

## THE BRITISH BRYOLOGICAL SOCIETY 1923-1983

P. W. RICHARDS

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The British Bryological Society, which celebrates its Diamond Jubilee this year (1983), is the only society in Britain, and one of the very few in the world, devoted to the study of mosses and liverworts (bryophytes). Under its present name it goes back to 1923, but it is in fact a continuation in an enlarged form of an earlier society, the Moss Exchange Club. This can claim to be the first bryological society in any country, as it was founded in 1896, antedating by some two years its American counterpart, the Sullivant Moss Society, originally the 'Sullivant Moss Chapter of the Agassiz Society', and since 1969 the American Bryological and Lichenological Society.

***The beginnings of bryology in Britain.*** Though no bryological organisation was formed in Britain until the end of the 19th century, mosses and liverworts had attracted the interest of British botanists much earlier. Gerard's famous *Herball* (1597) illustrates several mosses and thallose liverworts. Thomas Johnson (1604-1644), the London apothecary, recorded a few mosses, now difficult to identify, which he found on botanical excursions to Hampstead Heath (now within the boundaries of Greater London) and Kent (Gilmour 1972) and the remarkable Welshman Edward Lhuyd (1660-1709), who became Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, drew Ray's attention to a moss readily recognizable as *Racomitrium lanuginosum*, which he said was a pest in the grasslands of Wales. The great scientist and inventor Robert Hooke (1635- 1703) made remarkable observations on the microscopic structure and life-history of mosses (Richards 1981), though he was not much interested in their taxonomy.

But the systematic study of British bryophytes really began with the work of John Jacob Dillenius (Dillen) (1684-1747), a German who came to England in 1721 and became the first Sherardian Professor of Botany at Oxford. He collected bryophytes in various parts of England and made a notable tour of North Wales (Richards 1979). His *Historia Muscorum* (1741) describes and figures a large number of species of mosses and hepatics and also deals with algae, lichens and some pteridophytes. As in other botanical works of the time, the nomenclature was cumbersome - an example is *Bryum foliis latiusculis congestis, capsulis longis nutantibus*, the Transparent and bigger tufted Bryum, with long stooping heads (*Bryum capillare* Hedw.), but Dillenius' *Historia* remained for many years the chief reference book for British bryologists.

Towards the end of the 18th century, the work of Hedwig on the sexual organs of mosses and the adoption of the binomial system of nomenclature revolutionized bryological taxonomy. The first British floras following these advances which dealt only with bryophytes were Turner's *Muscologia Hibernica* (1804), W.J. Hooker's *British Jungermanniae* (1812-1816) and Hooker & Taylor's *Muscologia Britannica* (ed. 1, 1818). Wilson's *Bryologia Britannica* (1855), which was originally intended to be a revised (3rd) edition of Hooker & Taylor's book, incorporated many improvements in classification from Bruch, Schimper and GümbeL's *Bryologia Europaea* (1836-55), and was for many years the standard work on British mosses. At about the same time Hofmeister's work on the higher cryptogams brought a new understanding of the life-histories of bryophytes.

Several British moss floras were published after Wilson's *Bryologia* including Berkeley's *Handbook of British Mosses* (1863), Hobkirk's *Synopsis* (ed. 1, 1872) and Braithwaite's magnificent *British Moss Flora*, begun in 1887, but not finished until 1905, and supplemented by his *Sphagnaceae of Europe and North America* (1880). The hepatics fared less well, for after Hooker's pioneer work of 1812-1816, no complete British flora appeared until M.C. Cooke's *Handbook* (1894) and Pearson's two-volume *Hepaticae of the British Isles* (1899-1902), neither of them wholly satisfactory.

The need for a practical, up-to-date and not unduly expensive, moss flora was not met until the publication of H.N. Dixon's *Student's Handbook of British Mosses* (ed. 1, 1896): among its many excellent features were the drawings and keys by H.G. Jameson, adapted from his own *Guide to British Mosses* (1893). Further editions of Dixon's *Handbook* appeared in 1904 and 1924 and it remained the standard work on British mosses until superseded by A.J.E. Smith's *Moss Flora of Britain and Ireland* (1978a). Probably encouraged by the success of Dixon's book, a similar *Student's Handbook of British Hepatics* by S.M. Macvicar was published in 1912: there was a second edition of this in 1926, but a more modern flora of British hepatics is now long overdue.

