

## Obituaries

### JOHN ALFRED CODRINGTON (1898–1991)

The varied aspects of that endearing character, Lt-Col. John Codrington, have been well set out in obituaries in *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* of 23 April, *The Independent* of 3 May, and *The Rutland Times*, supplemented by further notices in *The Times*. These cover his extraordinary career, but hardly mention his life-long absorption in plants.

He painted four remarkable sets of flowers, dated 1905, 1905, Spring 1906 and Summer 1906, 19 in all, when he was 6 and 7. In July 1908, aged 9, he was given a nicely bound copy of the Rev. C. A. Johns' *Flowers of the Field*, and he was growing alpine when still young. The interest never left him, and was kept up even during his 20 years with his father's regiment, the Coldstream Guards. In 1920, when quartered at Wimbledon, he noted *Potentilla norvegica*. He sent a long letter from Salzburg to the *Wild Flower Magazine* dated September 1922, recording several plants; and another from Constantinople in June 1923.

He wrote a beautifully clear set of "botanical maps and directions" for over 300 scarce and rare plants in England and Scotland, labelled "confidential", with an index. An O.S. map is noted for each and the grid reference. Most are dated 1953, but they extend from 1951 until 1969. Some dozen are marked "most secret", and as many "secret", but not all will still be valid, e.g. for *Agrostemma githago*. This set has been gifted to the Botany Library of the Natural History Museum, London.

He kept up his painting all his life, almost all of landscape or gardens, including garden designs – his first essay in design was a knot garden at Rockingham Castle in 1916, which still survives. The only later painting of a flower I have seen is of *Cypripedium calceolus* in 1957, which is with his directions for finding that species, and is frankly a poor depiction. In all, something between 2,000 and 4,000 of his paintings survive.

The Royal Horticultural Society awarded him its Veitch Memorial Medal in gold in 1989, "living proof that the finest gardeners never age" as the President put it. There is a good account of him in *The Garden* for November 1987.

I first met him soon after the last war, and we had kept in regular touch ever since, including on the tours of the International Dendrology Society, of which he was a faithful member. At both the houses he eventually lived in, in Pimlico and Rutland, he grew remarkable plants. The Ranelagh Cottage house reverts to the Grosvenor Estate, which will try to get a suitable tenant for the garden. What happens to Stone Cottage, at Hambleton, Rutland, is currently uncertain. Its garden he described in *The Englishman's Garden* of 1982, and in *The Garden* for November 1988.

He worked with Sir Alexander Korda for some years after the war (with Merle Oberon too) at London Films. On one occasion he noticed on a film set that the flowers were wrong for the time of year the action was taking place. Sir Alexander bet him that no-one would complain, and no-one did. Among the plants that interested him most and he distributed widely were *Bupleurum falcatum* from Essex stock, which seeded freely in his chalky garden, *Smyrniolum perfoliatum*, Bowles' Golden Grass *Milium effusum* 'Aureum', and white-flowered Herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*). He grew many native and naturalized plants in his "mad wild jungle" (as he put it) at Hambleton, *Sisymbrium strictissimum* doing particularly well; and there were others he had collected from exotic places. He took seed of a cypress from the Holy Land in 1922, two of the progeny being still in the churchyard at Oakham and others in that at Preston, nearby, all family territory.

His name will be found as having made contributions to publications such as *The Hand List of the Plants of the London Area* of 1951, *The Atlas of the British Flora* of 1962 and the *Flora of Essex* of 1974. He was the unquenchable enthusiast, pestering me to go and see how the London Rocket (*Sisymbrium irio*) was on Tower Hill (which he had seen during 1951–6 at least) until a year or so before he died.

Apart from the accounts already mentioned, I know of nothing that he put into print about plants, except occasional letters to *Country Life*. This is sad, because he had travelled the world endlessly

and saw much, and had written a manuscript autobiography. I think that he did not consider himself a botanist, but was just a devoted, clubbable plantsman, with a wealth of stories. But what a plantsman!

D. McCLINTOCK

NORAH DAWSON  
(1913—1991)

Norah Dawson, B.S.B.I. Recorder for County Armagh, died on 4 March 1991. A daughter of Armagh, the 'City of Saints and Scholars', Norah was one of the most modest and yet competent of amateur botanists. A history graduate of The Queen's University of Belfast, she trained as a librarian, and spent her working life in the employment of Armagh County Council, where she was for many years the County Librarian.

Norah's interest in botany developed through the Armagh Field Naturalists' Society, of which she became one of the founder members in 1952. At first, the Society was a small band of enthusiastic novices. Norah, because of difficulties with her sight, preferred to concentrate on plants, whereas birds absorbed most of the attention of other members. Perhaps rather unusually for her time, she had studied German rather than Latin at school, but nevertheless soon mastered the use of Latin names for plants.

With encouragement from the late Pat Kertland, Norah became interested in recording plant distribution during the years leading up to the publication of the B.S.B.I.'s *Atlas*. Later, during the 1960s, the Armagh Field Naturalists along with the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club began a project to record the Co. Armagh flora in 5-km squares, and Norah became the stalwart of this project.

On her retirement, she took on the honorary secretary's post in the Field Naturalists' Society, a role she carried out with singular efficiency and good humour for several years. As the Society's chairman and a near neighbour, I came to know Norah and her constant companion Burren well at this time. Burren, a red setter, was ironically not named after the botanists' Mecca in western Ireland, but after a little-known townland of that name in Co. Down. In fact, Burren became known under another name to my family rather earlier than Norah, on account of the memorable sight of him emerging from another neighbour's back door and careering across the unfenced back gardens of our recently built estate with a string of sausages hanging from his jaws. Burren was temporarily known as 'The Sausage Stealer'; quite unfairly as it turned out, as we later discovered that the neighbour in question was a butcher with a surplus of out-of-date sausages.

