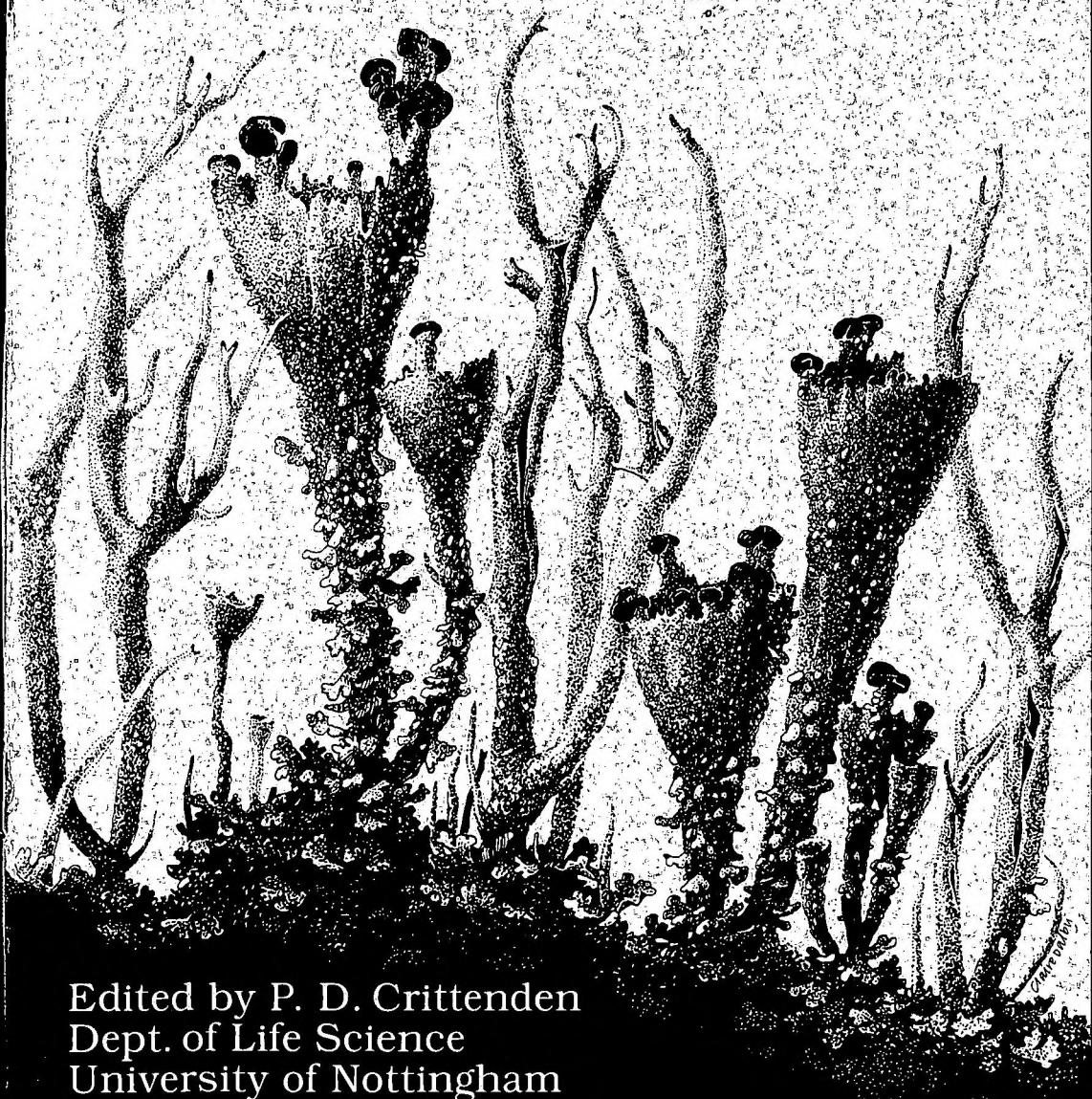


BRITISH LICHEN SOCIETY BULLETIN

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THE FORMATION OF THE BRITISH LICHEN SOCIETY

The formation of the British Lichen Society in 1958 was one of the most important developments in the history of lichenology. Unfortunately little has been published on the way in which the society was formed or of the events at the inaugural meeting. Some of what has appeared has been erroneous (Brightman & Seaward 1989: 380; Moxham 1983: 291), in contrast to one accurate account (Swinscow 1968). Therefore an attempt is made here to provide a detailed description of the formation, chiefly by reference to original documents.

