

## Obituaries

### JOAN FLORENCE HALL (1919–2004)

With the death of Joan Hall on 28 August 2004 after a short illness we have lost one of the rapidly diminishing number of stalwarts of the BSBI who took our society by what David Allen called “full steam ahead” into a “golden period”, i.e. the 1950s, when the BSBI as we know it today started to take shape. The defining activity in that period was of course the field work for the 1962 *Atlas of the British Flora*, in which Joan, along with her husband Peter, was deeply involved.

Joan Hall was born on 22 February 1919 in Folkestone, Kent. Joan’s father died early in her life, and her mother was an accomplished studio photographer who often travelled away from home, so Joan was largely brought up by her grandmother, of whom she became extremely fond. Joan excelled at school, and gained a scholarship to the grammar school and then, in the late 1930s, a place at East London College (later Queen Elizabeth College, University of London) to read Chemistry. Unfortunately at about that time her grandmother became seriously ill and Joan characteristically passed up the opportunity of University life to nurse her. In any case war broke out, and after her grandmother’s death Joan took up infant school teaching, at first in London and later while evacuated to the West Country. She then sought a more demanding job that was closer to her interests in chemistry and moved to Manchester to work on quality control for the Scientific Civil Service in a paint laboratory. After the war this moved to Risley, Cheshire, where she met her future husband Peter, whose job had also taken him there in 1946.

Their favourite spare-time occupation in their first years together was walking, especially tramping the moors in Derbyshire and Yorkshire. I remember Joan telling me, when I moved to Manchester in 1962, that after a day on the moors their trousers were covered in black soot from the factories in the valleys, before the Clean Air Act came into force. In the late 1940s the Risley laboratory closed down and they were moved to Woolwich, Joan to continue working on paints and adhesives and Peter on fuels and lubricants. They were married in the Kensington Registry Office in 1950.

During their walks they became interested in the plants that they saw and frustrated at not knowing their names. An increasing fascination with plants led them to join the BSBI and the London Natural History Society in 1952, in both of which they became prominent and influential members, and they were founder members of the Kent Field Club in 1955. After their return to London they spent a holiday walking the Pennine Way, via Youth Hostels.

During the 1950s Joan and Peter rapidly became expert field botanists, and gradually, as their expertise became more widely known, they took on greater roles in organising field work for the societies, and many less expert botanists, such as myself, benefited enormously from their kind and patient tuition. Peter became the BSBI Field Secretary in 1956, and Joan and he participated in all the field meetings concerned with *Atlas* recording until the *Atlas* was published. Perhaps their most notable discovery was of *Spiranthes romanzoffiana* in South Devon in 1957, still the only English or Welsh locality and the most southerly site in Europe. Although they were very much an equal partnership, Joan was happy to remain in the background and simply take pleasure in Peter’s achievements. She served on the BSBI Development and Rules Committee from 1959 to 1965, and was Minuting Secretary to Council from 1963 to 1967. Joan also prepared by hand many of the nearly 1000 maps in Peter’s *Sussex Plant Atlas* (1980).

In 1969, aged 50, Joan retired from her profession and could then devote more time to her love for plants, both wild and cultivated. She was an expert gardener, both skilled and knowledgeable, with a special interest in alpinists, lilies and penstemons, and was a keen participating member of the Alpine Garden Society and of the National Trust. Her expertise was much needed since for many years her garden was on the chalky boulder clay of North Kent. Another of Joan’s talents lay in tailoring and needlework, skills learned from her grandmother, and she made almost all the clothes worn by her and Peter to a fully professional standard.