The early years of her retirement were the time when Norah was at her most botanically active, most days in summer being spent recording along the by-ways of the County, and also further afield in Ireland, both on her own or with the Irish Biogeographical Society. As befitted a professional librarian, her plant records were kept in a magnificent state of order, and she also kept meticulous notes on butterflies in Co. Armagh. Her role as a B.S.B.I. Recorder was largely one of collating her own records, the county at that time being sparsely populated by resident botanists and seldom visited by outside ones.

A modest and unassuming person, Norah could always be relied on to do anything she undertook in a thorough and reliable way. She always felt that a little more work was needed before the records for her county would be in a fit state for publication. It was a great shame, therefore, that health problems led to premature decline in her recording activities and, as the major contributor to the stock of botanical records in Co. Armagh, that she did not live to see them through to publication in a County Flora.

J. S. FAULKNER



JOHN GEORGE DONY  
(1899—1991)

John Dony M.B.E., B.Sc., Ph.D., Hon. F.L.S., who died in Luton on 24 March 1991, was one of the best-known British field botanists of this century. He was essentially interested in the distribution, ecology and features which were susceptible to statistical analysis rather than the systematics of plants. His *Flora of Bedfordshire* was widely recognized as a model of how such things should be done and truly, as the late Sir E. J. Salisbury said, "takes a worthy place amongst its predecessors and contemporaries", and so does its author amongst his. His efforts for conservation in the county in which he was born and died were sustained and successful, resulting in a well-merited M.B.E. in 1983.

John was born in Luton on 8 August 1899 in Court Road by the parish church in a road of typical mid-Victorian terraced houses, now totally destroyed. A great fondness for the church, indeed a magnificent building, remained with John throughout his life, although he had no time for religious doctrine. His father, an engineer, was a well-known Sunday School teacher and a very active member of the Chase Street Mission, Luton from 1901 until its closure in the early 1940s. His great-grandfather was a Cornish tin miner who changed the name from Doney. His mother's family were local and mainly connected with the hat industry. His grandfather was a founder member of the Luton Industrial Co-operative Society in 1883, and John himself was an ardent Fabian. His education at Surrey Street School, like that of so many of his contemporaries, was restricted to elementary school (but from what I know of its products it must have been immeasurably superior to that of the present day). In 1913 he became an apprentice at Hayward Tyler, an engineering firm renowned for their hydraulic pumps, where he worked on the bench. He stayed in the firm until 1920, his service there broken by World War I, when he joined the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve from June to December 1918, although he did not see active service. From 1920 to 1922 John worked as a draughtsman in London and Cardiff but then after matriculating at London University in 1922 became an uncertificated school teacher. His working in Cardiff probably explains his support of Glamorgan County Cricket Club. A suggestion that his first teaching post was in Cardiff appears to be inaccurate as there is no other mention of this, and his first school post was at Norton Road School, Leagrave. He obtained an Acting Teachers' Certificate in 1924, the last time a teacher could become qualified without going to college. He moved to Queen's Square School from 1925

until 1931, then to a school in Kentish Town for nine years. Although he had attended W.E.A. evening classes in engineering, mathematics and Spanish years before, his attempts to better his lot now started in earnest. He attended the University Extension Class, 1931–32, in Economics at Toynbee Hall with W. Milne-Bailey as tutor, for whom he wrote a long essay on the hat industry which was shown to J. J. Mallon, the Warden of Toynbee Hall, and Barbara (later Baroness) Wootton, both of whom encouraged him to continue. He enrolled as a student of the London School of Economics, working in the evenings until he gained his B.Sc. in 1936. He had married another teacher in the 1920s but this marriage was dissolved in 1931.

The beginnings of the straw hat industry in Luton go back to visits by James I, whose mother Mary, Queen of Scots had brought over to Scotland some Lorraine straw-plaiters – or so the story used to go. Actually the industry may have had more local origins. However it started, it eventually dominated the town, which became a main centre in Europe for the trade. The extent of its importance is now inconceivable to a generation most of whom do not even own a hat. My own paternal grandfather, a Belgian hatter, came to Luton in the 1890s when it was the Mecca for hat-workers of all sorts. John had decided to work on and obtain a doctorate and the hat industry was an obvious choice of subject for a Lutonian and he gained a Ph.D. in 1941 for his thesis on its history and economics. To tell the truth he used modern pressurised interrogation techniques on the surviving hat firms of the day by bombarding them with innumerable queries and wanting to see their records. From his thesis he produced a book, *A history of the straw hat industry* (1942), which became accepted as the standard, if not the only, work on the subject. The industry rapidly declined until it became a fragment of the town's economy but John's desire to investigate this was never accomplished. His teaching career blossomed and after a short spell at the North Western Polytechnic, he became in 1941 History and Economics Master at Luton Modern (later Grammar) School and remained there until his retirement in 1964. There he was much loved and universally known by the nickname 'Doc'.