***The Moss Exchange Club, 1896-1923.*** In February 1896 a notice appeared in the *Journal of Botany* (vol. 34, pp.88-9), and at about the same time in *Science Gossip* and *The Irish Naturalist*, proposing the formation of a 'Moss Exchange Club'. The writer was the Rev. C.H. Waddell, a Church of Ireland clergyman living in Co. Down, who was a keen and very knowledgeable field botanist. He was keenly interested in bryophytes, especially hepatics, as well as in flowering plants, (particularly the 'critical' groups such as Rubi and Hieracia). The club was to be modelled on the long-established Exchange Clubs for vascular plants (which eventually became absorbed into what is now the Botanical Society of the British Isles). The main object of the Moss Exchange Club, like that of any other exchange clubs, was to assist members in building up collections of correctly named specimens. It was also hoped to produce new catalogues of British bryophytes to replace the Botanical Record Club's already out of date *London Catalogue of British Mosses* (Lees 1881).

The history of the Moss Exchange Club, which has been chronicled by one of its original members, Miss E. Armitage (1944), and also by W.O. Foster (1979), need be dealt with here only briefly. Waddell hoped to attract 30 members; 23 joined in the first year, but in 1899 there were 37 and by 1914 the number has risen to over 60. The Club held no meetings and regular contacts between members were mainly through the annual exchanges of specimens and the short printed reports; for some years also a notebook was circulated among members in which they could write comments on the specimens distributed in the exchange or on other matters of interest.

From its early years one of the Club's aims was to compile reliable records of the distribution of British bryophytes on a 'vice-county' basis. The results appeared in the first *Census Catalogue of British Mosses* in 1907 and the *Census Catalogue of British Hepatics* in 1903, replacing a previous catalogue compiled by C.H. Waddell in 1897. Several revisions of the *Census Catalogue* have since been prepared, a complete bibliography being provided in the most recent version (Corley and Hill 1981).

Throughout its existence the Moss Exchange Club was concerned almost entirely with British bryophytes, which as not surprising as all the members were resident in Great Britain or Ireland. But even in the first year the Rev. C.H. Binstead wished to include continental European mosses in the exchange and contributed mosses from Norway. Later, after a visit to Ceylon and Borneo he tried to

arouse an interest in the Club in the 'extensive moss flora of the tropics'. W.E. Nicholson in 1901 had tried unsuccessfully to organize a 'Foreign Section' of the Club.

The original members included well known experts such as Dixon, Macvicar, Nicholson and Waddell, and 'beginners' with very little knowledge or experience. To help the latter a 'Section 2' was instituted in 1900. As the years passed many of the 'beginners' became 'experts' and the separation into two sections became less useful. Nearly all the original members of the Moss Exchange Club were amateurs in various walks of life; one who afterwards became a professor of botany resigned after one year. Later on a few university teachers and other professional botanists joined the Club, but they were always a small minority. The aims of the Club may have been narrow, but it should be recognized that during a period when bryophytes were almost completely neglected in British universities it kept an interest in mosses and hepatics alive and made a considerable contribution to knowledge of the British bryophyte flora.

***The British Bryological Society, 1923-1945.*** In 1922 the sudden illness of William Ingham, who had been Secretary of the Moss Exchange Club since Waddell retired in 1903, led to a proposal that the two Sections should be merged. The members were circulated and an informal meeting at Dolgellau in Wales was convened, with D.A. Jones, the Secretary of Section 2 as 'leader'. There it was decided to reorganize the Moss Exchange Club as the British Bryological Society (as from January 1, 1923), with Dixon as President: Jones and Miss E. Armitage, both of whom had taken a large part in the discussions leading up to the meeting, were to be the Secretaries. Rules were drawn up and an important decision was that there should be an Annual Meeting and Excursion.

The reorganization quickly had beneficial effects. The membership began to increase and reached 100 by 1934. The meeting at Dolgellau was followed by a successful one at Buxton, Derbyshire and the opportunities for members to meet had a stimulating effect on their activities. For the first time members from other countries joined the Society which by 1934 included distinguished overseas figures such as Pierre Allorge, E.B. Bartram, A.W. Evans, L. Loeske and N. Malta. The somewhat parochial Moss Exchange Club had become an internationally recognized society.

