1980 by Chris Preston at the Biological Records Centre, increased from 0.8 million records in 1994 to 2.2 million at present.

As the society grew, so did the need for conservation. The annual exchange of specimens was terminated in 1969. Following discussions with the British Lichen Society, Paddy Coker was appointed BBS Conservation Officer in 1977. He began by writing a code of conduct for the BBS. Subsequent Conservation Officers have been very busy, advising on Red Lists and site protection. The Tropical Bryology Group was established in 1986. It promoted expeditions to Uganda in 1996 and 1998, and Malawi in 1997. The Bryophyte Ecology Group was set up 2006.

In 2012, the society is full of vigour. Its current publications include an excellent website dating from 1996 (redesigned 2003 by the son of the website manager), the *Journal of Bryology*, and *Field Bryology*. In Ted Wallace's day, the *Bulletin* was a rather scruffy cyclostyled sheet. Under Roy Perry's editorship (1974-1998), it grew from a slim A5 paper booklet carrying the society's business, to a regular publication with a thick paper cover, featuring articles on identification and history as well as vice-county records. Under its next editor, Marcus Yeo (1999-2005), it continued to grow, and in 2004 expanded from 2 to 3 issues a year as *Field Bryology*.

Finally, the *Field Guide* (Atherton *et al.* 2010) – written, with much prodding by Mark Lawley, collaboratively over the internet – is a remarkable new production. Its attractive format and wonderful photos are bringing bryology to a wider public. It is a worthy though very different successor to Dixon's (1896) popular *Handbook*, published in the year that the Moss Exchange Club was established.

Bibliography

There is an interesting section with many articles on 'Bryohistory' under 'Learning More' on the BBS website. The following publications are cited above.

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