

PAUL WESTMACOTT RICHARDS (1908-1995)

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This is one in a series of articles about prominent British and Irish field-bryologists of the past. The author would be very pleased to learn of any information which supplements its content.

A Social and Biographical History of British and Irish Field-bryologists is also available on-line at <http://britishbryologicalsociety.org.uk/>

Bryological career

Paul Richards's lifelong interest in botany (including bryophytes and lichens) began to develop during boyhood in Cardiff, probably in response to his mother's interest in plants and natural history. In 1920 the eleven-year-old Richards arranged to visit D.A. Jones in Harlech, and in consequence of that encounter joined the beginner's section of the Moss Exchange Club.

Richards's membership of the MEC ran seamlessly into one for the British Bryological Society in 1923, and he remained a BBS member for the rest of his life. Immediately after the Second World War, he was a pivotal figure in transforming the BBS from its pre-war persona of a club solely for amateurs into a learned society that also served the interests of younger, academic members with scientific interests.

He found *Telaranea nematodes* in Killarney in 1936, and *Calypogeia integristipula* new to Britain in Sussex in 1946. Richards was also an expert on vascular plants, particularly rushes. However, Richards's contributions to British and Irish bryology were not so much in what he discovered in the field, but through his influences in teaching and research.... Derek Ratcliffe (19....) was one of his early Ph.D. students at Bangor, and Tony Smith and Jeff Duckett joined the staff at Bangor.

His herbarium of 11,500 packets of bryophytes went to the National Museum and Gallery of Wales, Cardiff, along with his bryological correspondence.

Family background and biography

Paul Westmacott Richards was born on December 19th 1908 at Walton-on-the-hill, Surrey, the fourth and youngest son of Dr Harold Meredith Richards (1864-1942), a medical administrator, and Mary Cecilia (*née* Todd, 1871-1941). Paul's siblings were John Gower M. (born 1900), Owain Westmacott (1901-1984), who became an entomologist, and Alan Meredith (1904-1938).

Harold Richards was the fifth child of six born to David Richards (born 1820/1), a hatter and hosier of Cardiff, and Margaret (*née* Gower, 1826/7). Mary Todd was the eldest child of six born to Walter John Todd (1841-1893) and Florence Annie (*née* Westmacott, 1850). Florence's father was James Sherwood Westmacott (1823-1900), a sculptor, whose own father was Richard Westmacott (1799-1872), sculptor. Richard Westmacott was a sufficiently prominent sculptor to merit an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, as was his father, Sir Richard Westmacott (1775-1856). Sir Richard's half-brother Charles Molloy Westmacott (1786/7-1868) was a well-known journalist and is also described in the *DNB*.

Paul lived in Croydon, Surrey until 1911, where his father Harold was a medical administrator, but that year the family moved to Cardiff where Harold had been appointed deputy chairman of the Welsh Insurance Commission. Paul attended Cardiff High School from 1918 until 1920, when the family moved to Hampstead upon Harold's appointment to the Ministry of Health in London, and Paul completed his schooling at University College School (1920-25), and University College London (1925-27). During this period he frequently visited the South London Botanical Institute, where W.R. Sherrin encouraged his botanical interests.

Richards went up to Cambridge in 1927. The university was intellectually vibrant in the 1920s and 1930s, with free-thinking people such as J.B.S. Haldane, R.A. Fisher, John Maynard Keynes, A.E. Houseman, Wittgenstein, and Enoch Powell. Botany there was also vibrant, and Richards met E.F. Warburg, Eustace Jones, Harold Whitehouse, and others.

Richards stayed on in Cambridge after graduating in botany, becoming a research fellow at Trinity College, and then lecturer in botany. After his enthusiasm was fired by expeditions to British Guiana (now Guyana) in 1929 and Sarawak in 1932 (arranged through his brother Owain's connection with Oxford University), Richards became a world authority on tropical rain-forests, and wrote *The Tropical Rain Forest* (1st edition, 1952).

In 1930, Paul Richards met Sarah Ann Hotham (born 1910) in Cambridge, and they married in 1935. Ann was a daughter of Charles Hotham and Sarah Ann (*née* Buck, 1889). Paul and Sarah had four children: Catherine (Kate), Martin, Mary, and Sarah.

In 1949, Richards was appointed to the chair of botany at Bangor - a post that he held until he retired to Cambridge in 1976, chaired the Nature Conservancy's Committee for Wales in 1956-7, helped to found the North Wales Naturalists' and became its chairman from 1969 until 1972. He was also sometime President of the British Ecological Society (1961-3), British Bryological Society (twice, in 1950-51 and 1978-79), and was awarded C.B.E. for services to conservation. He died on October 4th 1995.