It is always rather difficult to pin down accurately the start of an interest, but John as a schoolboy belonged to The Band of Hope, a society for promoting temperance principles among the young (although John was not averse in later life to a modest drink in convivial company). This worthy body gave a series of books as prizes for an essay on "The evils of strong drink" and John, a winner, chose *The Works of Shakespeare* and J. Saunders' *Field Flowers of Bedfordshire*, the latter an austere work scarcely likely to inspire a youngster. When he was 15 he made a collection of insects and plants and received a commendation for the flowers. It is likely that Frederick Mander, (later Sir Frederick, General Secretary and President of the N.U.T. and Chairman of Bedfordshire County Council), keen on orchids and a teacher at Surrey Street School, encouraged him most of all to let his innate interest in natural history develop. Mander's name appears several times in the Orchidaceae in John's Flora. John's early interest in botany relaxed during the time he was obtaining qualifications but was rekindled in 1935 and developed considerably during the War years. Once he had resolved to write a new Flora of his county, a group of like-minded friends (particularly Horace Souster, perhaps his most constant companion) gathered together and an immense amount of field work was undertaken. How far this had advanced was evident from a very successful exhibition entitled "Wild Flowers in Bedfordshire" which was mounted at the Luton Museum some years before the Flora was published. The covering booklet for this was of course written by John and for many Lutonians it was the first intimation of the project. This sustained labour by John and many helpers culminated in his *Flora of Bedfordshire* in 1953, without doubt his finest work. This was a subscriber publication and was produced for the very modest sum of "42s nett". I was already an old Africa hand by then and received my copy in Nairobi together with a letter from John dated Christmas Day, 1953 (he wrote in a small but very legible hand which achieved maximum information per square inch of paper). Almost unbelievably the 1000 copies cost only £1271 to produce and an expected deficit of £600 was soon turned into a small profit. John was extremely sensitive about the reception of this work and he awaited comments eagerly. I think that they were without exception extremely favourable, as indeed they should have been – John had a natural bent for accuracy and his publications were accordingly much more polished than those of many a professional scientist. The 20 pages of historical introduction to Bedfordshire botany make fascinating reading, combining as they do John's twin interests of botany and local history. The geographical index is a feature I still constantly use. Today this 42 shilling book usually fetches about £18–25, which seems rather low bearing in mind inflation. It was reissued in 1978 in a much less

pleasing format. John then moved on to writing the *Flora of Hertfordshire*, which was published in 1967 by the Hitchin Urban District Council, again with an introduction by Sir E. J. Salisbury. Although only 14 years later than the Bedfordshire Flora, the changes in book production gave it an altogether different look. There was also the novelty of 47 pages of tetrad dot maps. These two Floras show to a remarkable degree John's capability of marshalling an enormous amount of varied information and presenting it in an orderly form; this was perhaps his dominant characteristic; it is of course a prerequisite of a good historian.

John developed a deep interest in conservation but was not unreasonable. He recognized that progress, whatever we might individually think about it, was inevitable and did not make foolish demands. His well-reasoned pleas produced more success as a result. Perhaps all this was started as a result of a disgraceful act he witnessed as a youngster – the demise of Grass of Parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*) in Bedfordshire. The last population was uprooted in his presence by an amateur botanist who proudly gloated: "That is the last time anyone will find that here!". John mentions this in his *Flora of Bedfordshire* but did not hint that he witnessed it. Perhaps it is as well that I have forgotten the name of the perpetrator. The designation of Knocking Hoe, Pegsdon as a National Nature Reserve in 1958 was a major success for John.

Like many on the political Left, he seemed to actively enjoy being on committees and helping to found new societies; he did valuable work for a surprising number of them. Early on, his political affiliations developed (he had long warned of the dangers of fascism) and he became a local secretary of the Left Wing Book Club and a founder member of the Luton Branch of the Fabian Society. He became its chairman when it re-formed in 1967 after ten years of lack of public interest. He was Honorary Keeper of Botany at Luton Museum from 1935 until 1988 during which time he built up an admirable local herbarium and library; from 1955 he undertook the same duties at Hitchin Museum. Already a Member of the Wild Flower Society, he joined the Botanical Society of the British Isles (then the Botanical Exchange Club) in 1937 and after 1947 held office continually as, successively, a Council Member, its Honorary Field Secretary (later renamed Honorary Meetings Secretary) (1949–56), Honorary General Secretary (1956–64), a Vice-President (1965–66) and finally President in 1967–69. After this he was made an Honorary Member. He helped found the Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire Naturalists' Trust in 1961 and was also a founder member in 1962 of the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Trust. He was almost a founder member of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society but missed the first meeting (I fear I used to gloat over this); he was, however, intimately associated with it for over 40 years and served as President in the early 1960s. He also served as President of the Hertfordshire Natural History Society and of the South Bedfordshire Association of National Trust Members. In 1954 he was elected a Fellow (Honoris Causa) of the Linnean Society of London. Other posts which he held were Chairman of the South Bedfordshire Preservation Society (which he helped form in 1948) and the presidency of the Luton Workers' Educational Association which he took over from Lord Hill ('The Radio Doctor') in 1977 and retained for ten years. Towards the end of the 1980s John relinquished his various duties and one of his last acts was to grace the opening of the John Dony Field Centre by the Mayor of Luton in October 1990.

He was extremely interested in alien plants, particularly those resulting from the use of wool shoddy; a remarkable number grew in Bedfordshire and in some places such as Flitwick railway sidings one could be forgiven for thinking one was in Australia rather than Britain.

