

J. Edward Lousley (1907-1976)

J. G. DONY

9, Stanton Road, Luton, Beds. LU4 0BH

J. Edward Lousley, who was born at Clapham on 18th September, 1907 and died at Streatham Common on 6th January, 1976, was the most noteworthy British field botanist of his time. His paternal ancestors had been Berkshire farmers bearing the Christian names of either Jethro or Job, the latter being J. Edward's first name but rarely used by him. His great-great-grandfather, Job Lousley (1790-1855), was a competent naturalist, the value of whose work was later assessed by J. Edward (*Berkshire arch. J.*, 65: 57-65 (1969)).

Jethro Lousley (1882-1963), J. Edward's father, had no love for farming and came to London at a comparatively early age to enter the service of the South London Metropolitan Gas Company, becoming eventually an Area Supervisor. His work entailed living in various places in South London until 1925, when the small family (there was only the one son) went finally to 7, Penistone Road, an address that was to become widely known to botanists both in Britain and abroad for almost half a century. Jethro's life was given to serving good causes, and in 1946 he was awarded the MBE in recognition of his long service as Chairman of the Streatham National Savings Committee. He was a member of Wandsworth Borough Council for about seven years and, after his retirement in 1947, he lived at Bexhill-on-Sea, sitting on its Borough Council for the last twelve years of his life. He was, it may be noted, a most skilled gardener. J. Edward's mother, who died in 1945, came from Huguenot stock.

Lousley's interest in natural history came at the early age of 12 or 13, when he was attending the Strand School, an L.C.C.-maintained grammar school at Brixton that had a very high reputation. He was one of a small party of boys from the school who were invited by W. R. Sherrin, then the curator of the South London Botanical Institute, to use its facilities as much as they liked. He was here to meet other similarly-minded youths, including D. G. Catcheside and E. C. Wallace. Sherrin's main interest was in bryophytes, but he chose boys associated with the Institute to ride with him in pairs on bicycles to study natural history as a whole in his favourite haunts in Surrey. There grew with Lousley a love for the Surrey countryside which was to remain with him throughout his life.

In 1922 his parents moved to Norbury, which was outside the L.C.C. area, and as a result his formal education was completed at Selhurst Grammar School, where he became secretary of the Natural History and Scientific Society and also of the Philatelic Society. The instinct in him to collect was strong indeed. He collected stamps, mainly those that came his way, for many years but we must be grateful that the desire to build up a herbarium soon gained the upper hand. He reached the sixth form, leaving the school in April 1924 to join Barclays Bank.

For ten years he worked in South London branches of the bank before being transferred to the City to serve first in the Stock Exchange and City Branches and finally in the Trustee Department of the Head Office of the bank. He was the Departmental Manager at the time of his retirement. Progress in the service of the bank entailed studying, mainly at evening classes, to gain the necessary examination qualifications, but his interest in field botany remained. He sought a wider approach with membership of the British Empire Naturalists' Association (B.E.N.A.), becoming a member of its Council when he was only 19 years of age. Some of his earliest papers were published in *Country-side*, the journal of B.E.N.A.

He continued to be loyal to the South London Botanical Institute. In 1926 Sherrin persuaded him to join the Watson Botanical Exchange Club and in the following year he joined the Botanical Society and Exchange Club of the British Isles, known in those days more often as the Botanical Exchange Club. The membership of both clubs enabled him to meet or correspond with the botanical giants of an age that was rapidly passing. He soon gained a reputation for having an intimate knowledge of the British flora which, at a time when members of the Watson Exchange

Club used their initials only rather than their names, caused a minor crisis. J. E. Little, a venerable and competent botanist, found his determinations credited to the young enthusiast Lousley—much to his annoyance as he claimed the initials were *his* as he had them first! (c.f. *Rep. Watson botl Exch. Club*, 3: 414 (1928)).

