Explanations of why organisms look like and behave as they do survive longest and best when they are founded upon temporal classifications of natural processes rather than spatial classifications of form. How else, indeed, can we link cause with consequence? As Proust (1927) observed ‘A literature which is content with “describing things”, with offering a wretched summary of their lines and surfaces, is, in spite of its pretension to realism, the furthest from reality, the one which impoverishes and saddens us in spite of its pretension to realism, the furthest from reality, the one which impoverishes and saddens us.

Evolution, ecological succession, changes in peoples’ ideas as consequences of the weathering and erosion of the earth’s crust, of thrusting, faulting, volcanic activity, understanding extant landscapes as products of organisms’ features as they grow and mature, encourage us to search for it again. By sequestered streams, and over quiet hills. Most people, though, steadfastly retain the essence and the future in which they place themselves at the periphery of that world. The green cloak of wonderfully varied countryside in the Welsh Marches harbours a diverse bryoflora which has hardly yet been evaluated, and the naturalist of today feels encouraged to compare the discoveries of long ago with what has come to light recently, and anticipate what may still await discovery as he follows his predecessors through shady woods, by sequestered streams, and over quiet hills.

Early bryologists in the Welsh Marches

The first bryological expedition that we know of in or through the Welsh Marches took place in 1726, when Johann Jakob Dillenius (‘Dillenius’, 1684–1747) and Samuel Brewer (ca 1669–1743) accompanied Littleton Brown (1698–1749) on a journey to North Wales, an excursion which brought a number of bryophytes to first public notice when Dillenius’s Historia Muscorum appeared in 1741. Brown was a native of Bishops Castle in west Shropshire, and vicar of Kerry, Montgomeryshire, so perhaps Dillenius and Brewer met up with Brown when they reached the Welsh border from Oxford. William Sherard wrote that ‘Mr Brown … is the keenest botanist I have met with … Dr Dillenius has been a moss-cropping with him: he has an excellent eye’. Unfortunately, though, we know nothing of what Brown found in the Welsh Marches, for his herbarium and papers are lost; nor is it clear how

Mark Lawley takes us on a historical and floristic tour of the bryophytes to be found in the beautiful but often overlooked scenery of the Welsh Marches.

A bryological stroll through time in the Welsh Marches

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many of the bryophytes found on the excursion in 1726 can be attributed to Brown's keen eye.

After Littleton Brown, another priest, the Reverend Edward Williams (1762–1833) was Shropshire's next accomplished bryologist. Williams, a distant relative of the naturalist Thomas Pennant, was inducted to the livings of Battlefield and Uffington near Shrewsbury in mid-Shropshire, which were in the gift of his half-brother, John Corbet of nearby Sundorn Castle. Williams found and collected 117 mosses and 23 liverworts in Shropshire, and compiled the county's first (unpublished) list of bryophytes. His discoveries included Ricciocarpos natans at Eaton Mascot (SJ5305) in 1802, as well as Antitrichia curtipendula at Haughmond Hill (SJ5414) and Acton Burnell (SJ5301). Williams also found Targionia hypophylla on Pontesford Hill (probably Pontesford Hill, SJ4005) where it grows to this day.

With Williams in his grave, Shropshire's bryological world had fallen silent by the mid-19th century. To the south, though, in north-west Herefordshire, a third priest, the Reverend James Frederick Crouch (1809–1888) rekindled the embers of local, investigative bryology. He became rector of Pembroke near Leominster in 1849, taking up bryology in the 1860s and laying a foundation for Ley's list of Herefordshire mosses in Purchas & Ley's Flora of Herefordshire (1889). Crouch also occasionally ventured west over the Welsh border. His contributions to the sum of bryological knowledge came not so over the Welsh border. His contributions to Herefordshire's bryoflora to an extent matched only by Ley before him. He published his paper (Binstead, 1940) on the county's mosses shortly before he died.