Joan Hall at an *Atlas* field meeting around 1960

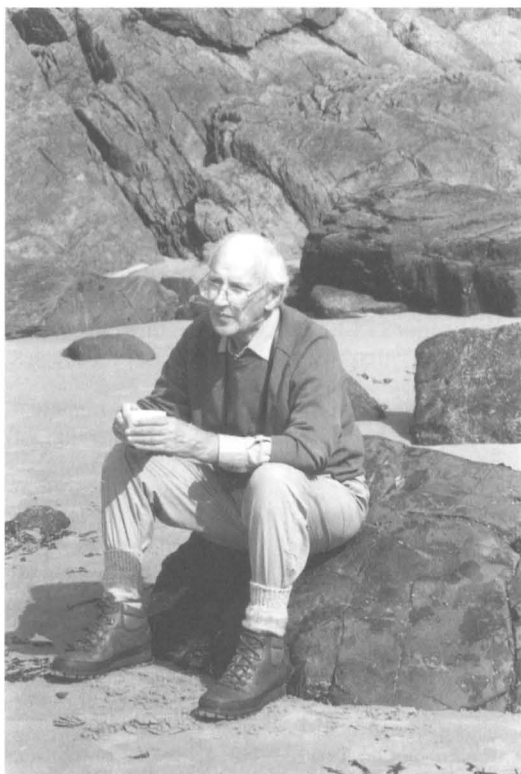
Soon after 1977, when Peter retired, they escaped the over-crowded south-east to live in a rural house just outside Monmouth, where Joan took over a larger garden overlooking the River Monnow. During their time there they attended many B.S.B.I. and local field meetings and so made new friends. In 1994, when the garden proved too large to maintain, they moved again to a flat in Poole, where Joan created and enjoyed a tiny balcony garden.

Many will wish to extend their sincere sympathies to her husband Peter, to which I add my thanks for most of the above biographical details.

CLIVE STACE

ALLAN MCGREGOR STIRLING  
(1924–2004)

Allan Stirling joined the Botanical Society of the British Isles (B.S.B.I.) in 1954 and was actively involved with the Society until his death. In particular, he was appointed plant recorder for Dunbartonshire (v.c. 99) in 1961, transferring to Ayrshire (v.c. 75) in 1987. In the 1960s–1970s he was a member of the Committee for the Study of the Scottish Flora (C.S.S.F.), a joint undertaking involving the B.S.B.I. and the Botanical Society of Edinburgh (B.S.E.), whose aim was to promote projects in Scotland – e.g. the C.S.S.F. instigated recording which culminated in the 1985 publication of *A Map Flora of Mainland Inverness-shire*. Elected a founder member of the B.S.B.I. Committee for Scotland in 1977, he became its first Vice-chairman and second Chairman. He served on the committee again from 1986–91. He was joint editor of the *B.S.B.I. Scottish Newsletter* for Issues 1–26 (1979–2004). In 1993 he gave the formal presentation at the Scottish Annual Meeting, the subject being the “Flora of the Vice-county Ayrshire”. It was subsequently reported that the talk had given the history of plant recording, along with a description of the geology and topography that dictate the habitats of the area, with particular attention to the flora of Ailsa Craig. The special botanical features and local plant rarities had been splendidly illustrated.



Allan Stirling at Knock Bay, near Portpatrick in 1994.

Being an excellent photographer he was a frequent contributor to the post-supper presentation of colour transparencies and tabled many interesting exhibits. When leading field meetings, he shared his expertise willingly according to the level of knowledge of those attending. In general, he was very unstinting in sharing his time with others.

His interest in wild plants was kindled when, as a student at the West of Scotland Agricultural College, he was sent for practical experience to work on a hill farm on the west side of Loch Lomond. As part of his course, he was expected to identify 100 different plants growing on the farm. Initially, he took the National Diplomas in Agriculture and Dairying and after War and National Service in the R.A.O.C., obtained the General Agriculture Diploma in 1949. After qualifying he worked in the Bacteriology Department of the West of Scotland Agricultural College, engaged in Farm Advisory work and part-time lecturing. He then became a cheese and butter grader, working for a time in Chester, before returning north to become Assistant Manager of a Milk Powder Factory of the Scottish Milk Marketing Board. In 1962 he was appointed Technical Officer of Creamery Production at the head office in Glasgow.