Lousley's great knowledge of the flora was gained from a careful study of all the available literature, by an examination of specimens determined by the experts (finding here the true value of membership of the exchange clubs) and finally by excursions, usually in the company of others, to various parts of the British Isles. Some of those who joined him on these expeditions have recalled how carefully he planned them, knowing precisely what he wished to see and where, working out how long could be spent here and there to catch the connections that would take them back to base. He would even go to the length of training to face the strenuous climbs he knew would be ahead. For one brief period he drove a car, but otherwise he had to face the trials of public transport or be dependent upon friends, of whom he had many.

At a comparatively early age he realized the need for specialization, and for him it was to be the study of the genus *Rumex*, his work on which soon gained him an international reputation. He was also interested in the problems of island floras and, before the outbreak of the Second World War, was contemplating an early publication of a Flora of the Isles of Scilly.

The Watson Exchange Club, in which Lousley had been most active, came to an end in 1934 largely because its sole purpose, the exchange of specimens, had by then become less popular and much misunderstood. He now became more active in the Botanical Exchange Club, which, following the death in 1932 of G. C. Druce, who had long been its sole custodian, was in the process of adopting a rather loosely defined constitution. In 1936 he was elected to its Council, to remain on it either as an elected member or an officer until his death a few months short of 40 years later.

In the period between leaving school in 1924 and the Second World War he had travelled to every part of the British Isles, gaining an intimate knowledge of its flora. His herbarium, begun modestly, had grown and was eventually to be the largest in the British Isles owned by a private individual. The specimens were fortunately mounted on small sheets, as no ordinary dwelling house could have housed the complete collection. He began the compilation of an index with cross references to all that was known of the plants that comprised the British flora. Of Druce it had been said that he had seen all British wild vascular plants, and Lousley had without any doubt seen more than any of his contemporaries. Above all he knew them intimately. His work bore the mark of an expert, with the result that many who did not know him personally assumed, as I indeed once did, that he was a professional botanist.

In 1940 he married Dorothy Winifred Thorpe, who survives him; they had one child, Margaret, who is now the wife of Dr John Gleghorn of Lancaster University. Mrs Lousley was to ease considerably the burden of the increasing work he undertook. His correspondence was becoming voluminous, not the least of his trials being that for many years the morning post arrived long after he had left home for the City. Mrs Lousley sensed priorities, dealing herself with many routine items, thus enabling her husband to deal more adequately with what remained.

The war was to be in every respect a turning point in Lousley's life. In April 1941 Francis Druce (not related to G. C. Druce), the treasurer and acting secretary of the Botanical Exchange Club, was killed in an air raid. Simultaneously all the records of membership and the accounts of the club were also destroyed. Lousley was near at hand with the willingness to become treasurer and face the formidable task of reconstituting the club. This entailed writing to all whose names had appeared in recent reports, only to find that a number had no knowledge that they were members and others, for reasons known only to G. C. Druce himself, had been made honorary members. Some had been long since dead and many, having moved, could not be traced. He found ultimately that only 342 members could be considered to be 'good on the books'.

The war-time conditions curtailed his travelling, making it for the time being impossible for him to visit the Isles of Scilly. The bombing of the City, where he had been working for six years, brought introduced plants to the bombed sites which attracted his attention. He was eventually to list nearly 300 species which had occurred in these changed circumstances of war in 'the square mile of the City'. Nearer to his home he found an entirely new plant, an indirect result of the bombing, which he appropriately named the London Ragwort (*Senecio × londinensis*).

The return to peace brought still more changes in Lousley's activities. The discovery of

introduced plants on the bombed sites coincided with that of an increasing number of species introduced with wool. He turned his attention to the alien flora, soon becoming the unchallenged authority on introduced plants. For some time he contemplated writing a full account of the alien flora of Britain but, much to the regret of all who knew him, this was not achieved. Broadcasting came his way, and from 1946 until about 1966 he was to be heard frequently in nature and similar programmes of the B.B.C. He appeared also, but less regularly, on television. In 1950 he was invited to contribute one of the early volumes in the Collins New Naturalist series, *Wild flowers of chalk and limestone* (1950). This proved a most popular work and the one for which he became most widely known. It was based on a close study of Box Hill in his beloved Surrey with an expanded treatment to include the whole of the British Isles which only he, with his unique knowledge, could have achieved.