A founding member of the Moss Exchange Club in 1896, Binstead added many mosses to the county's list, including Tortula atrata and Sphaerocarpos texanus near Mordiford (SO5737), and T. canefolia from sunny hedgebanks at Eardisley (SO3149) in 1897–98 and in other districts subsequently. He also found the rare aquatic moss Cinclodictum riparii in the River Teme at Whitchurch (SO7256).

Brown, Williams, Crouch, Ley, Binstead: all five were Anglican priests, comfortably placed, middle-class gentlemen with plentiful spare time in which to pursue bryology. After caring for their cures, they would have set off on horseback (or latterly by train) to explore countryside largely unpolluted by agrochemicals, industrial effluent and internal combustion engines.

**Low-lying, base-rich and calcareous rock in the Marches**

Calcareous localities such as The Doward in south Herefordshire, Nash Rocks in north-west Herefordshire, Aberedw Rocks in Radnorshire, and Llanymynech Rocks on the border of Montgomeryshire and Shropshire offer botanists uncommon assemblages of plants, including some species which are rare. Other small hills along the Welsh border are composed of base-rich, igneous rocks that also support unusual bryoflora, for example at Stanner, Roundton, and Breidden. Such places have attracted more bryological attention than elsewhere in the Marches, but are still offering up fresh discoveries in the 21st century.

Near Ross-on-Wye, the Doward's (SO5416)
Bryological stroll through the Welsh Marches

white cliffs of Carboniferous Limestone rear up like ghosts from wooded slopes where the looping River Wye has cut a gorge, with sheltered, humid air at the bottom and drier, more exposed conditions above. Ley was one of the first to examine the Doward’s bryophytes, finding *Bryum canariense*, *Dicranum scottianum*, *Eusthodium madlenbergii*, *Grinnia orbicularis*, *Gymnostomum calcareum*, *Platetheurynchium striatum*, *Pleurencha squarrosa*, *Rhytidiadum rugosum*, *Scorpiurium cinnatum*, *Seligeria acutifolia* and *S. pusilla*. And Binstead found *Coleolejeunea calcarata* nearby in the Great Wood at Huntsham (SO5616).

Another prominent bryologist of Ross-on-Wye, Eleonora Armitage (1865–1961) also explored the Doward to good effect. She was the only female founding member of the Moss Exchange Club in 1896, a great-granddaughter on her mother’s side of Spencer Percival (the British Prime Minister who was shot in the lobby of the House of Commons in 1812), and the daughter of the county to build a picture of the local distribution of these plants when they explored Roundton in 1965, the BBS recorded *Grimmia issica, G. ovalis* and *G. trichophylla*, as well as *Sprengelia papillosa* on an elm tree. More recently, *Grimmia longirostris, G. montana*, *Schistidium pruinosum*, *Riccia beyrichiana* and *R. nigrella* have also been seen at Nash, and long ago at the close of the 19th century Binstead found *Didymodon acutus* (where it still grows), as well as *D. ferrugineus*, *Grinnia orbicularis* and *Thuidium asimile*. With its south-easterly aspect, lime in the rock, and freedom from shade and intense grazing, Nash outshines other, smaller, disused quarries in north Herefordshire for botanical diversity and scarce species – a place the botanist can return to repeatedly, and each time find new plants. Stanner Rocks (SO2658) lie in east Radnorshire, just across the Welsh border from Kingston, Herefordshire. Stanner’s dark, sun-soaked and readily drying volcanic gabbro, dolerite and granite stare out into Wales over a long-abandoned railway line and halt, and provide uncommon conditions that favour scarce species. Binstead came to Stanner at the beginning of the 20th century, finding *Bartramia stricta, Bryum argenteum*, *Orthotrichum rupestre*, *Pterogonium gracile*, Rhodobryum roseum, *Scleropodium turnetti, Taxiphyllum waisgrillii* and the liverworts *Frullania fragilifolia, Riccia sublunaria* and *Targionia hypophylla*. And when Sam Bosanquet came here in 2009 he added *Grimmia longirostris, Schistidium helveticum* and *S. provinciale* to the list of species known from the hill.