Anxious that every record should be as accurate as possible, he gradually got to know all the botanists of his day, particularly the specialists on tricky groups. Many of them accompanied him on field trips. Whilst Edgar Milne-Redhead was stationed at Dunstable during World War II, a great friendship sprang up between them and they travelled by bicycle and train over much of the county collecting records. A particular friend was V. H. Chambers who died in 1984. He had begun a herbarium when only twelve years old and continued to list his records until 1931. Later he specialized in the Hymenoptera and became a recognized authority on certain groups. He collaborated with John and was in fact the stimulus which persuaded John to undertake the arduous task of writing a proper Flora. Vic had a car early on and they undertook numerous joint expeditions; Vic shared with me the almost total inability to ride a bicycle. Many young botanists owe much to John's encouragement. Peter Taylor and I were both protégés during the war and we both decided eventually to become professional botanists. Peter was very neat and tidy (like John) and did very much more to help John with recording and indeed wrote the Section on the Hepaticae



in the *Flora of Bedfordshire*. I already had many zoological interests which interfered with botanical recording. My father viewed my interest in botany with dismay, particularly as I had a degree in physics, and was certain I would never get a job as a biologist (they were rare in those days) and it was John who showed it was a possibility, and in fact made it a respectable option. Without his help and introductions to other people, probably neither Peter nor I would have ended up at Kew. One of my main memories of him during the war years was the speed with which he walked despite his short stature – like a galleon in full sail bent into the wind – and this continued well into later life. In those early days transport was scarce and we had no car – a large part of most expeditions was done on foot which of course helped us to find more.

John got on well with others, whether peasants or aristocrats. During the gathering of records for the *Flora* he needed to examine the flora of many private and government properties. This was usually arranged in advance, nearly always without difficulty, but occasionally had to be done off the cuff, so to speak. He had a formula for this: when the door opened he would say “We are botanists” in much the same way as one might announce that one was the Governor of the Bank of England! Nearly always this resulted in permission being given – only occasionally was the reply the equivalent of ‘get lost’! John had a quite authoritarian air about him which somewhat overawed the opposition.

A group of us often ended up in a pub (as often as not the *Speed the Plough* just north of Barton and actually mentioned by name on sheet 95 of the old one inch map) on our way back from a meeting in Bedford for a modest drink. He ate very frugally, often only an apple for lunch during a field trip; which fruit he was proud of being able to split into two pieces by a deft twist of the hand.

Although as a schoolboy he disdained history, a W.E.A. evening course on economic history he attended in 1917–18 kindled a strong interest – so much so that history ultimately became his bread and butter. He became particularly fascinated by local history, about which he gained an encyclopaedic knowledge. It is an interesting coincidence that the road of his birth long ago formed part of the estates of Sir John Rotherham, one of the oldest parts of Luton. He was part author of *The Story of Luton* (1964) (reprinted 1966 and 1975) and wrote many other historical papers besides. John’s total output of articles was quite considerable, many being in the *Bedfordshire Magazine* and *The Bedfordshire Naturalist*, also *Watsonia* and its predecessors. He was an excellent writer of obituaries.

In 1971 he joined the élite band of amateur naturalists to have received the Bloomer Award of the Linnean Society (H. H. Bloomer, 1866–1960, was himself an amateur who mainly studied bivalve molluscs). John married for a second time in 1962, Christina Mayne Goodman, a keen Birmingham botanist and former England hockey international, who proved the perfect companion. Most of John’s work after this date was in the nature of a joint effort. He is survived by her and a son by his previous marriage. Undoubtedly the secret of John’s success was hard work and determination coupled with enthusiasm and orderly methods, all in fact attributes of the Victorians, one of whom he could just claim to be. He could certainly have been a successful politician and probably a business man but he chose to become a schoolmaster don who will long be remembered for his attainments.

#### PUBLICATIONS OF J. G. DONY\*

##### MAJOR WORKS

- 1942 *A history of the straw hat industry*. Luton.
- 1946 The hat industry, in H. A. SILVERMAN, ed. *Studies in industrial organisation*, pp. 155–198. London.
- 1953 *Flora of Bedfordshire*. Luton (reprinted 1978. Wakefield).
- 1964 (With J. Dyer and F. Stygall) *The story of Luton*. Luton. (2nd ed., 1966). (With J. Dyer, 3rd ed., 1974).
- 1967 *Flora of Hertfordshire*. Hitchin.
- 1970 *A history of education in Luton*. Luton.

\*Compiled mainly from a list produced by himself. It excludes detailed elaboration of recorder’s reports. Some very short notes, exhibition reports, etc. are also omitted.

- 1974 (With F. H. Perring and C. M. Robb) *The English names of wild flowers*. London. (With F. H. Perring and S. L. Jury, 2nd ed., 1986).  
 1976 *Bedfordshire Plant Atlas*. Luton.  
 1984 *The story of High Town*. Bedfordshire County Library. (2nd ed., 1985).  
 1991 (With C. M. Dony) *The wild flowers of Luton*. Luton.

## MAJOR WORK EDITED

- 1975 *A view from the alley* (by A. S. Darby). Luton.