After the demise of Section 2 of the Moss Exchange Club there was no official provision for 'beginners', but various senior members of the Society took trouble in recruiting and encouraging young members. Notable among them was W.R. Sherrin, Curator of the South London Botanical Institute, who, as recorded in the reminiscences in British Bryological Society Bulletin 42 (1983), gave much help to several young bryologists, including D.G. Catcheside, E.C. Wallace and the writer of this article, all of whom later played active parts in the Society.

The British Bryological Society continued to prosper until the outbreak of the Second World War. During the war years meetings were necessarily suspended, though some of the older members did what they could to keep the Society alive.

***The British Bryological Society, 1945-1983.*** In June 1945, a few weeks after the war in Europe ended on 'VE Day', a small group of members met for a weekend at a hotel in Borrowdale to discuss reviving the Society and in September an informal Annual Meeting was held in London, presided over by W.R. Sherrin in the absence of Miss Armitage, the President, who was ill. This was followed by a field trip in Surrey 'and, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Moss Exchange Club, there was a dinner at the Eccleston Hotel at which Dr. John Ramsbottom of the British Museum

Professor Richards subsequently wrote an Erratum sheet replacing this last paragraph which is appended to the end of this document

(Natural History) was the guest of honour. An Annual Meeting and Excursion in the pre-war style was held at Appleby, Westmorland, in April 1946.

After this the Society, with E.C. Wallace as its able and devoted Secretary from 1948 to 1969, grew and flourished to an extent undreamt of before the war. The membership soon passed the pre-war total and reached 250 in 1950. By 1971 it had risen to 500 and since then has remained at about that level. A considerable number of professional botanists joined the Society, and as most of them, like the much beloved E.F. Warburg ('Heff'), were lecturers in universities or colleges, many of their students also became active members. In contrast to the situation before the war, the Society attracted many members from overseas, who now (1983) number between 150 and 200.

The rapid growth of the British Bryological Society after its revival in 1945 was probably due to several causes. One was the great upsurge of interest in natural history and nature conservation in Britain after the war, another was the expansion of the universities and the development in their biological departments of a new interest in bryological research. But there can be little doubt that one of the most important factors was the success of the *Journal of Bryology*. In its early years the Society's only publications, other than *Census Catalogues*, had been slim *Annual Reports* which seldom contained anything beyond lists of species contributed to the exchanges, lists of recent publications, officers' reports and other domestic items; only occasionally were there short notes on new or critical species. In 1947 the Society began to issue a journal, originally called the *Transactions of the British Bryological Society*, but after 1972 changed to the *Journal of Bryology*. The decision to publish the *Transactions* was mainly due to the foresight and enthusiasm of an amateur bryologist and lichenologist, F.A. Sowter, and he was the first editor. Thanks to Sowter and his successors, the *Journal of Bryology* has established itself as a scientific periodical of the highest standards and has a circulation much wider than the Society's membership. Since 1963 the *Journal* has been supplemented by the *Bulletin*, which deals mainly with the Society's own affairs, and also includes short notes and papers of bryological interest.

One of the aims of the British Bryological Society, and of the Moss Exchange Club before it, has been to compile reliable records of the distribution of bryophytes in the British Isles. The results have appeared as *Census Catalogues* giving the occurrence of each species in the vice-counties originally defined by H.C. Watson in 1852 for recording the distribution of higher plants. Additional records are published every year in the Society's reports (now in the *Bulletin*). Since 1946 records have been accepted only if supported by a properly determined voucher specimen: these specimens are deposited in the Society's herbarium (at present at the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff) which is thus a valuable archive of bryophyte distribution in Britain. The most recent catalogue (Corley & Hill 1981), the first to include mosses and hepatics in one volume, outlines the history of the vice-county recording system for bryophytes, and discusses its merits and disadvantages. Since 1960 recording by vice-counties has been supplemented by recording on 10 km squares of the National Grid. 'Dot maps' of species distributions on this system began to appear in 1963, and in 1978 a *Provisional Atlas* (Smith 1978b) was published showing the distribution of 104 species.