Llanymynech Rocks (SJ2621) south-west of Oswestry straddle the vice-county boundary between Montgomeryshire and Shropshire. They are Carboniferous Lime Limestone like the Doward, and much quarried like the Breiddens. As with the Breiddens, the BBS visited twice in the 20th century, noting *Bartramia stricta, B. integrifolia*, *Orthotrichum rupestre*, *Pterogonium gracile*, Rhodobryum roseum, *Scleropodium turnetti, Taxiphyllum waisgrillii* and the liverworts *Frullania fragilifolia, Riccia sublunaria* and *Targionia hypophylla*. And when Sam Bosanquet came here in 2009 he added *Grimmia longirostris*, *Schistidium helveticum* and *S. provinciale* to the list of species known from the hill.

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Where rivers have cut deep gorges through rock, more shaded and humid conditions enable a greater suite of species to thrive. In north Herefordshire, the River Teme cuts through mildly calcareous shale and mudstone at Downton Gorge (SO4474), where the castle is renowned as the former seat of the Knight family, who made a fortune as ironmasters in the Industrial Revolution. Downton Castle is the spiritual home of the Romantic movement’s appreciation of ‘picturesque’ nature; indeed, cynics remark that the wild and beautiful gorge could hardly be transformed into the kind of smooth parkscape favoured by Capability Brown.

However that may be, bryophytes abound of smooth parkscape favoured by Capability Brown. Binstead discovered Bryum torquescens, Plagiopus oederianus, Platydictya jungermannioides and Seligeria donniana early in the 20th century, and Miss Armitage added Metzgeria conjugaeta. In 1979, BBS members found Bartramia isophylla, Diallytrichia macronata, Mnium marginatum, Orthothecium intricatum, Poblia cruda, Protogoniuni gracile, Scleropodium cupriata and Taxiphyllum wissgrillii, as well as the liverworts Anastrophyllum schleicheri, Scleropodium tourettii, Weissia ruilans, and the liverworts Lophozia birec łatina, Marchesinia mackaitii, Plagiarchis bifaria and Targionia hypophylla.

**Higher ground in the Marches**

The hills of the Welsh Marches are more mound than mountain, neither spectacularly high nor steep. They attract ramblers rather than mountaineers, and many tourists pass them by on their way to the coast or more eye-catching terrain. But the Marches’ discreet charm entices discerning naturalists, with bryologists particularly attracted to rocky crags and scree, and flushes on hillside in hollows. The Darens (SO2929/2930) of south-west Herefordshire and the Black Mountains (SO22) just across the Welsh border enjoy comparatively high rainfall and are made of Old Red Sandstone that is distinctly base-rich in some places, with a correspondingly rich bryoflora. Hard up against the border, the Olchon valley is a delightful vignette of old England, with hedges of Bird Cherry (Prunus padus) bounding small meadows beneath the rocky slopes above. These hills and the valleys between them attracted Ley, and he found Bryum vulgareum in the upper Gwyne valley (SO22/23) in 1903, Encalypta ciliata on the Black Mountain (SO22), Plagiopus oederianus on the Red Daren (SO2930) in the Olchon valley, and Weissia squarrosa at Cwm-y-o-y (SO2923) in 1874. In various places and on different occasions during the 20th century, BBS members found Brachydontium trichodes, Bryoerythrophyllum ferruginascens, Campylostelium saxicola, Encalypta ciliata, Hygrohypnum eugyrsum, Isopterygiopsis pulchella, Orthothecium intricatum, Philonotis calcaria, Plagiobryum zieri, Seligeria trifaria i.s., Tetradontium brownianum and the liverworts Marchesinia mackaitii, Riccia beyrichiana and Scapania uliginosa. S. aspera and the moss Tortella hambergeri also occur. At just over 500 metres, Titterstone Clee Hill (SO57/67) just east of Ludlow in south Shropshire has some of the highest ground in Shropshire, so its air and soil remain colder and wetter than elsewhere so far south-east in Britain. The persistent moisture attracts a suite of species uncommon or unknown elsewhere in the county, otherwise confined to districts further north and west.