## ARTICLES

- 1946 Additions and emendations to the Comital Flora for v.c. 30 (Bedfordshire). *Rep. botl Soc. Exch. Club Br. Isl.* **1943-4**: 803-14.  
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 — The case for nature reserves. *Bedford. Mag.* **1**: 19-22.  
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 1948 (With K. Piercey) Nature reserves. *Bedford. Nat.* **2**: 19-21.  
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 1952 (With J. E. Lousley) The travels of plants. *Bedford. Mag.* **3**: 185-9.  
 1953 Wool aliens in Bedfordshire, in J. E. Lousley, ed. *The changing flora of Britain*, pp. 160-3. London.  
 1954 *Cyperus rotundus*. *Proc. botl Soc. Br. Isl.* **1**: 159.  
 — The position with regard to the conservation of nature in Bedfordshire. *Bedford. Nat.* **8**: 12-13.  
 1955 *Hordeum leporinum* Link, *H. glaucum* Steud. and *H. pusillum* var. *pubens* Hitchcock. *Proc. botl Soc. Br. Isl.* **1**: 323-24.  
 — Notes on the Bedfordshire railway flora. *Bedford. Nat.* **9**: 12-16.  
 1957 The drawings of Caroline Gaye. *Bedford. Nat.* **10**: 14-15.  
 — The place of the local flora in the study of the British flora, in J. E. Lousley, ed. *Progress in the study of the British flora*, pp. 30-9. London.  
 1959 Some Hertfordshire plant records. *London Nat.* **38**: 74-6.  
 1960 Nature conservation in Bedfordshire. *Bedford. Nat.* **14**: 19-24.  
 1961 Flowers of the roadsides. *Bedford. Mag.* **8**: 34-7.  
 1963 The expectation of plant records from prescribed areas. *Watsonia* **5**: 377-85.  
 — Counting the cost, in P. J. Wanstall, ed. *Local Floras*, pp. 87-94. London.  
 — Botanists in Hertfordshire. *Hertfordshire Past and Present* **3**: 39-44.  
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 1966 The Hertfordshire Natural History Society. *Wild Flower Mag.* **345**: 6-7.  
 1967 A Bedfordshire botanist and schoolmaster. *Bedford. Mag.* **11**: 69-72.  
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 — Notes on the flora of Hertfordshire. *Trans. Herts. Nat. Hist. Soc.* **27**: 23-4.  
 1970 Straw hats - a bibliography. *Costume* **1**: 10-11.  
 — Plant notes for 1969. *Trans. Herts. Nat. Hist. Soc.* **27**: 83.

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- 1971 The need for a recommended list of English names for British plants. *B.S.B.I. Recorders' Conf. Rep.*, pp. 87-94.
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- 1975 The Bedfordshire Natural History Society. *Wild Flower Mag.* (Spring Issue): 11-12.
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- 1977 (With C. M. Dony) Some additional wool aliens in Bedfordshire. *Watsonia* 11: 428.
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- 1978 The 1919 Peace Riots in Luton. *Publications of Beds. Hist. Rec. Soc.* 57: 205-33.
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- 1985 (With I. Denholm) Some quantitative methods of assessing the conservation value of ecologically similar sites. *J. appl. Ecol.* 22: 229-38.
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- 1986 Introduction to *Mate's Illustrated Guide to Luton*. Luton.
- (With C. M. Dony) Further notes on the flora of Bedfordshire. *Watsonia* 16: 163-172.
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- Nature reserves in Bedfordshire. *Bedford. Mag.* 20: 323-7.

## PAMPHLETS AND PRINTED REPORTS

- 1943 *Report on the Luton hat industry*. (To Nuffield College social reconstruction survey.)
- \*1948 *Wild flowers in Bedfordshire*. (An exhibition at Luton Museum and Art Gallery.) [undated].
- 1947-86 Reports of Recorder for Botany (*J. Beds. Nat. Hist. Soc.*, later *Bedford. Nat.*)
- 1948 Report of field meeting: Bedford and district. *Rep. botl. Exch. Club Br. Isl.* 1946-7: 220-3.
- \*1948 *Bedfordshire Wild flowers*. Luton Museum.
- 1950 Report of field meeting: Huntingdonshire. *B.S.B.I. Year Book* 1950: 51-3.
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- 1971 *Species-area relationships*. (Mimeo. to Natural Environment Research Council.)
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- ? *The classification and assessment of mires in Bedfordshire*. British Ecological Society.

\*There appear to be two separate items involved. I have a copy of a white undated 16-page pamphlet with a photograph of *Alisma* on the front cover; C. Boon has a green pamphlet dated 1948 with a similar photograph but with 20 pages.



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B. VERDCOURT

## JOHN DONY, HISTORIAN AND TEACHER

John Dony was a most remarkable man with limitless interests and boundless energy. He was a true self-made man – he left school at 14, completed an engineering apprenticeship, and then, without any full-time attention to study, qualified as a teacher, earned a respectable degree in Economics, and then secured a Doctorate. The record does not end there for, and this is well documented in the bibliography above, there is a prodigious list of publications devoted to his two academic loves of Botany and History.

Although he was a prolific historian, I would think that his national reputation is greater in Botany and that may be because much of his historical work focusses on Luton. However, even a parochial interest must not be dismissed for what he produced is of considerable value and not just to local people.

John was best known for his work on the Straw Hat industry (the subject of his Ph.D. thesis) which was originally inspired more by the issues of labour relations than by the product itself. This work grew out of an essay on trade unions and the hat industry first composed in 1931 for his Economics tutor. Much encouraged by J. J. Mallon and Barbara Wootton, the subject was later to

be enlarged and developed into his doctoral thesis. John had no direct connection with the hat industry but, as it was an important and lively economic activity in Luton, it offered a ready and accessible research topic.

In concert with two others (Dyer and Stygall) he produced the definitive local history under the title *The Story of Luton*. As a schoolboy it is known that he had little taste for history but his enthusiasm was kindled by a W.E.A. class and he took to the subject with a passion, and it was that very passion that made him an effective and entertaining teacher, for he made history challenging, alive, and, importantly, relevant.

