

The Herbarium of the British Bryological Society, BBSUK

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Formation of a joint Herbarium and Library was proposed and agreed at the Society's Annual Meeting at Llanberis on 4 September, 1924. In the Report for 1925 it was announced that Mr W.R. Sherrin had "kindly undertaken to take charge of the books and plants belonging to the Society. In due course members may have the free use of the books and specimens on payment of postage both ways. Any botanical books of interest and duplicates of Mosses and Hepatics will be gladly received by him." According to the Minutes the collections were to be housed at the South London Botanical Institute but Mr E.C. Wallace has told me that he does not remember ever seeing the Society's herbarium there. Not only its location but also its size at that time, and also the sources from which individual specimens had been obtained, remain obscure.

Sherrin was a keen naturalist and collector. Despite lack of academic training, he became an acknowledged expert in both botanical and zoological fields. He collected and studied coleoptera, lepidoptera and mollusca as well as phanerogams and bryophytes. As an articulator in the Department of Zoology at the British Museum (Natural History) he must have had a good working knowledge of the vertebrates (a rat from what is now Pakistan and a bat from New Guinea were named after him). He was employed full-time in the Department of Zoology from 1895 to 1919, when he became Curator of the South London Institute. He continued to work part-time in the Department of Zoology until 1928 when he was transferred to the Department of Botany to work (still part-time) on the bryophyte collections until his retirement in 1947. Throughout this period and until his death in 1955 he remained Curator of the South London Botanical Institute.

With this background it is scarcely surprising that one of Sherrin's first acts as Curator of the British Bryological Society's Herbarium was to ask members to contribute more specimens. His initial request for any duplicates may have been rather over-enthusiastic. The Report for 1926-27 was modified a little, asking members to kindly make contributions of authentic specimens of mosses and hepatics from time to time. However, the Secretary's Reports from 1928 to 1946 continued to state that any specimens would be acceptable. The Report for 1944-45, published in 1946, was the last of its kind. From 1947 to 1951 Reports were published in the Proceedings as part of the Transactions. No further mention was made of any specimens being acceptable for the Herbarium. There was no recorded mention of any debate or vote on this change of policy but subsequently accessions seem to have been practically restricted to voucher specimens, with few exceptions apart from major bequests. It is surprising that the standing invitation for members to send specimens to the Herbarium had persisted so long, for shortage of space was not a new state of affairs. To quote from the Minutes of an Informal Meeting held in January, 1932 - " A very valuable collection of Mosses comprising over 10,000 specimens and including 35 fascicles of Bauer's European Exsiccata of Mosses, up to date, all arranged, mounted on sheets & catalogued was very generously offered to the Society by our member the Rev. Dr. Rhodes. Unfortunately, Mr. Sherrin, our Curator, was unable to house the herbarium, so other arrangements had to be made. It was suggested that the herbarium should go to the Natural History Museum at South Kensington subject to the approval of Dr. Rhodes and, also, to conditions that would benefit our members directly. The Secretary paid a visit to the Museum yesterday and approached Mr. J. Ramsbottom, Keeper of Botany to discuss the matter. He offered to accept the herbarium subject to an arrangement by which he promised to form a Standard Herbarium, based on the collection & other herbaria belonging to the B.B.S. for the sole use of the members, the remaining mosses after the formation of the Standard Herbarium, to belong to the Museum Trustees. He stipulated also that specimens out of the Standard Herbarium could be sent to members for

examination on application to the Keeper of Botany." The outcome of this was that one packet of each species in the Rhodes collection was retained for the B.B.S. Herbarium, all the rest being handed over to the British Museum (Natural History).

In the following year Sherrin reported on - "the Standard Herbaria (Mosses & Hepatics) at the British Museum (Sth. Kensington) based on the collections of the B.B.S., Dr. Rhodes, Mr. Millar (Mosses) and also on the collection of Hepatics of the B.B.S. & the residue of the late Dr. Macvicar's Herbarium."

At an Executive Meeting in June, 1937, the disposal of two fascicles of North American Mosses collected by Drummond was discussed. Mr. Ramsbottom was to be requested to store them with the B.B.S. collection of British Mosses at the British Museum (Natural History) and under the same conditions as the British Mosses. This would be the Musci Americani or Specimens of the Mosses collected in British North America and chiefly among the Rocky Mountains during the Second Land Arctic Expedition Under the Command of Captain Franklin, R.N. This is a set of exsiccata of considerable historical interest, dated 1828. It is no longer in the B.B.S. Herbarium if indeed it was ever accessed into the collection. It would be interesting to know where it is today.

