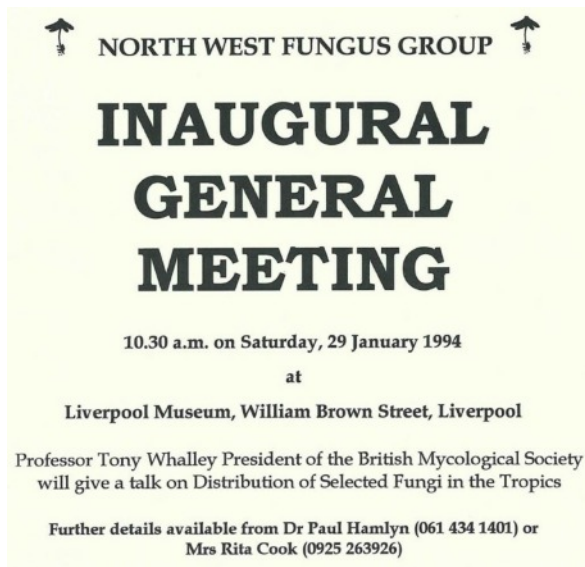


The History of the NWFG

(An account of my talk given at the AGM in February 2024 marking the 30th anniversary of the formation of the NWFG)

Paul F. Hamlyn

I was having a clear out at home last year and came across a flyer for the Inaugural General Meeting of the North West Fungus Group (NWFG) held on 29 January 1994 at Liverpool Museum. This also marked the beginning of the Internet (there were only about 130 websites in 1993). Look at how far both the NWFG and the Internet have developed since then. The focus of my talk is on the people who have played a major role in the activities and running of the group from its inception in 1994 to the present time. My apologies, if due to a lapse of memory I have omitted anybody from this review.



Rita Cook was the founder and driving force behind the formation of the group. There is a nice photograph of Rita taken in October 2009 at what became the annual Keswick residential weekend. Prior to the formation of the NWFG, Rita was involved in the Mycology Section of the North Western Naturalists' Union (NWNLU), which set up its own Common Fungi Survey asking for records for 6 common and readily identifiable species. The Botany Department at Liverpool Museum provided computer facilities for

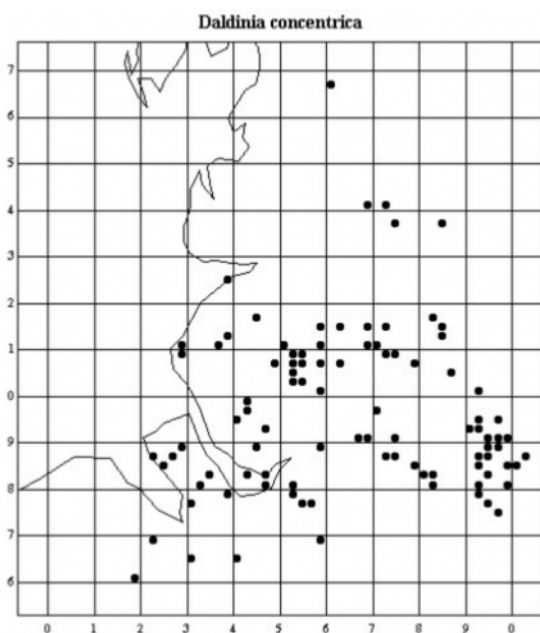
Rita to produce a set of dot distribution maps (opposite). Having done a PhD in fungal genetics at the University of Nottingham I settled in Manchester in November 1982. However, it was not until 1990 that I acquired my first car and was then able to look for a local fungal recording group to participate in forays. I enquired at my local library and was given details of the NWNLU. It was then that I first met Rita Cook who was very much involved in running forays for beginners at sites such as Sunbank Wood near Manchester Airport (part of which has now sadly been lost due to expansion of the airport). I got to know Rita very well and

she recruited me as Treasurer and Membership Secretary for the soon to be formed NWFG after I had told her that I had previously been the treasurer at a local school and scout group. But, a lot of other people have also been involved over the years. Robin Dean gave an account in the Spring 2017 edition of the NWFG Newsletter that marked Rita's 90th birthday (we enjoyed a party with Rita and a cake) on how it all began from his own perspective (1). Our distinctive NWFG Logo was prepared by Mike Walton who is also involved with the newsletter.



I think one of the unique things about the NWFG compared to other recording groups in the UK is that over the years we have managed to acquire a President of some standing in the mycological community. Our first President Professor Anthony J. Whalley in office from 1994-1996 was also President of the British Mycological Society (BMS) in 1994. He is an expert on *Xylaria* species of SE Asia. Following him, Dr Juliet C. Frankland a fungal ecologist and BMS President in 1995 took over for one year in 1997. Then in 1998, Dr Sean Edwards the Curator of Botany at Manchester Museum who was very much into fungi folklore held the post for one year. He was followed by Professor Bruce Ing who stayed in post from 1999-2015. I first met Bruce at the centenary celebrations of the BMS in 1996. I had an exhibition stand on my research work at the time (fungi and wound healing) and Bruce had one on Mycofantasia sharing it with Camilla Lovatt from the Staffordshire Fungus Group. Rita Cook representing the NWFG

had an exhibition stand on the role of the amateur mycologist. The event also included a cookery demonstration from the then famous Italian chef Antonio Carluccio. Bruce gave us some very interesting presentations at our AGMs over the years covering topics such as Fungi and Climate Change way back in 2005. Finally, Geoffrey Kibby the editor of Field Mycology took over and held the position from 2016-2023. Having brought out a series of field guides when he was our President, Geoffrey was in an excellent position to point out in his AGM presentations the problems with the changing



scientific names of fungi due to recent developments in DNA analysis.