The main interest of the Society has always been in taxonomy and the study of mosses and hepatics in the field, but there are now many members who are active research workers on the ecology, physiology, biochemistry, genetics and other aspects of bryology. Since 1959 a well-supported annual paper-reading meeting has catered for these interests and many papers on such subjects have appeared in the *Journal*. However, the number of papers on non-taxonomic bryology needs to be increased and

the view that bryology is wider than merely the classification and identification of bryophytes still needs to be encouraged.

As in the Moss Exchange Club's early years, there is still a gap between 'experts' and 'beginners'. The field meetings provide good opportunities for the latter to learn from the former, but for financial and other reasons many members find it difficult to join field meetings regularly. With this problem in mind, two-day 'taxonomic workshops' have been held in recent years. In 1983 a more formal course on bryophyte taxonomy was organized jointly by the British Bryological Society and the Systematics Association. Four members of the B.B.S. taught in this course, which was given at Manchester University. On August 16-19, 1978, also in co-operation with the Systematics Association, an international symposium on bryophyte systematics was held at the University College of North Wales, Bangor. A volume containing the 21 contributions was afterwards published (Clarke & Duckett 1979).

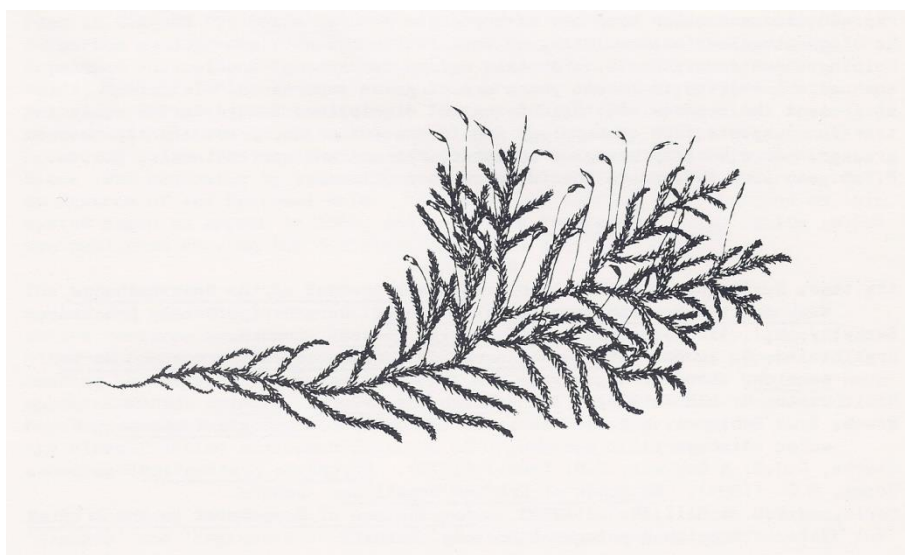
As long ago as 1896, H.N. Dixon expressed anxiety that the exchanges of specimens 'might tend towards the extermination of our rarer species' (Foster 1979). The danger from collectors remains and today threats to bryophytes from the destruction or modification of habitats such as woodlands, fens, bogs, old trees and old walls, as well as from atmospheric pollution, to which bryophytes like lichens are very sensitive, is enormously greater than in the last century. The B.B.S. has long abandoned organized exchanges of specimens and its members are well aware of the need to collect sparingly, if at all, because so many species are endangered. In 1977 a Conservation Officer was appointed, and a *Code of Conduct* has been printed and distributed to universities, field study centres and naturalists' trusts to alert a wider public, especially students, of the urgent need to conserve our bryophyte flora. In the last hundred years only two or three species of bryophytes have become extinct in the British Isles as far as is known, but unless determined efforts are made, losses in the century ahead may well be much greater.

**The next sixty years.** Like other branches of science, bryology today is becoming more and more sophisticated; for some kinds of research expensive apparatus and techniques only available to professional scientists are necessary. Yet in the next sixty years, as in the past, there will undoubtedly be a useful role for amateurs. Apart from describing and identifying bryophytes, recording and similar work, non-professionals can play an indispensable part in co-operative projects such as monitoring the survival of rare species and the spread of immigrants, studies of phenology, reproduction and other branches of bryophyte natural history. The B.B.S. can be of great value in stimulating an interest in students and others, and in helping them to develop it. For this reason 'workshops' and lecture courses such as those given in recent years are of great importance. In universities at present the demands of other biological disciplines leaves little money or time for subjects such as bryology and in the future the pressures may be even greater. As a society bringing together amateurs and professionals, the B.B.S. can look forward to the future with confidence.

