

Obituary

JOHN MICHAEL MULLIN
(1947–1999)

Michael Mullin, or Mike as he was known to his botanical colleagues, family and friends, was born in 1947 in Tyneside into a large family of three brothers and two sisters. A few years later his family moved to Stevenage New Town, and his natural history interests were shown early; when he was five years old Michael went missing for most of a day, until found happily and totally absorbed in a study of the local frogs. As a teenager Michael's main interest was firmly focused on botany, and with a school friend he organised an exchange scheme of insectivorous plants. At fourteen he was seriously recording wild plants, helping John Dony on his *Flora of Hertfordshire* project at weekends and in school holidays, and later he worked with the Upper Teesdale Group from Durham University. Schooling was at Alleyne Grammar School from which he left with eight '0' level passes, but always with a tendency against authority, he left with a rude message to the headmaster watered in weedkiller onto the cricket square. Later from South Shields Grammar Technical School for Boys, he left with three 'A' level passes - one with distinction in Biology.

Mike started work as a Biology lecturer in various schools, soon adding field trips for Extramural Associations, and slide presentations. As a keen walker, cyclist and camper with a passionate interest to see every British plant, by the time that he joined the staff at The Natural History Museum (then the British Museum (Natural History)) Mike had an exceptional knowledge of field localities all around the British isles. Mike had met his wife Anne on field work at Malham Tarn in 1966, and together they had continued camping, walking and hitch-hiking to field meetings or to search for plants, collecting for herbarium specimens where appropriate.

From 1973–1990 Mike worked at the BM (Natural History), first as a student then as a Scientific Officer when he worked mainly in the British Herbarium curating collections. He participated in the British Museum Outer Hebrides project and was co-author with R. J. Pankhurst of the *Flora of the Outer Hebrides* (1991). Working in the Museum Mike acquired a phenomenal knowledge of plants from around the world, and was always prepared to spend much time researching plants brought to him for identification, and other botanical queries that came to him in the Department. As a member of the B.S.B.I. Meetings Committee, Michael had special responsibility for the organisation of the Annual Exhibition Meeting, which for many years was held in the Department of Botany each November, attended by several hundred members and guests - in the General Herbarium. Mike cycled to work and around London and his bicycle became his logo, his letters and memoranda notes being signed 'Mike the Bike' with a small cycle drawing below. He was also regrettably accident prone, and managed to get knocked off his bike on what surely must be a record number of times? In 1990 Michael was Assistant leader on a botanical tour to the Peloponnisos, but returned to find that staffing at the Museum had been re-organised and his post no longer existed.

For a number of years Michael then worked on short-term contracts, including with London Wildlife Trust as Project Manager/Warden of Gunnersbury Triangle Local Nature Reserve, as an Ecologist with a consultancy firm, as a Lecture Course Organiser at St Mary's College, University of Surrey, and as an Ecologist with the London Ecology Unit. In 1997 he was appointed as a Tour Leader with Naturetrek Tours, taking groups to the Himalayas, Madeira, Portugal etc. Here, Mike had really found his niche and he could have continued as a travelling lecturer for a long time. As a brilliant teacher in the field, he had a talent for making plants and natural history interesting for a wide range of people. I recall meeting him unexpectedly on Wengen Station in the Bernese Oberland, surrounded by his group and recently returned from Sikkim; he was dressed in white with a topee, a cane and looking every inch the genial traditional botanical explorer. Unfortunately, after Sikkim the first signs of the illness which was to take his life became apparent. In spite of a courageous fight against the cancer, Michael died on 2 August 1999.

Colleagues from the Department of Botany attended his funeral with representatives of his other interests. Michael described himself as having 'eclectic tastes in music ranging from classical and folk to New Age etc.' He had a deep interest in dancing with the Cotswold Morris, and with his

family and friends travelled to dance in Britain and also to Spain and France. Michael Mullin died sadly young leaving much promise and unfinished projects. We extend sympathy to his wife Anne and their daughter Fiona, and to his many friends – he will be sadly missed. On April 9 2000, a memorial bench to Mike at Gunnersbury Triangle L.N.R. was celebrated with 'a toast and some tales'. Friends commented 'it was a grand party and Mike would have loved it' but Anne said 'I am not so sure, he would have been gnashing his teeth at not being able to get at the beer.'

MARY BRIGGS