The post-war years were to see great changes for the Botanical Exchange Club. The days of exchange were numbered, the *Journal of Botany* had ceased publication in 1945, and the Club had the opportunity, given a sound leadership, of assuming a changed character to become a much more effective body. Following the death of Francis Druce, the acting secretaryship was held for the war years by A. J. Wilmott, who was to be the moving spirit in the four years immediately following the war. Wilmott, Deputy Keeper of Botany at the British Museum (Natural History), was a brilliant botanist but with a forceful personality. During the period of his influence a new constitution was adopted in 1947, when the name of the Club was changed to The Botanical Society of the British Isles; a new journal, *Watsonia*, was launched and the first conference held. Wilmott himself edited the first Conference Report. His death in 1950 precipitated a crisis which was solved by Lousley agreeing to become the secretary, relinquishing the treasurership he had held for nine years. This action was made possible by E. L. Swann, already assistant treasurer, who was willing to take over the whole of the treasurership. The change for Lousley meant putting aside work which he could selfishly have considered to be more important.

He was to be secretary for six years, which were to be ones of great change and expansion for the Society. When he retired from office the membership had grown from 342 to 1,084. He thought that it was essential for one person to know all the affairs of the Society, and in the 15 years that he was treasurer or secretary he had attended every meeting of the Council and its committees—at times there were as many as seven—except one when illness had prevented him from being present. It was in this period that valuable co-operative work with D. H. Kent began, firstly with Kent's assistant secretaryship and his editorship of the Society's *Proceedings*, and secondly in their joint authorship of the Handlist of Plants of the London Area, which appeared as supplements to the *London Naturalist* between 1951 and 1957.

Valuable work for the Society arose from his zeal for nature conservation. After the formation of the Nature Conservancy in 1947 he was instrumental in securing joint meetings with representatives of the Society when, as our spokesman, he was, with his wide knowledge of the country as a whole, better able to present our case than anyone else could have done. He made many reports for the Nature Conservancy and was a member of its Committee for England from 1966 to 1973, an appointment which gave no cause for surprise. He was especially active in the fight to save Upper Teesdale and played an important part in 'The Countryside in 1970' conferences in 1963 and 1965. When the Council for Nature was formed in 1959 he was its first honorary secretary, an office he was forced to relinquish five years later because its meetings had increased in number and were held at times when it became difficult for him to attend.

He played an important part in the launching of the B.S.B.I. Maps Scheme as chairman of the Maps Committee from its formation in 1950. He edited *The study of the distribution of British plants*, the report of the 1950 Conference, which heralded the Maps Scheme and culminated in the publication of the *Atlas of the British flora* in 1962. Three more Conference Reports were to be edited by him. When he was relieved of executive office, his advice, which could be given from his extensive knowledge of the Society's affairs, remained available as a result of his service as President from 1961 to 1965 and as Vice-President from 1956 to 1960 and from 1969 to 1973. In the intervening periods he was an ordinary elected member of the Council. He continued his membership of the Publications Committee, and of the Maps Committee through its many changes to become finally the Records Committee.

The B.S.B.I. owes him a great debt of gratitude. He, more than anyone else, was responsible for changing its nature and bridging the gap between what it is now and what it was, seeming in

these days to belong to a world long since past, when he first took office. This is the more remarkable as his first inclination was always to resist change, seeing clearly the virtues of what was passing and demanding that its replacement should be by something equally sound. He was in every sense truly conservative; and politics were, almost by common consent, the only topic we never discussed in my long association with him.

His services were sought by many other societies: the London Natural History Society elected him its recorder for flowering plants (from 1942), its President (1962-64) and Chairman of its Botanical Section. His affection for the South London Botanical Institute remained throughout his life, and after the death of Sherrin in 1955 he acted as the honorary curator for the following 13 years.

Notwithstanding the many meetings he had to attend, he never lost any opportunity to do field work. He made a number of important discoveries including *Veronica praecox* in Suffolk, readily recognized by him as a plant new to Britain, and in Buckinghamshire the Military Orchid, a plant feared to have become extinct in Britain. The species he added to the alien flora were numerous. He had his foibles; to my shame I once confronted him with a herd of cows, his dislike of which arose from a narrow escape he had in his early days in the field.