Lichenology in the Fifties

Walter Watson of Taunton was the dominant figure in British lichenology during the thirties and forties of the twentieth century. Following the publication of his Census Catalogue (Watson 1953), giving the vice-county distribution of every species - a method of recording which has never been continued, he retired from active lichenology and died in 1960. Watson's retirement left a void and gave rise to a period aptly called "the lean years" (Gilbert in Jones 1982). During the fifties there were only a few botanists with much knowledge of British lichens, and very few publications for increasing this knowledge. The low level of lichenological activity was demonstrated by the fact that the lichen herbarium at the British Museum (Natural History) (now called The Natural History Museum), London, was consulted only once by one visitor, Fred A. Sowter, during the whole of 1953, compared with an average of about one visitor per working day during the 1980s.

Fortunately active measures were taken to revive British lichenology. Fred Sowter of Leicester began a 'Lichen Study Group' which circulated parcels of named specimens. Eilif Dahl came over from Norway to work for a while at Cambridge University from where he published a set of duplicated keys to British macrolichens (Dahl 1952), which proved a considerable aid to identification; before then the only guides in print were the difficult small handbook (Smith 1921) and the equally difficult large monograph (Smith 1926) which dealt mostly with microlichens. In 1955 the trustees of the British Museum appointed Peter W. James to the elite scientific officer class to work on lichens at the British Museum (Natural History) where he established a lichen section and adopted a leading role in the promotion of lichenology. Charles Sinker of the Field Studies Council helped arrange the first course on lichens at a field centre in 1955; it was at Malham Tarn and was run by Arthur E. Wade of the National Museum of Wales at Cardiff. This rise in lichenological activity led to the consideration of a society

devoted to lichen studies. Arthur Wade did not consider that there was sufficient support for an independent society and so informal discussions began with both the British Bryological Society and the British Mycological Society with the aim of establishing a lichen section within either one or the other. These efforts, however, were suddenly eclipsed by a most unexpected development.

Swinscow's Proposal

In November 1957 T. Douglas V. Swinscow sent a letter to everyone in Britain with any interest in lichens, however slight, about 60 persons all told. In the letter, sent with minimal consultation, he proposed the formation of a British Lichen Society. What was surprising was that Douglas Swinscow, a medical editor by profession, had taken no previous active interest in lichens, but was keen on ferns and bryophytes and published on both (e.g. Swinscow 1953; 1959). Equally astonishing he had thought of forming the society only three weeks beforehand whilst walking through Borrowdale in Cumbria on 10 October 1957 (Swinscow 1968). Remarkably only one lichenologist, namely Fred Sowter, showed any resentment at this impulsive initiative. The duplicated letter to botanists was undated and sent from Douglas's home in Knebworth, Hertfordshire; it read as follows:

'Dear [name entered in ink]

In response to inquiries I have recently made, a number of lichenologists have told me that they are keen to start a British Lichen Society. They include A. E. Wade, F. Sowter, D. Pigott, P. James, and Miss U. K. Duncan. I am writing now to ask if you think you would be willing to join such a society.

The exact form the society should take has not yet been decided. It might, for instance, be a group within one of the established botanical societies, or be affiliated to one of them, or be independent. Its purpose would be to advance the study of lichens by holding meetings, circulating specimens, and publishing records. A number of botanists believe there is a need for such work to be carried out, and that the time is ripe to start it.

No doubt at first the society would be a small one - and it should be possible to keep the subscription reasonably low. Field meetings would presumably be held, but whether or not in conjunction with the field meetings of other societies, such as the B.B.S., is for members to decide. There are arguments for and against having joint meetings.

The study of lichens is more difficult than it need be for two reasons: first, the literature is rather obscure and inaccessible; secondly, the slow growth of these plants and their relative scarcity in some parts of Great Britain, make inadvisable an organized exchange of specimens such as some other botanical societies run. A lichen society would not only help to overcome these difficulties but seems the best way of doing so. In addition to holding meetings and sending out publications (if at first of a modest nature) so that knowledge of lichens can be advanced, a society might hold a central collection of lichens from which members could borrow specimens, and it might extend the system by which at present a parcel of lichens circulates among the members of a study group.

Such, very briefly, is an outline of what a society might do, but all suggestions are welcome. I hope you may feel inclined to join such a society, and would be grateful to have your views.

Yours sincerely,

[signed] Douglas Swinscow.

Almost everyone sent favourable replies to this letter and in December 1957 Douglas Swinscow sent out a second undated duplicated letter from his home at Knebworth reading as follows:

'Dear [name entered in ink]

About fifty people have now agreed to support a lichen society. This seems to be a sufficient number with which to start one. Opinion is overwhelmingly in favour of its being an independent society and not affiliated in some way to an established society, though many people have said they would prefer field meetings in conjunction with another society such as the B.B.S. or the B.M.S.