The subdued green and brown hues of Grimmias, Racomitriums, Marsupellas and Andreaeas on Clee’s slopes attest acidity, whereas the brighter, terracotta tints of Bryoerythrophyllum recurvostrum and Schistidium species, the yellows of Barbula, Trichostomums, Tortellas and Cenidium, and vivid green of Encalyptas are conspicuous only by their absence. Grimmia incurva abounds on the hard dolerite near the summit, even though on a national scale it is the rarest bryophyte known from Titterstone. G. donniana also grows on the hill, and indeed both these species have been
found on Brown Clee to the north. Of liverworts on Titterstone, *Gymnomitrion obtusum* is notable this far south and east in Britain, and *Barbilophozia batcheri* also occurs sparingly. Discoveries by the legends of yesteryear lure the inquisitive to Titterstone in the hope of finding their plants. Augustin Ley came up from Herefordshire in May 1893 and found *Grinnia incurva* and *Tetraplodon minnoides*, and both mosses thrive there to this day. John Bishop Duncan (1869–1953) found *Poblia cruda* and *Rhabdoweisia crispata*, and they too still live among boulders in the scree. However, *Hygrohypnum eugynium* has not been seen since Duncan found it in 1904; does it survive on the hill?

Another local bryologist, Arthur William Weyman (1860–1935) was a solicitor of Ludlow, a younger brother to Stanley Weyman (the popular and successful historical novelist), and of the 23 founding members of the Moss Exchange Club in 1896 was one of five who lived in the Welsh Marches. He found *Hamatocaulis vernicosa*, *Tetraplodon minnoides* and *Blindia austri* on Titterstone Clee Hill (SO5977) late in the 19th century.

Weyman is remembered particularly for his discovery of the rare aquatic moss *Cinclidotus riparius*, new to Britain in the River Teme at Cramer, *S. riparius* differs from *C. fontinalisoides* in being tinged black, but is otherwise very similar to its congener — so similar, indeed, that for a long time *C. riparius* was reduced to varietal status. A note accompanying a specimen at view prevailed until 1998, when it was realized that the two species can after all be distinguished by differences in thin sections of the leaf margins and a few other subtle differences, whereupon *C. riparius* was reinstated as a species, so enabling Weyman to rest easy in his grave. Weyman, though, was no one-moss wonder, for apart from his discovery of *C. riparius*, and other species on Titterstone Clee Hill, he is also credited with first discovering the scarce *Bryum weigeltii* on the Long Mynd (SO49) in 1893.

Titterstone's bryological riches may not all have yet been discovered. *Sporidium cossinis* betrays more base-rich conditions in flushes on lower slopes, *Nardia geoscyphus* came to notice in 1999, Jonathan Sleath found *Gymnomitrion obtusum* the following year, and exploration of the quarries on Magpie Hill (SO6177) in 2010 added *Fusariumina incurva*, *Campylopus subulatus* and *Dictytria crispa*, as well as restoring *Poblia cruda* to the county's bryoflora, so who can say what's still to come?

