

David William Mitchell (1938-2019)ⁱ

Bruce Ing¹ and Henrik Kylin²

¹ Tigh na faoileige, Rhue, Ullapool, IV26 2TJ, United Kingdom

² Department of Thematic Studies – Environmental Change, Linköping University, Linköping, Sweden

E-mail: myxoking1@gmail.com

Received: 9 November 2021

Accepted for publication: 31 January 2022

Published: 31 January 2022

Corresponding editor: Steven L. Stephenson

Abstract: David William Mitchell was a myxomycetologist who contributed greatly to the knowledge of these organisms in different parts of the world. In this short note, some of his friends and family remember him through some of the facts of his life.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

David William Mitchell grew up in the countryside of East Sussex, south east England. He was observant throughout childhood and recorded much of what he saw and found in drawings and photographs. He deeply appreciated the unique bio-diversity of the Ashdown Forest and spent many happy hours there with friends, his students and his children.

“I (Bruce Ing) first met David in the early 1960s. He had met another friend, Peter Holland, in Sussex and Peter told him that I was working on myxomycetes. We soon set up a strong working relationship and friendship and published a few papers together, especially on Irish species. David lived on the edge of Ashdown Forest in Sussex, in the village where A.A. Milne and Christopher Robin, of Winnie the Pooh fame, had lived.”

Even though David’s main interest was the natural world, his lifelong study settled on the myxomycetes. Upon the creation of email services, he chose “SlimeLord@” as his own address. He enjoyed forays for collecting specimens and bark for culture at home. His records were meticulous. David was always looking for new species. He published a key to the Corticolous Myxomycetes in 1978 through the British Mycological Society’s bulletin.

David spent two years in National service between 1956 and ‘58 in the Royal Air Force. One year spent in Hong Kong as an A1C (Airman First Class) Entry rank. This is recorded in one of his many photograph albums. David taught Biology at the Secondary School in East Grinstead and his enthusiasm made him an inspiring teacher. He was respected by his colleagues and liked by his students. He made learning interesting and memorable for the them. He quickly became expert in myxomycology and contributed to local natural history journals. As he met more people, his interests took him around the world and he collaborated with many of the leading workers.

He was a talented photographer and, after he retired from teaching, he made a new, part-time career... filming weddings!

On myxomycetes, he specialised in corticolous species and described new species with Ellie Nannenga-Bremecamp and Roland McHugh. Myxomycetology made him contacts all over the world with whom he shared a fascination for these organisms and in 2001 he made a trip to the United States Great Smoky Mountains National Park that he always remembered with special sentiments. During that trip, he met up with fellow enthusiasts to contribute to the 15 year all taxa biodiverse inventory (ATBI) of the national park.

“David’s interests were not limited to myxomycetes. When he first introduced me (Henrik Kylin) to myxomycetes it turned out that we shared an interest in tardigrades. Although he did not publish much on these, he did find some new species that were described by others. As far as I know, David, Peter Holland, and I were the only three that have taken interest in both these groups.”

Sadly, he began to lose his memory and was eventually diagnosed with Alzheimers dementia.

“In spite of this, on his last visit to me (Bruce Ing) in Scotland, in 2013 he collected Echinostelium lunatum in Ross-shire, which is still the only record in the United Kingdom!”

He later moved into sheltered accommodation and his friends organised the transfer of his herbarium to the mycological department at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. He will be remembered for his enthusiasm and quirky humour and is greatly missed by all his family (Figure 1) and many friends in the world of myxomycetes, who pertinently appreciated him for more than his contribution to slime mold science.

David Mitchell’s More Important Publications

Mitchell DW. 1978. A key to the corticolous myxomycetes. Part 1. B Brit Mycol Soc. 12:18-42.

Mitchell DW. 1978. A key to the corticolous myxomycetes. Part 2. B Brit Mycol Soc. 12:90-197.

Mitchell DW. 1978. A key to the corticolous myxomycetes. Part 3. B Brit Mycol Soc. 13:42-60.

Mitchell DW. 1992. The Myxomycota of New Zealand and its island territories. Nova Hedwigia 55:231-256.

Mitchell DW. 1995. The Myxomycota of Australia. Nova Hedwigia 60: 269-295.

