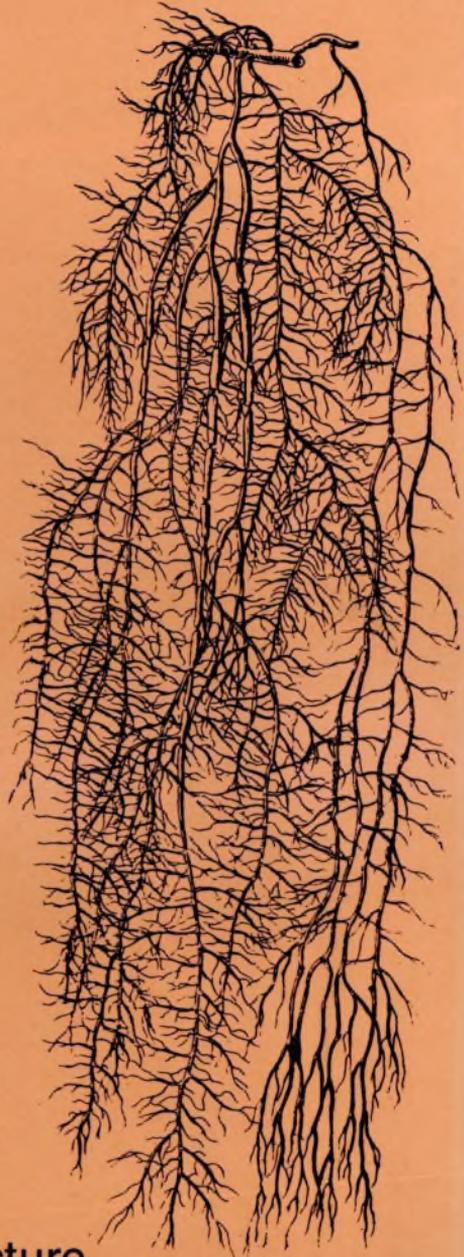


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Edited by O. L. Gilbert  
Dept. of Landscape Architecture,  
The University, Sheffield S10 2TN

opposite direction as I approach. The view is spectacular! Thirty miles away across a white landscape, the Pennines rise out of the mist, while to the north Teesside forms an impressive spectacle against the backdrop of the sea. Behind me the North York Moors are dark and brooding in the fading light, reminding me that this is December and I can't linger long. But I can stay a few minutes to soak up the atmosphere and reflect on the day. It has certainly been an interesting one, and enjoyable; but have I been successful? Have I found P.picea? You'll have to wait for the flora.

Alan Fryday

#### SOME RETROSPECTIVE WAFFLE

Please don't blame me - blame the Editor - he egged me on, though it was so long ago he has probably forgotten that he wanted me to write some account of how I became interested in lichens, and, though he was too polite to put it that way, how on earth I ever became president of the BLS!

Well! it was twenty years ago, but when I contemplate the eminence of the lichenologists who nowadays occupy that position the somewhat rugose octogenarian countenance tends towards the rufescent, if not rufous. Apart from running a pioneer nursery course at BANGOR I have contributed precisely nil to the knowledge of lichens, and never could identify more than the commonest ones. It was their symbiotic nature that fascinated me, at a time when the Establishment was distinctly non compos mentis and even lecturing about mycorrhizas was considered to smack too much of the deadly (to careers) 'muck and magic' school.

Of course, it was not as a sub-lichenologist that I was so generously allowed to preside (jointly) at that first, historic, combined symposium of the British Mycological and Lichen Societies

on 27 September 1968. It was as a lichenophilic mycologist; and my contribution to lichenology was to insist audibly that lichens are not an eccentric sort of liverwort but an important part of the Fungal Kingdom - a point sundry people seem to have noticed before, from de Bary on, but it has been pushed aside, especially by mycologists, with a few notable exceptions. Incidentally, after looking at soil fungi I am not at all sure I believe in fungal species with all that scandalous anastomosing a-going on, so I can't help wondering about lichen-fungi. What are they up to on rocks and bark and so on? In my notorious view the fungal species should be a large taxon, and much more use should be made of sub-specific categories. My attempt to introduce the term 'The Phycotrophic Fungi' (Lichenologist 4, 323, 1970) did not catch on, but I noticed that it was mis-printed as a page heading, and in the list of contents, as 'Phycotropic Fungi'. Now I wonder if there is anything in that? After all, it is still a mystery how the fungus finds its algal partner. Is it all chance?