John was very much a son of Luton and he came from a well-known local family which lived almost in the centre of the town. John's grandfather supported the Co-operative cause and was a founder-member of the Luton Industrial Co-operative Society. John's share number, which he inherited via an uncle, was 2. He was thus 'related' to the development of what was once a significant social movement.

We were fortunate at Luton Grammar School to have been taught by scholars, but most were drawn from relatively comfortable middle class backgrounds. John was not of that mould. Although he was a success, he had had to struggle to be so. He was his own man and he brought to his many activities a very marked sense of reality doubtless drawn from his experiences. For a man otherwise destined for the machine-shop John won his place in the pantheon of great teachers. He was a man who bore his achievements modestly and without display; he gave much of himself and was always a ready friend and counsellor. His like is rare enough and it is an honour to be one of his 'old Boys'.

M. BUTCHER

#### JOHN DONY AT THE LUTON MUSEUM

When I started work at Luton Museum as assistant to the curator in 1938 we were the only full-time curatorial staff, but we had an Hon. Keeper of Botany, John Dony. On Saturday mornings and in the school holidays he darted about the museum, working on the herbarium with a great sense of purpose. He remained Hon. Keeper of Botany for the next 50 years. No museum can have had more valuable and devoted service than he gave to Luton. He appeared only at these times because he was teaching in Kentish Town and also working for a Ph.D. in Economics, having taken his first degree two years before, by evening study after a full day's teaching. He gained his doctorate for his thesis on the straw hat industry in 1941. In the same year he took a post at Luton Grammar School, teaching history and economics, and remained there until he retired, as Head of History, in 1964.

He was born, brought up and educated in Luton; worked in his teens as an apprentice engineer there until 1920; and began his teaching career, first in Luton and then in Kentish Town (but still living in Luton). His chosen study, the straw hat industry, was not just a subject for a thesis. He had grown up in a town which had been shaped by this industry, which took from it its urban pattern, its social nuances. It was the social and economic complexities of the industry which fascinated him. His studies in local history and politics were never those of an academic specialist, but, as in his botanical work, were 'habitat studies'.

His historical writings are mostly about Luton: *A History of the Straw Hat Industry* (1942); *The Story of Luton* (1964); *A History of Education in Luton* (1970), enriched by his own experience as pupil and teacher there in the early years of this century; and *The 1919 Peace Riots in Luton* (1978), in a volume presented to another Bedfordshire historian, Joyce Godber. Again he wrote from first hand knowledge, a mildly participating witness of this tragi-comedy of local politics, in an essay which shows how well he understood the character of the town he had lived in, worked in and served all his life.

A. BUCK

#### JOHN DONY AND THE B.S.B.I.

John Dony's influence on the Society's development was second only to that of Ted Lousley in the early post-War years. Throughout those two formative decades, the 1950s and 1960s, he was

continually in office: initially as the first-ever Field Secretary; in due course, for eight years, as General Secretary; and ultimately as the third amateur to fill the Presidential chair in the new post-War amateur/professional alternation. While, unlike Lousley, his involvement in the Society's affairs never extended to administering its finances and he was content to leave the publications side of its activities to others, the nine years he devoted to organizing and overseeing its annual meetings programme – a much more onerous responsibility than is generally appreciated – proved an excellent preparation for running the Society as a whole, so that when Lousley stepped down as General Secretary in 1956 no succession to that office can ever have seemed so natural and appropriate.

Though very different personalities, the two of them worked together in harmony, united by a common commitment to efficiency and shared battle scars from the endless in-fighting that had characterized the régime that preceded theirs. John in particular never forgot or forgave, to the end of his days, the airy casualness with which the supposed joint organizer had left him to cope alone, almost at the last minute, with the arrangements for the all-important 1950 Conference at which the *Atlas of the British Flora* had its original, carefully stage-managed conception. Nothing of the kind ever happened again once the Society's meetings programme was entrusted to his hands alone. In a very short time, indeed, the atmosphere was transformed: the conflicts and cantankerousness for which some of the first post-War field meetings were notorious at once became a thing of the past, as John brought to these occasions his chuckling sociability, his supreme meticulousness and his unending tact. They were qualities from which the Society was to benefit more generally in his subsequent spell as General Secretary and which rendered the team who served with him in those years a memorably happy and smoothly-functioning one.

The meticulousness which he brought to the Society's administration was the hallmark of his personal botanical work too. Delighting in precision, with that tiny, figure-like handwriting characteristic of the mathematically inclined, he loved nothing more than working carefully-delimited areas with steadily increasing intensiveness. Deeply rooted in his home town of Luton and surrounding countryside, he had the compiling of local Floras as his manifest botanical destiny. And not just their compiling: his training in economics additionally gave him a taste for just those aspects from which local Flora-writers typically tend to shrink, and he would spare no trouble in working out costings and gauging market potential, matters on which he became the acknowledged national expert and was ever-pleased to be asked for advice by fellow authors. It irked him greatly that the handsome profit that the first of his Floras had unexpectedly made all went into the coffers of its local government sponsor, yielding him no personal benefit financially in return for all the effort he had put in, not least in earlier raising the money that had made publication feasible; and he was determined ever afterwards to assume the risk of publication himself, convinced by that first experience that works of this type were sound commercial propositions provided the production and marketing received the careful attention they deserved. Not everyone felt able to share his optimism on that score, which assumed an input of time and labour which few if any others were likely to be prepared to contemplate (it extended, for example, to acting as your own publisher's representative and hawking copies in person to every bookshop in the county); but he was a lasting force for good in making Flora-writers think more carefully and constructively about the stages that must come after the accumulating of the records. The series of habitat studies which formed a major and novel feature of the first of his Floras has had many copiers, while his switch from the traditional octavo format to a quarto one for the succeeding *Flora of Hertfordshire*, to accommodate the printing of the systematic list in double columns, which he perceived as dictated by cost-cutting logic, was so much admired by K. G. Messenger that he modelled his *Flora of Rutland* exactly upon it.