Rita Cook was our first Chair from 1994-2003 and in addition edited the newsletter, organised the first Keswick residential weekends, sorted out the insurance and led several beginners forays each year. Eventually, doing all these tasks became too much for Rita and Irene Ridge took over the role of Chair from 2004-2020. Finally, Jeanette Maddy has been the NWFG Chair from 2021-to date. Another very important role has been that of the Group Recorder. John Taylor was the Group Recorder for many years (1975-1999) initially for the Mycology Section of the NWNLU and then the newly formed NWFG. Peter Smith took over from 1999-2005 and was followed by Tony Carter (2007-2016). Tony continues to run the email group. Finally, John Watt took over the role in 2017. Foray leaders are now expected to put the records together for their foray and submit them onto the Fungal Records Database of Britain and Ireland (FRDBI) website. With the number of forays that we run during the year it is far too much work for one individual to undertake. John Watt prepares the annual foray recording programme, looks out for possible new recording sites, and leads several of the forays himself.

The roles of treasurer and membership secretary go together. I took on the task in 1994 up to 2009. In 2009 I was having to undertake much more overseas travel for work, and was also editor of the newsletter and running the website. Something had to give and fortunately Elizabeth Moore agreed to take over from 2010-2016. Kathleen Ryan held the post from 2017-2021 and from 2022 Kerstin Nagel has been our treasurer and membership secretary. Rita Cook started the newsletter and was editor from 1994-1999. Robin Dean took over from 2000-2004 and has also contributed many articles on microscopy and the use of chemicals over the years. I became the editor in 2004 and have carried on since then. Mike Walton has carried out the type setting, printing, and sending a copy to the British Library from the outset of the formation of the NWFG.

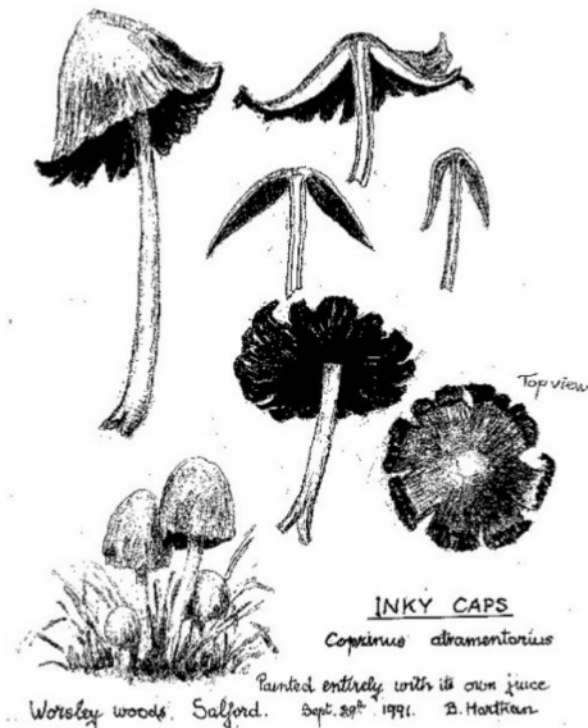
I have always been a strong advocate of the Internet and put the NWFG on-line in 1996 (2). I believe that we were the first fungus recording group in the UK to go on-line, but I am rather embarrassed that the initial web address was <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/pfh2/nwfg.htm> (note: this page no longer exists). Eventually I acquired the web domain name <http://fungus.org.uk> (at my own expense) and then used this to host the NWFG website. However, after some 20 years my site was starting to look a bit outdated. I have always chosen to write my webpages in notepad using HTML and CSS (sorry for being a bit technical here) rather than using a website builder. Max Furmidge took over the NWFG website in 2017-todate, and has done a really good job of producing a first class and modern looking website for the NWFG. He also maintains a Facebook account for the NWFG. I still do maintain a webpage for Tony Carter (aka MykoGolfer).

The first residential foray of the NWFG took place in October 1997 at the Blencathra Field Centre just outside Keswick and was organised by Rita Cook. Irene Ridge summarised the event in an article for the newsletter (3). The article by Robin Dean (1) takes the story forward to the use of the Keswick Convention Centre in 2005. The Blencathra Field Centre was quite expensive (no self-catering) and isolated whereas the Keswick Convention Centre was within easy walking distance of the town centre. More recently, a joint residential weekend with the Isle of Man Fungus Group was organised in October 2019 by John Watt (NWFG) and Liz Charter (Isle of Man Fungus Group). Several workshops on microscopy have been run by Robin Dean and others over the years and Jeanette Maddy has organised workshops on DNA analysis.



Unfortunately, it is not possible for me to acknowledge in this article everybody who have contributed to the success of the NWFG including foray leaders and those who have helped in providing catering at our AGM and Keswick events. Sherry Stannard who is with us today has attended many forays and NWFG

events. I can remember Sherry preparing some delicious cooked food at previous AGMs. Sadly, no longer with us Bess Harthan was still attending forays in her 80's and was a good artist drawing many pictures of fungi some of which were bequeathed to Liverpool Museum.



References

- (1) Dean, R. How it began. *NWFG Newsletter*, Spring 2017, 8-9.
- (2) Hamlyn, P. F. & Cook, R. North West Fungus Group goes on-line. *Mycologist*, 1996, 10(4), 177-179.
- (3) Ridge, I. Report on the first residential foray of the NWFG. *NWFG Newsletter*, May 1998.