He wrote a great deal and all was exceedingly well written, be it the seemingly more trivial items such as reports and plant notes or his major works. His very best writings were probably his reviews of the works of others, whose merits he, with his wide knowledge, could well appreciate. No carping criticisms or clever comments came from his pen. His review of Clapham, Tutin & Warburg's *Flora of the British Isles* stands reading many times. His last major work published in his lifetime was *Flora of the Isles of Scilly* (1971), a model of all that a Local Flora should be. It was the result of many visits made during 40 years at all times of the year, and many of the specimens that he collected needed critical examination.

His final work concerned, most appropriately, his very first love, Surrey. When he was a young man of 24, C. E. Salmon's *Flora of Surrey* was published and proved to be not completely satisfactory, as the author had died before publication. Lousley had long hoped to see a more satisfactory Flora and played a leading part in the formation in 1957 of the Surrey Flora Committee, the secretary of which was Mrs B. Welch, for so long a valuable co-worker in the B.S.B.I. He eagerly awaited the new Flora; but its publication was delayed by the unfortunate death in 1972 of Dr D. P. Young, who was well advanced with the collation of the records made by members of the committee. In 1973 Lousley undertook to write the Flora, which at the time of his death was in the process of printing. The Surrey Flora Committee did much more than collect records and made, among other exercises, reports on the reserves of the Surrey Naturalists' Trust, of which Lousley had been Vice-President since its formation in 1961.

At the time of his death he was also preparing for the B.S.B.I. an account of the members of the Polygonaceae to be found in the British Isles. This would have included the genus *Rumex*, which still held an interest for him. Among other groups of plants of which he had a special knowledge was *Verbascum*.

He much resented having to retire from banking in 1967 on his 60th birthday, when he had good reason to consider that he was still in his prime. Retirement, however, enabled him to devote more attention to imparting to others the knowledge he alone had acquired, thus fulfilling a long-felt desire. He had for many years been interested in the work of the Field Studies Council and after retirement became able to conduct courses himself at various centres. Nearer to home he was appointed a University of London Extension Lecturer, taking courses, always well attended as they were also much appreciated, in field botany at Morley College. Here he also lectured on problems of retirement. He was also the guide for many tours to the Continent and the Mediterranean islands, for his knowledge of plants extended far beyond those of the British Isles.

Few honours came to him apart from the honorary membership and presidencies of most societies with which he was connected. He was in 1963 the very first recipient of the Bloomer Award given by the Linnean Society of London in recognition of important contributions to biological science made by an amateur naturalist. Had he lived longer, other honours could not have been long delayed.

He died suddenly with what would have been his best botanical work (the *Flora of Surrey*) unpublished. A full congregation of his botanical and banking friends paid their last respects to him at a Memorial Service at St Olave's Church in the City, appropriately so with its associations

with William Turner, the 'father of English botany'. His large herbarium has been presented by Mrs Lousley to the Botany Department of Reading University and his valuable bibliographical index to the B.S.B.I. The index is being kept and updated at the Botany Department, British Museum (Natural History), where so much of his work was done. His library is being disposed of privately.

J. Edward Lousley had many virtues. He was an excellent colleague upon whom fellow officers could depend for co-operation and for support in times of stress. He dealt with an almost overwhelming correspondence and may perhaps be best remembered for the patient manner in which he dealt with the more trivial items, of which there were many, which came his way. When he began to be interested in plants he was grateful for the encouragement given to him by those much his senior. In his turn he was ever ready to assist and encourage those who approached him. Any debt we owe to him can best be repaid in the manner which was so essentially his.

In preparing this tribute I have been grateful to Mrs Lousley for lending me biographical notes made by Mr Lousley himself, to which she has been able to supply additional material. I wish also to thank A. W. Graveson and E. C. Wallace for recalling lively memories of Lousley's earlier days.

(Accepted September 1976)