On Titterstone’s eastern slopes, Catherton Common and Crramer Gutter (SO6177 to 6479) are nature reserves of the Shropshire Wildlife Trust. Although Crramer Gutter is only one field, it has many plants which are rare so far east. Bog-mosses (*Sphagnum species*) abound in the wettest part of the reserve, including *S. compactum* and *S. tenuellum*. Water gradually flows through the mire down a slope at Crramer, as well as on nearby Catherton Common to the south of the stream, bringing minerals with it and also maintaining oxygen levels, enabling some plants to assimilate minerals which would be unavailable in anoxic or mineral-poor conditions. Perhaps this is why these flushes are rich in liverworts which weave across and between the stems of *Sphagnum*, *Mylia anomala*, *Cephaloziella convivens*, *C. macractyba* and *C. pleniceps*; also *Cladophedilla fluitans* and *Odontochisma sphagni* and their gemmiferous congeners *C. francisci* and *O. denudatum*.

The tiny *Krasia pauciflora* is present, and the rare, even more minute *Cephaloziella elachista* also occurs. Cramer is a wonderful place to botanize on fine summer days, with Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) and orchids in flower, or heather and the rare Marsh Gentian (*Gentiana pneumonanthe*) later in the season, and only the song of birds and hum of insects disturbing the peace. *Hylocomium armoricum* and *Sphagnum quinquefarium* grow under birch trees by the stream at the south-east end of the reserve, where the strange, white, thallose liverwort *Anemia mirabilis* lurks underground.

To the north of Titterstone, the Long Mynd (SO49) near Church Stretton also offers considerable bryological interest on rocks and in flushes. Relentless mowing by countless sheep and rabbits keeps tall plants in check, allowing many bryophytes to thrive. Weyman found *Bryum weigeltii* in flushes on the Long Mynd, and John Duncan added *Grinnia montana* to the Mynd's known bryoflora.

Richard de Gylpyn Benson (1856–1904; Lawley, 2009b) knew the Long Mynd well. He had retired early because of poor health, and took up the study of mosses (and afterwards botany in general) to occupy himself after going to live with relatives at Church Pulverbatch, a few miles south of Shrewsbury at the northern end of the Long Mynd. His grandmother Frances was a daughter of the Reverend William Gilpin (1757–1848), a noted protagonist of the Romantic movement, who enthralled the beauty of the Wye valley at Tintern. Later Gilpin became rector at Pulverbatch for many years. Benson found many mosses new to the district around his home, and published a list of Shropshire's mosses (Benson, 1893) but did not notice liverworts, for he was bryologizing before MacVicar's handbook became available. He found *Grinnia montana* on the Wrekin (SJ6208/6308), *Hamatocaulis vernicosus* and *Orthonectum rectipes* on the Long Mynd (SO49), *Rhabdoweisia fugax* and *Sphagnum ampullaceum* on the Stiperstones (SO39/SJ30), *Spreia chionoptera* on Pontesford Hill (SJ4005) and Tortula welwitsii on Pulverbatch (SJ4202/4302).

*Leiocolea baumriensis* was first found on the Long Mynd in the early years of the 20th century, but not until a century later was it realized that the Mynd's flushes (like those at Catherton and Cramer) possessed an unexpectedly rich trove of hepatic treasures, as *Barbiliophozia kunzeana*, *Cephaloziella pleniceps*, *Jamesoniella undulifolia* and *Scapania paludicola* came to notice for the first time. And many flushes on the Long Mynd still remain to be carefully examined, as do countless flushes and bogs in Radnorshire and Montgomeryshire.

Further north, straddling Montgomeryshire, Merioneth and Denbighshire, Silurian flags and shales on the Berwyn hills constitute the highest ground along the Welsh Marches but remain little known bryologically. The BBS explored Tre-riwharth (SJ0229) one morning during their Spring Meeting in 1992, finding *Bartrania ithyphylla*, *Brachydictyum trichodes*, *Caciocodina cribrosus*, *Isopogon pusillissimum*, *Plagiochrysum zieri*, *Pohlia campyrauthica*, *Ulotra drummondii* and the liverworts *Anastrope omodensis*, *Frullania fragifolia*, *Plagiochila spinulosa* and *Solenostoma paroicum*. During the Spring Meeting, despite poor weather, members found *Dinoclonium crisipula* and *Kasenia blyttii* at Bwlch Maen Gwynedd (SJ0936), but there must still be a great deal more to find on the Berwyns and neighbouring hills.

