

PROFESSOR RICHARD FORTEY OBE
15 February 1946 – 7 March 2025

Although he made no secret of the fact that mycology was a pastime rather than a profession, Richard Fortey devoted all his spare time to studying fungi since he was a teenager.



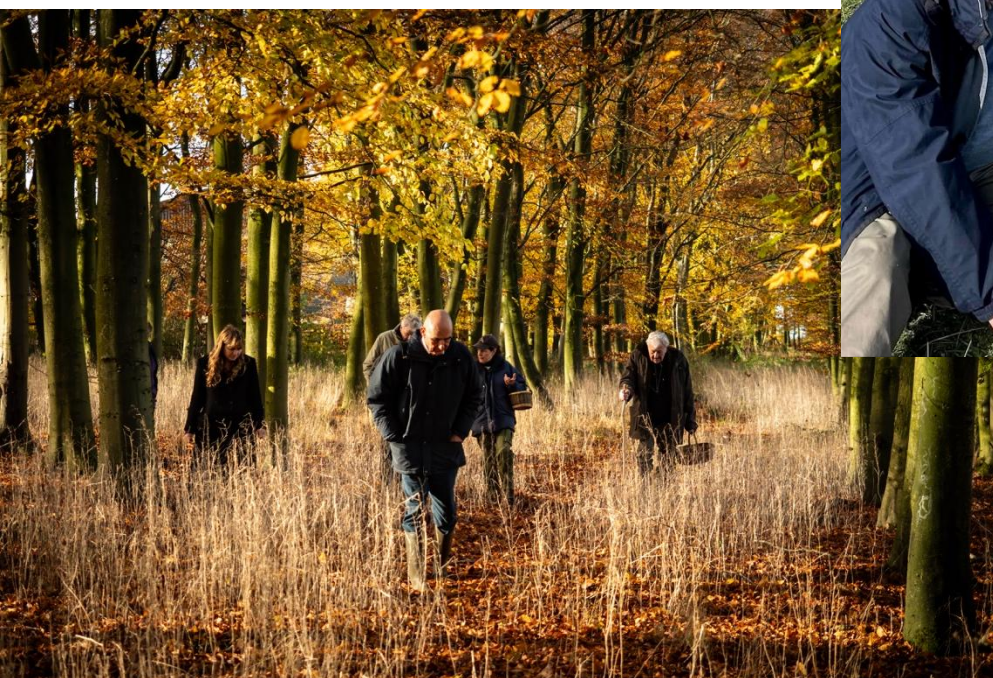
Richard was a well-known and revered figure in the mycological world. As a former Vice President of the British Mycological Society and President of the Fungus Survey of Oxfordshire, he connected with a wide range of people, conveying his enthusiasm for mycology and introducing beginners to fungi through his lectures, writing, radio and television programmes and by leading groups on walks and surveys.

Renowned as a palaeontologist, Richard worked at the Museum of Natural History in London for over 40 years, writing a variety of popular science books ranging from natural history to geology and from evolution to palaeontology. His dry wit and droll demeanour made him the ideal “Professor” to appear on television shows, including several of David Attenborough’s programmes, as well as his own documentaries including “The Magic of Mushrooms”, first televised in 2014 and shown regularly on BBC4.





As President of the Fungus Survey of Oxfordshire, Richard led many groups of varying mycological abilities into the woods to search for and record fungi. He took great pains to explain the basics so that even beginners knew what they were looking at, yet his surveys were fun due to his amusing anecdotes. He had tremendous energy, and looking for fungi with him was always exciting because he took such pleasure in each find. He always took home some samples for microscope work, hoping that perhaps he would have another "Oxfordshire first."





In addition, Richard lectured to local groups and led surveys for beginners at nature reserves on special days. He promoted mycology at an Autumn festival in Henley-on-Thames every year, with “Professor Fortey’s Fabulous Fungi Roadshow”, meeting the public with a table full of fungi and infectious enthusiasm. He had time for everyone, especially beginners and children.





Richard surveyed several sites for private individuals interested in finding out what they had on their properties. Moreover, many Oxfordshire “firsts” were discovered and recorded by this remarkable yet humble mycologist.