It is perhaps worth noting that R.M. Jackson (Nature, 180, 96, 1957) observed that fungal hyphae showed a strong tropic growth towards plant roots, the proximity of which also overcame the mycostatic effect of soil on the germination of fungal spores. This was attributed to the exudation of carbohydrates by the roots. It is unlikely that the relatively large ascospores of many lichens would require a carbohydrate stimulus to overcome a microbial mycostasis, but what about pycnospores or other microconidia? We know that lichen algae do release sugars into the thallus, but do they do it when free-living on a non-sterile, very low-nutrient substrate? Anyway, the commonest lichen algae (e.g. Trebouxia spp.) are scarcely known free. Foiled again! But what about the Cyanophyta? Do they rely as much on soredia etc., as do the Chlorophyta for getting around with a fungus?

But I am dodging the question of how the lichens managed to grab me as well as the algae. First of all you can blame my old Prof., Sir John Farmer, in his youth one of T.H. Huxley's demonstrators at the Royal College of Science, and also a well-known alpinist. He dragged us Honours students up to Snowdon for our ecology week - just before Finals, too ( a good idea - prevented overswotting and breakdowns, etc.). On Snowdon it was quite hard not to notice some lichens, if only Rhizocarpon geographicum, and also that what looked like bare rock was often lichen-covered. Later I took students there myself, and it all ended up with me as the forest botanist at Bangor.

Then in 1936 there was an arctic expedition to Spitsbergen, or Svalbard, as we arctic snobs call it to show we've been there! Mind you, this wasn't exactly an affair for intrepid arctic explorers; more of a mopping up operation. The fashionable shape for intrepid arctic explorers is sub-spheroidal, with a blubberoid pericortex, while mine is more queriform, as is proper for investigating soils. In fact, I spent a month at Cape Napier, in the Inner Fjord zone, mapping and plotting the vegetation for comparison with earlier and later studies. The only new thing that came out of it was the frequency-transect, a primitive way of graphically presenting vegetation changes along a line, mostly of course higher plants with some mosses and Cyanophyceae. The dry stony areas were covered with lichen crusts, variously labelled L1, L2, Lb, but so depauperate that I.M.Lamb at the B.M. (N.H.) could name very few of them. The dominant crustose species was Lecanora epibryon - an alpine rarity in Britain. Basal squamules of Cladonia pyxidata were recognisable in L1, Caloplaca bracteata occurred in one transect, and that was about all that could be named (J. Ecol. 27:126-48, 1939).

Not very exciting as regards the lichens; but at Magdalena Bay in the north west corner of West Spitsbergen, where the good old Gulf Stream still exerts its influence, it was a very different matter I

have a vivid memory of monstrous great knee-high Cladonias (Cladinas, by hindsight) of heaven-knows-what age, though they may have grown a bit in my mind in half a century. How incredibly prehistoric it all must seem now! Probably by now all the lichens are recorded, mapped, and with little tags on them.

Finally, it is high time that I let out the real story of how I got involved in the BLS. Believe it or not, it was all to do with fluoridation - or flouridation as the local press usually prints it, under the impression, no doubt, that it must be flour they put in the water as it is described as a nutrient. Personally I have always thought that wilful pollution of the public water supply with a prophylactic against childlollipopitis verges upon the bonko-cretinoid, but, on being assured that the medical profession was 100 per cent for it, I started a correspondence in the BMJ in 1955 which ran for about 18 months, and showed that it wasn't.

One day I got a note from the BMJ in Tavistock House inviting me to call in for a talk. It was signed Douglas Swinscow. I did that, and we soon got off fluoridation onto natural history and then the virtues of North Wales as an area for lichens. "Why", sez he, "do you mycologists neglect them so?" "Because", sez I, "we've already got enough fungi to drive us crackers!" "Then", sez he, "there ought to be a separate society for lichens." "Yes!" sez I. "Then why don't you start one?" sez he. "Because" sez I, "though I find them fascinating I can't tell t'other from which, especially with Lorrain Smith's book. Anyway, I'm hired to teach botany. All proper voluntary societies are founded by amateurs (i.e. people paid to do something else). So you do it!" Which is just what he did three years later, and look what has happened to lichenology since. Anyway, that's how I like to remember it.

Geoffrey Dobbs.