**Ruderal habitats**

Ruderal places and habitats have also been much neglected in the Marches, and probably harbour
many weedy species known to be common in more thoroughly explored English counties to the east, but remain scarcely known west of the border. Disturbed ground is often referred to by the implicitly derogatory term ‘brown-field’, but some sites may boast very interesting suites of species.

Many bryophytes are annuals or short-lived perennials, so thrive on the variety of substrates available in towns and villages. For example, as I walked round Presteigne during the epidemic of foot-and-mouth disease in 2001 (when the countryside was closed to travellers), I added Didymodon nicholsonii, D. sinuosus and D. vinealis to Radnorshire’s known bryoflora, as well as D. luridus, Bryum radiculosum, Pseudocbiocladium revolutum and Syntrichia papillosa, all of which have rarely been recorded in the county.

Churches and churchyards can be as rewarding to the bryologist as lichenologist, and many lie beside quiet lanes: peaceful places in which to botanize. Where the local base-rich sandstone has been used to tile roofs in the southern Welsh Marches, it provides a suitable substrate for Grimmia laevigata, G. ovalis and Hedwigia ciliata. Weedy species such as Bryum daniense, Ephemerum recurvifolium and Pottia davalliana may turn up on soils, with Weissia longifolia var. longifolia on mounds of soil in graves, and Syntrichia versicolor on paths of damp tarmac and gravestones.

Stubble in fields that have been left unploughed for several months is another neglected bryological habitat, where the bryologist may botanize. Where the local base-rich sandstone has been used to tile roofs in the southern Welsh Marches, it provides a suitable substrate for Grimmia laevigata, G. ovalis and Hedwigia ciliata. Weedy species such as Bryum daniense, Ephemerum recurvifolium and Pottia davalliana may turn up on soils, with Weissia longifolia var. longifolia on mounds of soil in graves, and Syntrichia versicolor on paths of damp tarmac and gravestones.

Abandoned quarries and pits that were once hives of incessant noise and disruptive, industrial bustle can be startlingly good for ruderal bryophytes, depending on how much bare rock and soil remains exposed. Dismused limestone quarries near Blakeway at the northern end of Wenlock Edge (SO6099) harbour Ephemerum recurvifolium, Microthecium rectum and Weissia longifolia var. longifolia. Nash Rocks (see above) is another rewarding locality, and in 2006 the rare Tortula emplexa came to notice in a working pit near Bridgnorth (SO79).

The draw-down zone of pools and reservoirs provides another rewarding ruderal habitat that is subtly different to the equally interesting flood-zone of medium-sized and large rivers. An hour on hands and knees by the Elan reservoirs near Rhayader (SN86) for a forthcoming bryoflora of mid-Wales turned up Atrichum crispum, A. tenellum, Polytrichum juniperinum and Sphagnum fuscum, Heterocladiunum wolffbergii, Pohlia bulbi-fera, P campylothricha and P. filum grow there too. River banks may also reward the inquisitive bryologist (for example, Cinclidotus riparius, Fissidens exiguum, F rivularis, F rufulus, Myriina pulvinata, and Weissia rostellata and W. squarrosa, and stubble elsewhere in the Marches has offered Acaulon muscicum, Lepidobryum leptophyllum, Orthotrichum rivulare and O. sprucei), but remain neglected, and there must be more to find beside still and running water in the Marches.