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## APPENDIX

### *Principal officers of the Moss Exchange Club and the British Bryological Society.*

#### *MOSS EXCHANGE CLUB*

The affairs of the Moss Exchange Club were conducted principally by the Secretary of Section 1 and the Distributor, there being no President.

<b>Secretary</b>	<b>Distributor</b>	<b>Year</b>
C.H. Waddell	C.H. Waddell	1896-1899
C.H. Waddell	J.A. Wheldon	1900-1901
C.H. Waddell	T. Barker	1902
W. Ingham	T. Barker	1903
W. Ingham	R.H. Meldrum	1904-1905
W. Ingham	D.A. Jones	1906
W. Ingham	E. Cleminshaw	1907-1908
W. Ingham	H.H. Knight	1909-1910
W. Ingham	W.H. Burrell	1911-1912
W. Ingham	Eleonora Armitage	1913
W. Ingham	D. Lillie	1914
W. Ingham	P.G.M. Rhodes	1915-1916
W. Ingham	Eleonora Armitage	1917
W. Ingham	D. Lillie	1918
W. Ingham	Eleonora Armitage	1919
W. Ingham	A. Wilson	1920
W. Ingham	W.G. Travis	1921
D.A. Jones & E. Armitage	Eleonora Armitage	1922

#### *BRITISH BRYOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

<b>President</b>	<b>Secretary</b>	<b>Year</b>
H.N. Dixon	D.A. Jones	1923-1924
S.M. Macvicar	D.A. Jones	1925
C.H. Binstead	D.A. Jones	1926-1928
W.E. Nicholson	D.A. Jones	1929-1930
W. Watson	D.A. Jones	1931-1932
H.H. Knight	D.A. Jones	1933-1934
D.A. Jones	D.A. Jones	1935
D.A. Jones	A. Thompson	1936
J.B. Duncan	A. Thompson	1937-1938
Eleonora Armitage	A. Thompson	1939-1943
E. Armitage (until Sept. '45)	A. Thompson	1944-1945
W.R. Sherrin (from Sept. '45)		
W.R. Sherrin	A. Thompson	1946-1947
A. Thompson	E.C. Wallace	1943-1949
P.W. Richards	E.C. Wallace	1950-1951
Lorna Scott	E.C. Wallace	1952-1953
E.W. Jones	E.C. Wallace	1954-1955
L.B.C. Trotter	E.C. Wallace	1956-1957
F.A. Sowter	E.C. Wallace	1958-1959
Evelyn Lobley	E.C. Wallace	1960-1961
E.F. Warburg	E.C. Wallace	1962-1963
E.V. Watson	E.C. Wallace	1964-1965
Joan Appleyard	E.C. Wallace	1966-1967
J.H. Peterken	E.C. Wallace	1963-1969
A.J. Pettifer	D.H. Dalby	1970-1971
E.C. Wallace	D.H. Dalby	1972-1973
A.C. Crundwell	A.R. Perry	1974-1975
Jean Paton	A.R. Perry	1976-1977
P.W. Richards	A.R. Perry	1978-1979
S.W. Greene	A.R. Perry	1980-1981
H.L.K. Whitehouse	R.E. Longton	1982-1983

E R R A T U M

The British Bryological Society 1923-1983, by P.W. Richards, Cardiff, 1983

Paragraph 6 on page 3 should read:

The British Bryological Society, 1945-1983. In June 1945, a few weeks after the war in Europe ended on 'VE Day', a small group of members met for a weekend at a hotel in Borrowdale to discuss reviving the Society and in September an informal Annual Meeting was held in London, presided over by W.R. Sherrin in the absence of Miss Armitage, the President, who was ill. This was followed by a field trip in Surrey. An Annual General Meeting and Excursion in the pre-war style was held in Appleby, Westmorland, in April, 1946. To celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Moss Exchange Club a Jubilee Meeting was held in London in September, 1946, and this incorporated a dinner at the Eccleston Hotel at which Dr. John Ramsbottom of the British Museum (Natural History) was the guest of honour.

P. Stanley