Above all, John was identified with tetrad-mapping. If not quite the first to employ this method (E. S. Eedes anticipated him by just one year), he was certainly to the fore in exploiting it and in promoting its adoption generally. The work that he undertook in this direction for his Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire plant atlases so fascinated him that he even talked for a time of going to live in Co. Carlow on his retirement and submitting that underexplored, similarly-sized county to the same exhaustive treatment. If that was to remain but a pipe-dream, it was happily a different story with his gradually-developing wish to research more deeply into the classically Watsonian question of the number of plant species to be expected in an average stretch of ground – the subject of an impressive paper that he contributed to *Watsonia* in 1963, in which his early statistical training came into its own. A grant secured from the Natural Environment Research Council (a signal achievement in

itself) not only made that possible, but also largely allayed the financial anxieties that had began to prey upon him as his time to retire approached.

Captivated by grid-square mapping and cursed with a home territory in which the administrative boundaries had been subject to numerous and substantial changes, John became a dedicated opponent of the long-standing vice-county system, repeatedly drawing attention to its drawbacks at conferences and in informal discussion. Eventually he took the opportunity of his Presidential Address in 1968 to advocate its wholesale abandonment and the adoption of 50-kilometre squares as the Society's unit for recording in its stead. No one could have put the case better, and he was undoubtedly more disappointed than he ever let on that his arguments failed to win enough converts to bring about that change.

It was probably the only major disappointment in a notably productive botanical life, in which he raised to a new high level of achievement the long and proud tradition in these islands of producing local Floras. It is as a local Flora-writer that he would surely wish to be remembered above all and the capacity in which his contributions are most obvious and likely to prove most enduring. But the B.S.B.I. more generally has cause to mourn the passing of a man who left his own very special mark on it, in the course of the many years in which he served it with singular selflessness, endearing himself to all of us who had the good fortune to know him.

D. E. ALLEN

MARY PATRICIA HAPPER KERTLAND  
(1902—1991)

Miss Pat Kertland had an enlightened upbringing and education which was Edwardian in the best sense. In her youth she travelled widely, including a trip to the Far East, went up to her local university and earned a higher degree. Her M.Sc. thesis, entitled "The ecology of *Divis*", was written while she was Hugh Wisnom Scholar at the University and formed the basis of a major paper in *J. Ecol.* **16**: 301–322 (1928).

She was blessed with the ability to use 'family money' without ostentation and was able to live much of her life in the way she wished, without the absolute requirement to hold the highest possible salaried post, though by training and intellect she would have had little difficulty in securing a senior position in any University.

She worked in the Botany Department of The Queen's University of Belfast, in which she had been a student, from 1929 to 1937 as Honorary Herbarium Assistant, as Demonstrator in Botany from 1937 to 1945 and as Curator of the Herbarium from 1945 to 1967. Within these few lines is encompassed a vast amount of work both personal and in the inspiration of generations of students, for although the Department was never large, it produced a number of outstanding botanists over the years on all of whom she had an influence; B. E. S. Gunning, M. Morrison and J. S. Pate immediately coming to mind. She was a colleague of Professor James Small and his successors Jack Heslop-Harrison and Eric Simon. The Herbarium collection was greatly enhanced and completely reorganized during her Curatorship. Her last great task was to oversee its transfer to the Ulster Museum (BEL) in the spring of 1968, though, technically, she had retired in the autumn of 1967. Her taxonomic work was meticulous and through it she got to know a large group of experts across the world.

From 1951, she was formally involved with the *Irish Naturalists' Journal*; at first as Assistant Editor with A. W. Stelfox for two years, then as Editor until 1976, when Mrs Elizabeth Platts succeeded her. After her retirement she continued to give both of her time and material resources and remained on the management committee until her death. A short appreciation of her period as Editor appeared in *Ir. Nat. J.* **19**: 1–2 (1977) and, with it, a reproduction of the pencil portrait created in 1973 by Raymond Piper which shows her in repose.

Through the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club she reached a wide audience as excursion leader and lecturer. Through the B.S.B.I. she became known to a wide spectrum of botanists and was unfailing in her assistance to members, at least to those of whom she approved, in the discovery, or rediscovery, of rare species across Ireland.

The *Irish Naturalists' Journal* fitted well into Pat Kertland's persona: it gave her the opportunity to do good by stealth. As Editor she encouraged the amateur naturalist in every way possible, often taking the barest bones of a scientific note and converting it to an acceptable technical standard. One recent project dear to her heart was the creation and publication of the *Flora of Lough Neagh* by John Harron (1986). This book, dedicated to her, reflects the encouragement of others and the drive which epitomised her life. She recognized the value of the data, and associated record specimens, which the author was collecting and, over a long period, catalysed a team to help him convert this raw material into the finished product.

I was privileged to be one of Pat Kertland's students in the early 1950s at a time when she took on extra duties after Dr Mary Lynn's early retirement due to unstable health (though happily she is still with us today). I can vouch for her ability as a lecturer, though, on field trips, her propensity to take both hands off the steering wheel to point out features of interest was disconcerting, to say the least.