Mitchell DW. 2001. Inventory of Myxomycetes of the United Kingdom, Dichotomous and Synaptic Keys, Full descriptions of species and additional tools for ecological research [Compact Disk]. Watton Cottage, Upper Hartfield, Sussex, England: David W. Mitchell. 1 CD with multiple independent applications for Microsoft Windows Systems.

Novozhilov YK, Mitchell DW, Schnittler M. 2003. Myxomycete biodiversity of the Colorado Plateau. Mycol Prog. 2:243-258.

McHugh R, Stephenson SL, Mitchell DW, Brims MH. 2003. New records of Australian Myxomycota. *New Zeal J Bot.* 41:487-500.

McHugh R, Mitchell DW, Brims MH, Stephenson SL. 2009. New additions to the Myxomycota of Australia. *Aust Mycol.* 28:56-64.

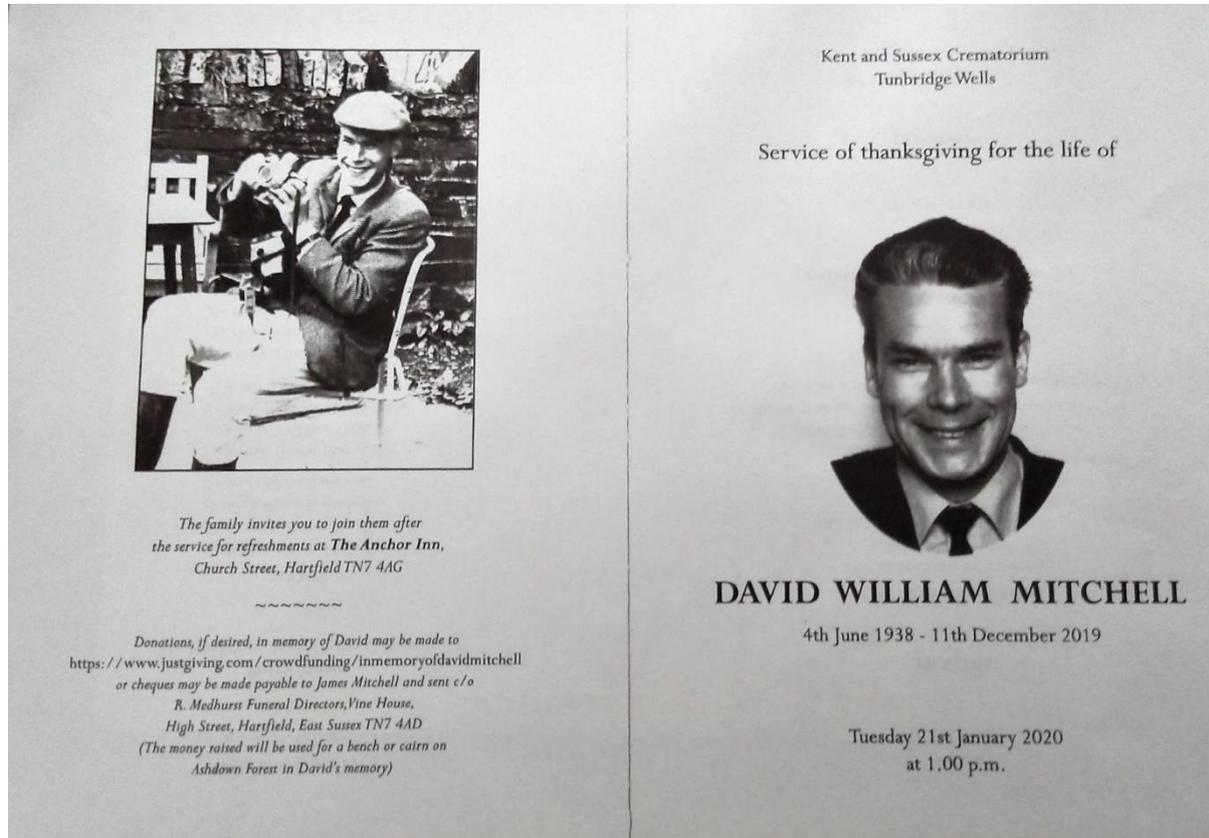


Figure 1. His family and friends in the world of myxomycetology will remember David for his scientific talents, humour and willingness to help others. In the image, the invitation to the service offered to thank his life.

ⁱ Parts of this obituary are from David's wife, Lindy, and were given at the funeral