Richard was the main attraction at the Harcourt Arboretum’s UK Fungus Day every October, speaking to literally

hundreds of people who listened in awe to what he had to say about mushrooms.



Groups would follow him around as he searched for fungi to show them after his talk. He was always very generous with his time.

All these activities contributed to expanding the knowledge of individuals who perhaps wouldn’t normally be looking for fungi.





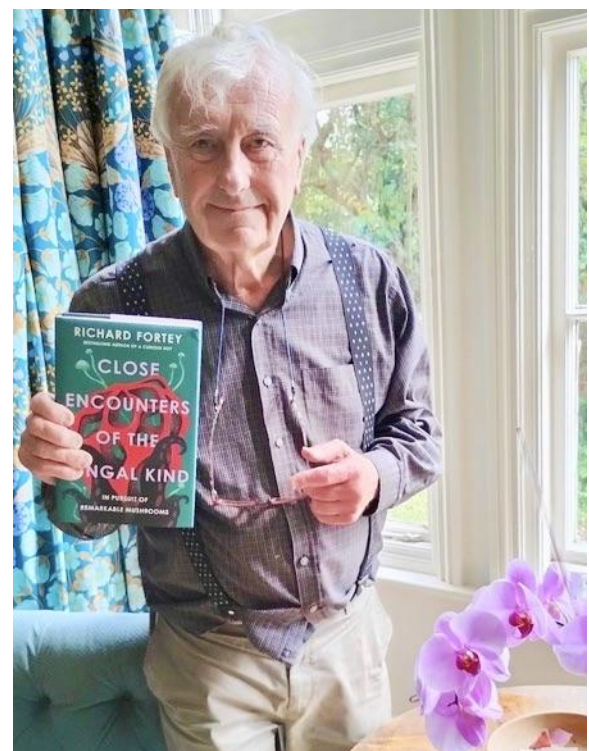
Richard contributed regularly to the Field Mycology Journal of the British Mycological Society. His article in Volume 22, Issue 1, January 2021, pages 16-17 "*In praise of English names for fungi*" is an example of how he tried to connect with and encourage beginners by keeping the nomenclature simple. As he wrote in his article, "...when

attempting to introduce young people to the pleasures of macro fungi...they do not need to be put off at an early stage by an intimidating roster of Latin words." He ended the article by saying: "...common English names are much more useful than I would once have credited. They should be used to ease fledgling mycologists into enjoying the field experience."

On September 12th 2024, Richard's last book was published. Entitled *Close Encounters of the Fungal Kind*, it is a mycophile's dream with a series of stories about all different aspects of the fungal world, from attending a mushroom festival in Italy to driving 500 miles to find "The Strangler."



Throughout the Autumn of 2024 he gave a series of slide lectures to promote the book, including a memorable talk at the Henley Literary Festival where he demonstrated how fungi spread their spores by opening up a small umbrella to the amusement of his audience. The book is written with warmth, wit and intelligence. Beginners will learn so much from it, while experienced mycologists will identify with and chuckle at Richard's engaging adventures.



Richard was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the 2023 New Year Honours list for services to palaeontology and geology.

Richard received the prestigious Fungal Outreach Award 2024 from the British Mycological Society, a fitting tribute to a celebrated mycologist.

Professor Richard Fortey OBE died on March 7th 2025 after a short illness.



His death is an immeasurable loss to the world of mycology, to the Fungus Survey of Oxfordshire and to his family and friends.

Obituaries

Henley Standard

[Tributes to 'perfect scientist' - Henley Standard](#)

The Guardian

[Richard Fortey obituary | Palaeontology | The Guardian](#)

The Telegraph

[Richard Fortey, trilobite expert who changed ideas about how prehistoric continents moved – obituary](#)

British Mycological Society – obituary – Richard Fortey OBE

https://www.britmycolsoc.org.uk/richard_fortey.html

The Times

<https://www.thetimes.com/article/24845109-75d4-4801-a8bf-19d375f273f1?shareToken=316ba5539434d87f8239555f207fde04>