F.E. Milsom died on 5th December, 1945, bequeathing his collection of bryophytes to the Society. After a period of indecision, it was announced in 1947 that Leicester University had agreed to accommodate it. In the same year W.R. Sherrin relinquished the office of Librarian (to Mrs. H. Wright) but continued as Curator until the following year when A.H. Norkett of the Department of Botany, British Museum (Natural History) was duly elected to that office (Dr. Ramsbottom's permission having been obtained). Within a few years it became apparent that storage space was still a problem and that pressure of official duties restricted the amount of time available for arranging and incorporating additional material in the B.B.S. Herbarium. Nevertheless in 1958 the Curator's Report showed that the Moss Herbarium had been re-housed and more shelf space was available. In 1959 Mrs. J.A. Paton and Messrs. Norkett, Dalby, Pettifer, Smith, Wallace and Wanstall rearranged, catalogued and re-housed the Society's Herbarium in labelled boxes. Mrs. Paton's subsequent report stated that the Herbarium at that time consisted of 10,850 packets of mosses, (an average of nearly 17 packets per species), and 2,450 packets of hepatics, (an average of nearly 9 packets per species). There were also several boxes of Sphagna in need of some attention, and of foreign species that do not occur in Britain. It was suggested that duplicates and at least some of the foreign material should be eliminated at the discretion of the Curator, the foreign material to be presented to the British Museum (Natural History).

In 1960 Mr. A.H. Norkett resigned from the Curatorship and was replaced by Dr. D.H. Dalby. In the following year it was agreed that the Milsom Herbarium should be moved from Leicester to the British Museum (Natural History) if room could be found for it. Any lichens in it were to be presented to the British Lichen Society. By April 1963 the move had been made and the Milsom sphagna and hepatics had been incorporated in the B.B.S. Herbarium. The Curator told the 1963 A.G.M. that he would appreciate help in incorporating material and stamping packets with the name of the collector where necessary.

In 1964 Dr. Dalby reluctantly resigned as Curator and Mr. Norkett, proposed by Dr. Warburg and seconded by Mrs. Appleyard, was again elected to the Curatorship. It seems that there were still difficulties over the housing and curating of the collection; shortages of both allocated space and time.

In 1969 an offer to house the Herbarium in the Department of Botany, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, was accepted. Mr. Norkett resigned and his place as Curator was taken by the present writer. Before the Herbarium was transferred to Cardiff it was again sorted and many foreign bryophytes were removed. When handed over to NMW the estimated number of specimens was c. 21,000. In recent years accessions have been practically restricted to V.C.R, voucher specimens, with few

exceptions apart from the J.H.G. Peterken bequest of c. 3000 packets and the smaller donation of 223 bryophytes ex Herb. P. Hunt. During the past decade the B.B.S. Herbarium total has grown to c. 28,000, of which only eight were other than V.C.R, vouchers apart from those mentioned above.

Recently I checked the dates of collection of the specimens contained in seven boxes, two of them hepatics and one of sphagna. The percentages for each decade worked out as follows:

1840-1849	0.006%	1910-1919	6.98%
1850-1859	0.012%	1920-1929	16.3%
1860-1869	0.006%	1930-1939	7.1%
1870-1879	0.006%	1940-1949	6.6%
1880-1889	0.02%	1950-1959	18.3%
1890-1899	1.13%	1960-1969	28.5%
1900-1909	7.54%	1970-1979	6.85%

It is doubtful whether these figures could have any statistical significance but they may be of interest as indicators of certain trends. For instance, they show that the Society's herbarium today contains a good number of specimens collected before the Society was formed, despite what seems to have been a drastic pruning operation on the Rhodes collection and a certain amount of judicious slimming in other areas. Without knowing the true extent of these operations how large the Herbarium might have been is anyone's guess. The fluctuating percentages since the 1940s also seem interesting.

Since the B.B.S. Herbarium was moved to Cardiff it has been the practice for the Curator's Report to give the number of voucher specimens received annually. It may be useful to tabulate these figures for the past decade.

Year	Voucher specimens		Others	
	Musci	Hepatics	Musci	Hepatics
1970	-	202	-	-
1971	268	173	(223 bryophytes ex Herb. P. Hunt)	
1972	313}	261	-	-
1973	225}		M3	-
1974	294	127	M1 (+c. 3000 Peterken bequest)	
1975	294	116	-	-
1976	278	132	-	-
1977	190	86	-	H4
1978	172	61	-	-
1979	194	80		
1980	280	138		