

## Obituaries

### EDWARD AUGUSTINE ELLIS (1909-1986)

Ted Ellis, who died on Tuesday, 22nd July 1986, was an outstanding naturalist. He was almost self taught, being very observant. His writings proved his talents beyond any doubt. In recent years there have been few all-round British naturalists with his abilities. One can say that in many ways he can be likened to the 18th century naturalist Gilbert White of Selborne.

He was born in Guernsey, and at a very early age showed great interest in the various creatures of the rock pools. I am happy to have known him for very many years. When he was eleven the family left Guernsey and moved to Gorleston, Norfolk. Very soon Ted met the local naturalists and joined the Great Yarmouth Natural History Society. He became the young disciple of A. H. Patterson, the author of several books on the natural history of East Norfolk. Such was his knowledge and keenness that Dr George Claridge Druce made him a member of the Botanical Society and Exchange Club in 1925 and also paid his subscription.

In 1928 he was appointed Keeper of Natural History at Norwich Castle Museum, a post he held until 1956 when he resigned to become a free-lance naturalist. He had by then moved to Wheatfen Broad, Surlingham, Norfolk, and in ideal surroundings was able to study the life of the Norfolk Broads. This work culminated in 1965 with the publication of his book on 'The Broads', in the New Naturalist Series.

Although an all-round naturalist Ted specialized in the Micro and Rust Fungi, discovering several very rare species and at least one he described as new to science. For his work he was awarded in 1970 an Honorary Doctorate of the University of East Anglia. His services were always in great demand, giving talks, leading field meetings and on radio and television programmes. He had a heavy post bag so he would frequently make a very early start by getting up at 3.30 a.m. to answer the correspondence and also to type his daily 'Countryside' notes for the Eastern Daily Press. This contribution dates from 1946, although in earlier years he used to compile a column of Nature Notes published weekly in that paper. Since 1964 he had been a regular contributor to *The Guardian's* 'A Country Diary'. A selection of his various contributions, thoughts and poems was published in 1982 as 'Ted Ellis's Countryside Reflections' and illustrated by David Poole.

Many societies, school parties and others visited his reserve and Mrs Ellis would provide a large urn of tea. During the thirty years he lived there the fen carr was not coppiced as he believed it should be left to develop naturally. It was difficult, with his knowledge, to show him anything which he had not already recorded. However on one visit I was able to add a sedge, *Carex binervis*, to his reserve records.

I first met Ted on Sunday, 24th July 1932, at Northfield Wood, Onehouse, Suffolk. He had cycled all the way from Gorleston and was quite exhausted after such a long ride. There was some difficulty for him to get away on Sundays as at that time he used to be singing in the church choir and was said to be 'leading the boys'. My diary for that day records that we saw in Northfield Wood, *Primula elatior*, *Paris quadrifolia* and *Habenaria [Platanthera] chlorantha*. All subsequent meetings with Ted were very rewarding botanically. We would even have our little jokes. One day at Trimley, near Felixstowe, when by the old oyster beds, I said 'look *Bromus*'. Ted looked vainly for a grass. There was no grass really but only an old broom sticking out of the mud!

A very well attended Memorial Service was held at Norwich Cathedral on the 31st October 1986. A Ted Ellis Trust is to be established to preserve Wheatfen, his house and records, so that naturalists may be able to continue to come and enjoy the wild life which meant so much to Ted.

F. W. SIMPSON

EDWARD CHARLES WALLACE  
(1909–1986)

Edward Charles Wallace, known as Ted to all his friends, died in Sutton Hospital, Surrey, from kidney failure related to cancer on 23rd July 1986. Ted was born on 12th February 1909 in the Blackfriars area of London. When he was two his parents moved to Sutton, Surrey, and he lived in the same house there until a day or so before his death.

Ted was an only child. He had no family background of botany or natural history. His father was a printer at the time of his birth, and later became a taxi-driver. He had no sympathy with his son's botanical interests, but his mother, though she had no personal interest in natural history, was always sympathetic to Ted's ruling passion for plants. Ted's interest in flowers and pond life seems to have begun when he was about five years old. By the time he was thirteen he was discovered by Anthony Gepp, then Assistant Keeper of Botany at the British Museum (Natural History), trying to name mosses he had collected with the aid of a framed collection in the Botany Department's public gallery. Gepp introduced him to W. R. Sherrin, then Curator of the South London Botanical Institute, who also worked part-time in the B.M. It seems to have been Sherrin – a born teacher – who really set Ted on his way as a botanist.

Ted was educated at Sutton County Grammar School, but had no encouragement there or at home, it seems, to take up botany professionally or to attempt a degree. He certainly would have benefited from such studies; but no doubt money was too short, and at the age of sixteen he joined W. H. Smith and Son, the newsagent and booksellers, with whom he remained until his retirement in 1972, apart from war service in the R.A.F. This gave him an opportunity to do some botanizing in India and Burma, where he was a medical orderly.

During his working life, Ted spent all his weekends botanizing, mostly in the Home Counties, in Hampshire with the late P. M. Hall, and often in the post-war years in Kent with myself or in Surrey and Sussex with the late Ron Boniface and others. His summer holidays in earlier years were spent exploring the Highlands of Scotland, mostly in the company of his great friend Robert Mackechnie of Glasgow.