In order to draw up its constitution a meeting will be held at the British Museum (Natural History) - i.e., the Natural History Museum - Cromwell Road, London, S.W.7, on Saturday, February 1, 1958, at 2.15 p.m. By kind permission of the Museum authorities it will be in the board-room.

You are cordially invited to attend this meeting. If you will be too far away to do so, and would like the meeting to discuss any views other than those you have already given to me, would you please send them to me before then?

Yours sincerely,

[signed] Douglas Swinscow.'

The Inaugural Meeting

The inaugural meeting took place as arranged in the formal atmosphere of the impressive boardroom at the British Museum (Natural History), London, on the fine but cold afternoon of Saturday 1 February 1958 at 14.15. Twenty-four botanists and Douglas Swinscow, most wearing smart suits, sat around the long table; at each place was a duplicated set of proposed rules previously prepared by Douglas. Unfortunately a list of persons present was not compiled, and has only recently been attempted, with incomplete results (Table 1).

TABLE 1. Known attenders of the inaugural meeting of the British Lichen Society on 1 February 1958

| | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Mr David J. Bellamy | * Mr Alan H. Norkett |
| Mr Frank H. Brightman | Mr Joseph H. G. Peterken |
| Mr Cyril P. Castell | Professor Paul W. Richards |
| Dr C. Geoffrey Dobbs | Dr David C. Smith |
| Mr John L. Gilbert | Mr David T. Streeter |
| Mrs Brenda D. Haynes | Dr T. Douglas V. Swinscow |
| Mr Fred N. Haynes | Mr John H. Tallis |
| Mr Peter W. James | Mr Arthur E. Wade |
| Mr A. Clive Jermy | Mr Edward C. Wallace |
| Mr Jack R. Laundon | Miss S. Wilson |

*Did not join the society and therefore not a founder-member. Five other persons also attended but remain unidentified despite extensive enquiries.

Dr Swinscow welcomed everyone to the meeting and reported that several people could not attend either because of distance (e.g. Ursula Duncan) or ill health (e.g. Fred Sowter). However, he said that those who could not be present had sent their support.

No agenda was circulated but Douglas took the chair and at once proposed that a lichen society be formed. By a unanimous vote this was agreed. Next the name of the society was considered. Douglas read out a letter from Fred Sowter stating that the name 'British Lichen Society' was bad English, and proposing that 'British Lichenological Society' should be the title. A vote on this proposal was taken, but it was lost by 23 votes to one. Only Arthur Wade voted in favour of the name 'British Lichenological Society', and said that his reason for doing so was in order to show support for his absent friend! Thus the British Lichen Society was formed: British by name, yet international by nature.

Next the draft rules were considered (see Appendix). Alterations were made to the draft rules following discussion. Douglas was concerned that undesirable persons did not become members, but eventually accepted that new members need not be nominated as long as they could be easily removed for misconduct. The number of council members was increased to six. Eventually the amended rules were adopted. They still form the basic rules today, although a number of alterations have been made over the years.

Officers, three members of Council, and referees were then elected, but the position of President was left unfilled. Subscriptions were fixed at £1 for ordinary membership.

Mr Joseph Peterken proposed a vote of thanks to Dr Swinscow for all his work in setting up the British Lichen Society and this was greeted with acclamation. The meeting closed before 17.00, everyone leaving with a great sense of achievement.

The Follow-up

After the inaugural meeting Douglas Swinscow sent another undated duplicated letter from his home in Knebworth. This read as follows:

'Dear [name entered in ink]

Now that the British Lichen Society has been founded, would you please send any further communications on it to the Secretary, Mr. Wade? I enclose a report of the inaugural meeting, with some notes appended to it by the Secretary. So that the Society may now get going in earnest, would you please send your subscription to the Treasurer, Mr. Peterken?

Since the Society is not going to organize an annual exchange of specimens, owing to the scarcity of many lichens, a herbarium from which members can borrow accurately named specimens should be of help. Having been appointed curator of the herbarium, may I appeal to members to send me any duplicates they can spare? Common species will be as welcome as rare ones. When I have accumulated a reasonable stock, members will be informed of what they can borrow. The sooner I receive specimens, the sooner we can get this service going.

With best wishes for the success of the Society,
Yours sincerely,
[signed] Douglas Swinscow.'