Bryological exploration lapsed and then resurfured in the 20th century

William Phillips Hamilton (1840–1910) of Shrewsbury added numerous species to Shropshire’s list. Like Ley, Hamilton probably acquired his interest in natural history from a maternal uncle, William Phillips (1822–1905), who was an accomplished mycologist. Orthotrichum gracile from Hodnet (SJ6128) in 1892 and Sphagnum magellanicum from Whixall Moss (SJ4835/4935) in 1905 were two of his best discoveries in Shropshire, but worthy as he was as a field bryologist, Hamilton’s most useful quality seems to have been his ability to coordinate the botanical efforts of his contemporaries in the county. An ultimately abortive attempt to publish a new flora of Shropshire (which would have included an account of the county’s mosses) failed because of ill health and a paucity of pre-publication subscriptions.

Indeed, the early years of the 20th century saw convulsive changes in English middle-class society, as the Great War claimed young men who might otherwise have inherited their fathers’ herbaria and entomological cabinets, and the subsequent economic depression diverted attention from the intricate diversity of nature to more pressing concerns about employment, salaries and standards of living (Lawley, 2009a). The atrophy of interest in natural history in the Welsh Marches exactly mirrored the national picture, and with Ley, Hamilton and Benson dead by the outbreak of war in 1914, only Armitage, Binstead and John Duncan remained to regularly explore the Welsh border. But they were aging Victorians, and no younger bryologists succeeded them in the field.

It is noticeable, too, that all these bygone bryologists lived on the English side of the border. As William Condry (1966) commented about north Wales, ‘In 1797 … someone wrote “Sensibly a summer passes but the opulent or the curious from the most distant parts visit … and volume upon volume is written to record its minutest beauties.” How I wish these words were true! Not until the middle years of the 20th century was the bryological imbalance on the Welsh side of the border corrected to some extent when Paul Westmacott Richards (1908–1995) was appointed to the chair of botany at Bangor in 1949, a post that he held until his retirement in 1976. During that time he developed around him a coterie of bryological expertise, whose cumulative explorations culminated in Mark Hill’s article (1988) on the bryoflora of North Wales, a publication whose coverage extended as far south-east as north Radnorshire.

Otherwise, though, bryological explorations on both sides of the Welsh border during the 20th century depended upon occasional incursions at BBS meetings: Brecon (1927 and 1984), Llangollen (1938 and 2008), Monmouth (1954), Oswestry (1960 and 1992), Llandrindod...
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Field Bryology (1965), Newtown (1975), Ross-on-Wye (1968), Ludlow (1979) and Abergavenny (1999). Reports of the many species discovered new to districts during these meetings can be found online at http://britishbryologicalsociety.org.uk. Valuable though these meetings were for investigating where few or no bryologists had ventured before, in the very limited time available they could do no more than break an ice that still hides a vast pool of bryological ignorance regarding what grows where in the Marches.

Ray Woods has published bryofloras of Radnorshire (1993) and Breconshire (2006), Sam Bosanquet and others have done likewise for Carmarthenshire (2005) and Pembrokeshire (2010), and I have investigated Shropshire’s bryoflora (see http://britishbryologicalsociety.org.uk). However, no active, resident bryologist has ever lived in Montgomeryshire, or written and published a bespoke bryoflora for that county. What information exists regarding its bryoflora (see http://britishbryologicalsociety.org.uk) is not comprehensive. Montgomeryshire slums along in a state of protracted and undeserved neglect, and concerted efforts in Herefordshire would surely bring much more to notice. Many people anthropocentrically presume that when a regional flora is published it becomes the definitive botanical statement about that district, with little or nothing more remaining to be found there or written about it. Nothing could be further from the truth, and thankfully a few folk do take up the challenge and find species that are supposedly ‘missing, presumed absent’. Diligent and painstaking though a few bryologists’ explorations have been, their endeavours only hint at what else may await discovery along and near the Welsh border. And perhaps we may also discover a little more about ourselves, obliquely reflected in nature’s mirror as we strive to interpret (or fail to interpret) the little-known bryology of a neglected region.

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Reports of meetings of the BBS and fuller accounts of many of the bryological explorations mentioned in this article can be found online at http://britishbryologicalsociety.org.uk/