In later years (the 1960s and after his retirement), however, he travelled more and more abroad, not only in various parts of Europe, but further afield, to Japan, Kashmir, Florida, Alaska, Canada and Australia.

I recall with particular pleasure my own excursions with him. One was to Germany and Austria in 1964, when we studied both the splendid bogs of southern Wurttemberg (with such plants as *Scheuchzeria palustris*, *Liparis loeselii* and *Inula salicina*) and the flora of the western Austrian Alps. Another was to northern French fens and chalk downlands, in 1967; and yet another to the then almost unexplored area of Knoydart in Westernness, where we camped out in a disused shepherd's hut, and were assaulted by ticks by day and bed-bugs by night!

Ted never had, nor did he ever learn to drive, a car; but he was a great traveller. Naturally conservative in his diet, habits, clothes and political views, he came to enjoy foreign food and customs the more he travelled abroad, and became quite cosmopolitan in many ways; he 'got by' in many countries with the aid of his own unique but comprehensible brand of the French language. Ted never married, and in his later years, after his mother's death in about 1967, seemed to have no close relatives left.

His health and vigour remained unimpaired until 1975, when he was taken ill during the International Botanical Congress in Leningrad with severe nose-bleeding due to high blood pressure. He was, to his surprise and pleasure, greatly impressed with the excellent treatment he obtained in a Soviet hospital. His health began to deteriorate in 1978; in that summer, on Colonsay with my wife and myself, he admitted to angina trouble, and in subsequent years he found it more and more difficult to climb hills or to get over stiles. He must have found this as severe a trial to himself as it was a source of anxiety to his friends, but he remained cheerful and complained little.

His determination to explore localities for interesting plants at this time, in spite of all the difficulties, was most impressive. He became really ill in Japan in 1983 with severe prostate trouble, but made an amazing recovery, and continued to make excursions at home and abroad to within ten days of his death. In April 1986 he visited Rhodes with a B.S.B.I. party, in particular to look for the rare *Carex illegitima*; he was successful in this quest.

Ted was one of the greatest British amateur botanists of this century, and a good all-round naturalist and conservationist. His main interests lay with the bryophytes; he was Secretary of the British Bryological Society for many years (1947–69) and became President of that society in 1972 and an Honorary Member in 1974. Indeed, the majority of his (comparatively few) scientific publications were concerned with bryology.

However, Ted was an outstanding vascular plant botanist as well. He joined the B.S.B.I. (under its former name of the B.E.C.) in 1932, and was Assistant Editor, Editor or Distributor of many B.E.C. reports. He was a founder member of the B.S.B.I. Maps Committee from 1954, a member of the Records Committee till his death, a member of the Publications Committee from 1954–77, and also the Society's Archivist and Recorder for v.c.13 for many years. His special interests among the phanerogams were the Carices and the Willows. He published very little on the vascular plants, but, particularly in Scotland, made many outstanding discoveries. Among these was the first record of *Carex ericetorum* outside East Anglia in Britain, at Burton Leonard in v.c.64, made while he was in the R.A.F. during the war; this find led others to look for it elsewhere (successfully) in northern England. Among his Scottish finds of note were *Saxifraga cernua* (until then believed to be only on Ben Lawers) on Bidean nam Bian with P. R. Bell in 1949; and of new sites for such plants as *Carex norvegica* and *C. atrofusca*. His major contributions to knowledge of our vascular plants as well as bryophytes, however, were made in areas of N.W. Scotland hitherto unknown or little explored botanically, such as Beinn Dearg, Seanna Braigh and the lesser-known parts of Breadalbane.

Ted was a kind and gentle person, not given much to wit, but with an excellent quiet sense of humour. He was very approachable (and unlike some other eminent botanists I have known), always delighted to share his immense knowledge and experience with others, particularly with young botanists. In my earlier days I (and many others) learnt an immense amount from his patient but enthusiastic instruction in the field, and always enjoyed his companionship. He led countless field excursions, but gave few formal lectures. He did not keep very detailed notes of his finds, perhaps because of his formidable memory, but he formed one of the last and greatest private herbaria of any recent British botanist. He was awarded the H. H. Bloomer Award of the Linnean Society in 1964, and was only the second botanist to receive this (his friend J. E. Lousley was the first).

With Ted's death, many of us feel that we have lost a dear and valued friend and field companion.

I would like to end with a brief anecdote which perhaps gives the essence of the man. In 1975, after our excursion to Knoydart, Dr B. J. Coppins and I travelled home on a beautiful summer's evening along the Highland Railway line from Fort William to Edinburgh. As we passed each mountain and corrie along that spectacular route, Ted gave us a continuous, enthusiastic and informative commentary on all the interesting species he had recorded on each crag or corrie that came into view; some he had not visited for over forty years. Brian Coppins and I were dazzled by this virtuoso performance and listened in silence for some time. Eventually Brian said: "Is all this written down somewhere, Ted? I hope so!" Ted replied: "Most of it isn't, I'm afraid, but then all the important records are represented in my herbarium".

Since his death, study of his herbarium of vascular plants (now at Reading University, RNG) has revealed what a rich storehouse of information it is.

F. ROSE