With this letter there was a duplicated report of the foundation meeting together with a duplicated copy of the approved rules of the society. The report was as follows:

"INAUGURAL MEETING OF BRITISH LICHEN SOCIETY

At a meeting in the afternoon of February 1, 1958, at the British Museum (Natural History) the British Lichen Society was formed by the unanimous vote of the 24 people present at the invitation of T. D. V. Swinscow. Dr. Swinscow in opening the meeting reported that about 50 people had agreed to support the Society.

The meeting then considered at some length a set of Rules defining the constitution of the Society and after certain amendments had been made it was resolved that the Rules be adopted.

The Rules provide for the appointment of certain officers. The meeting decided to fill some of these posts but to leave those of President and Vice President vacant for the time being. The posts filled, by unanimous votes of the meeting, were as follows:

Secretary: A. E. Wade, Department of Botany, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.

Treasurer: J. H. G. Peterken, 73 Forest Drive East, Leytonstone, London, E.11.

Editor: P. James, Cryptogamic Botany Department, British Museum (Natural History), Cromwell Road, London, S.W.7.

Librarian: D. C. Smith, University Department of Botany, South Parks Road, Oxford.

Recorder: P. James, Cryptogamic Botany Department, British Museum (Natural History), Cromwell Road, London, S.W.7.

Curator: T. D. V. Swinscow, "Everley", London Road, Knebworth, Herts.

Of the six elected members of the Council, the meeting decided to elect three immediately (E. C. Wallace, Miss S. Wilson, and F. A. Sowter, who was unable to attend, and subject to his being able to accept) and to defer filling the remaining three vacancies until next year. In this way the election of half the elected members of the Council for their term of two years will alternate with the election of the other half of the elected members.

A. E. Wade and P. James undertook to act as referees in determining specimens, and J. R. Laundon (British Museum (Natural History), Cromwell Road, London, S.W.7), for the genus *Cladonia*. The names of Miss U. K. Duncan, Parkhill, Arbroath, Angus, and F. A. Sowter, Greenholme, Stoughton Lane, Stoughton, Leicester, who were unable to attend, were also included in the panel of referees:

The meeting fixed the ordinary membership subscription at £1, junior membership subscription at 10s., and family membership subscription at 5s.

No decision was taken on any publication to be issued by the Society, though some of the problems were discussed. The question of the publication of a cyclostyled Bulletin was left to the Officers. It is hoped to issue a first number as soon as possible.*

Arrangements for the time and place of the next meeting are to be considered.

On the proposal of J. H. G. Peterken the meeting expressed its thanks to T. D. V. Swinscow for his work in getting the Society started and requested that this be recorded in the report of the meeting.

Signed:

T. D. V. Swinscow, A. E. Wade,
Convenor of Meeting. Secretary, B.L.S.

*Notes, records, and other lichenological items for the Bulletin would be welcomed by the editor.

New county records should be sent to Mr. Peter James, accompanied, if possible, by sufficient material to provide a specimen for both the British Museum and the Society's own collection.

Dr. D. C. Smith (Librarian) would be glad to receive for the Society's Library books or separates which members may care to present.

Subscriptions: Members are asked to send their subscription for 1958 to the Treasurer as soon as possible."

The British Lichen Society was now up and running. It began as a vibrant organization dedicated to the study of lichens. Its officers and first members (James 1958) had a unity of purpose and enthusiasm which ensured its success. These friendly pioneering days had a vitality and spirit of co-operation which has never been equalled. A forum for the dissemination of scientific information and for the promotion of research on lichens had been provided for all who wished to participate.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Fred and Brenda Haynes for sending me their interesting recollections of the inaugural meeting and to Sir David Smith for supplying me with photocopies of the documents. Mr Frank Brightman, Dr Geoffrey Dobbs, Mr Clive Jermy, the late Professor Paul Richards, Mr David Streeter, and Dr John Tallis kindly informed me that they attended the inaugural meeting on 1 February 1958, and Dr Kery Dalby, Mr Peter Hall, Mr Charles Jeffrey, Dr Ken Kershaw, Dr Donald Pigott, Dr Michael Proctor, Dr Dennis Ratcliffe, Dr Francis Rose, Dr George A. M. Scott, and Mr Cliff Townsend wrote that they were unable to be present; Dr Ken Alvin does not remember attending.

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Jack Laundon

APPENDIX

"British Lichen Society

Rules

1. *Name and Objects*. - The name of the Society shall be the British Lichen Society. Its objects shall be to encourage the study and conservation of lichens.
2. *Membership*. - The Society shall have honorary members, ordinary members (including family members), and junior members.

Honorary members shall be distinguished lichenologists and others who have