In recent years ill-health struck cruelly; firstly increasing deafness and then sudden total blindness. This did not break her spirit: she moved to a nursing home, organized readers and continued to make her distinctive contribution to life.

I can do no better than end with a quotation from the Address by the Rev. Dr David Lapsley given at her funeral in late February 1991: "Most of all she is held in deep respect and affection because of her interest in people. She was a source of encouragement to others, this honest woman, with a manner that could be formidable and brusque. She appeared not to suffer fools gladly, but her words and deeds were constantly flavoured by kindness and generosity."

W. D. LINTON

#### EVAN ROBERTS (1906–1991)

When Evan Roberts died on 15 May 1991, at the age of 84, Wales lost one of her most outstanding field botanists of this century, a man whose special interest was the distribution and ecology of the arctic-alpine plants of Snowdonia and who became the acknowledged authority on them.

He was born in Capel Curig, the little village in which he was to spend the whole of his life. Even when he married, he went to live only a mile away, and following the death of his wife, Mabel, in 1969, moved back to the house where he was born, to spend his latter years with one of his sons.

On leaving the village school at 14, he found employment at the local slate quarry and worked there almost continuously until it closed in 1953. The work was hard, often dangerous, and poorly paid. It was these circumstances which eventually drove Evan on to the course which was to give his life a new dimension and himself so much pleasure and satisfaction. For, having married when he was 23, the increasing needs of his young family forced him to give up his treasured motor-cycle and consequently spend more time on the hills around Capel Curig.

As he was fond of recalling, one Saturday afternoon during this period proved particularly fateful. He took the path up Moel Siabod, the hill immediately behind his home, and, just before reaching the summit, came across a plant with beautiful purple flowers which he had never seen before. It was only after several inquiries that he found its name: the plant which had captured his imagination was *Saxifraga oppositifolia*. For him it proved to be the key to a new world and from then on Evan spent much of his spare time searching for it on other hills around Capel Curig. He got hold of a copy of J. E. Griffith's *Flora of Anglesey and Carnarvonshire* and thereafter searched for other arctic-alpine plants such as *Lloydia serotina*, *Polygonum viviparum* and many others.

A chance meeting with E. Price Evans, the notable ecologist, gained Evan a friend who had considerable influence on him. For Price Evans urged him to keep a full list of all the plants he found, with details of their locality, altitude, aspect and the nature of the local rock. Thus began the most thorough and systematic account ever made of Snowdonia's arctic-alpine plants and all that grew with them. Years of careful and laborious work went into the survey, so that at its completion the plant life of this area was better known than it had ever been before. Rare plants thought to be extinct were rediscovered; others were found in new localities where they were formerly unknown, such as, for instance, his discovery of *Dryas octopetala* on the remote cliffs of Creigiau Gleision,



8 km from its previously known site above Cwm Idwal. When he took Price Evans there to see it some time later, they found *Carex capillaris* near by, a new record for Wales and an interesting addition to the mountain flora of Snowdonia. Happily, both plants still survive in this remote spot, where they may be seen together with *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, *Polystichum lonchitis* and many other species found here by Evan.

In addition to his dedication and enthusiasm (and in spite of a defect in one eye) Evan was well qualified for the work he undertook – he was hardy and a skilful climber. During World War II he assisted in training Commando units in the techniques of rock-climbing. It was therefore no surprise that when the Nature Conservancy acquired Cwm Idwal as its first National Nature Reserve in Wales, in 1954, Evan was appointed to be its Warden. He was later promoted to be the Chief Warden in North Wales, a position he held until his retirement.

In this new post his unfailing good nature, unruffled manner and natural courtesy, especially when dealing with those who sometimes transgressed the code of conservation in the Reserves, made him universally respected. His generosity and readiness to share his knowledge of the mountains and their flora with all who sought his help, made him many friends over the years. His services were in great demand to lead parties of students and others around the Reserves and, indeed, anywhere in Snowdonia. The illustrated lectures he gave during the winter months (both in his native Welsh and in English) became very popular and did much to further an understanding of the conservation movement among the general public in North Wales.

Evan's concern for conservation was apparent long before he joined the staff of the Nature Conservancy. I recall his deep disappointment when a small bog near Capel Curig, in which, in 1946, he had found *Hammarbya paludosa*, was destroyed by forestry operations a few years later, in spite of his appeal for its preservation. But I have happy memories, too, of many botanical excursions with him on fine summer days to Cwm Glas and Clogwyn y Garnedd, where he could show me most of the rare plants as unerringly as if they were in his own back garden; and of one occasion when he took me to a rock crevice high up on Snowdon to see the very rare *Woodsia alpina*. To be with him for a day on the mountains was an inspiration, for he knew Snowdonia, its cliffs and crags, gullies and ledges like the palm of his hand.

Although he published very little, his detailed records were made available to the Nature Conservancy. Copies of them have also been deposited in the Library of the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff.

The value of his work on the mountain flora of Snowdonia was recognized by the University of Wales, in 1956, when it awarded him the richly deserved honorary degree of M.Sc. He was later to receive the M.B.E. for his services to conservation over a long period, often beyond the call of his official duties. He was, indeed, a remarkable man and his loss is irreplaceable. He will be remembered with affection and gratitude by those who knew him.

We extend our deep sympathy to his three sons and their families in their bereavement.

R. H. ROBERTS