At the time of the recording project for *Atlas of the British Flora* (1962) he teamed up with Alfred Slack, by camping out overnight they were able to explore some of the more mountainous areas of Scotland. He developed an interest in hawkweeds, going on excursions with Archie Kenneth and they made significant contribution to the study of the genus in Scotland; initially just collecting, but subsequently becoming knowledgeable. Specimens presented to the Cambridge Botanic Garden about 1960 formed a valuable addition to their collection. A summary of their findings appeared in *Watsonia* (Stirling & Kenneth 1970). Working with Anne Sleep on the 'false serpentine spleenwort' *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum* subsp. *corruncense* (Page 1977) (=subsp. *silesianum* Milde); he visited serpentine outcrops all over Scotland, taking many tiny glass tubes and preservative for pieces of frond. Having learned of the re-finding of *Polystichum xillyricum* (*P. aculeatum* × *P. lonchitis*) in Ireland in 1972, he surmised that a likely site would be on the limestone scree at Inchnadamph in Sutherland. Accordingly, he paid a visit in 1973 and (with permission from the Nature Conservancy) fronds taken from three plants which he considered to be likely candidates, were confirmed by Dr Sleep to be the hybrid. Later in the year they both visited the site and discovered 39 plants. The discovery constituted the second British record. With the help of Dick Roberts he became an expert at identifying the *Polypodium* spp. and their hybrids. He had made a study of base-rich areas and with A. R. found eleven sites for *Polypodium cambricum* in Scotland, and one for the only known site for *P. xfont-queri*, its hybrid with *P. vulgare*, at Maidenbower Craigs near Dumfries (Rutherford & Stirling 1973). They also made exploration trips to discover which *Lamiastrum* subspecies were established in central Scotland – the ramping *L. galeobdolon* subsp. *argentatum* or spangled forms of subsp. *montanum*. The resulting information was published in *BSBI News* (Rutherford & Stirling 1987) and the differentiating features in the Plant Crib 1998 (Stirling & Rutherford 1987). In addition, he had a good working knowledge of a number of other critical genera: e.g. brambles, dandelions, roses, willows and sedges.

His knowledge of plants was not limited to Scotland. He botanised in other parts of Great Britain and as co-recorder is credited with the first record for Wales of *Eriophorum gracile* (Slender Cottongrass). Further, he went with the C.S.S.F. on their annual field meetings to Scandinavia or

Europe and attended foreign meetings led by B.S.B.I. members, in particular to south Spain. By taking ivy cuttings from a wide range of sites, he laid the groundwork for the *Hedera* research by Hugh McAllister at Ness Gardens, Liverpool University, which led to the *Hedera* account in *Flora Iberica* (Valcarcel *et al.* 2003).

His experience and dedication were appreciated also by other societies. He served as an office bearer in the Glasgow Natural History Society continuously from 1963–2004. In particular, at various times he held the offices of President, Treasurer, Convenor of botany and Editor of Short Notes for the *Glasgow Naturalist*. In recognition of his contribution, he was elected an Honorary Member in 1995. He had an interest also in bryophytes (joining the Bryological Society in 1963) and became acknowledged by fellow bryologists as having a ‘good eye’ for even the most inconspicuous of species.

To our knowledge, he had between 45 and 55 publications (10 as co-author with P.M.). Most were related to the west of Scotland – mainly new native or alien records, distribution of a species or site recording.

The B.S.B.I. are extremely grateful to the Stirling family for donating not only the botanical records and VCR material but also much of his botanical book library and vast collection of Scottish geological maps. The B.S.B.I. Scottish Officer, Jim McIntosh is now the ‘proud owner’ of an almost complete set of botanical atlases and Scottish floras, which will be immensely useful to his work. The geological maps are being dispersed, along with the copious extra v.c. 75 records and notes, to vice-county recorders around Scotland. Alison Rutherford has, at present all the VCR material safely stored. The remainder of the books, along with his photographic slides and microscope have been presented to the Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum. Allan Stirling accumulated an enormous private vascular plant and bryophyte herbarium. The specimens were carefully pressed and kept between newspaper pages, with detailed annotations along the margins. Although this collection is predominantly from west and central Scotland, it also includes much material from other parts of the British Isles and abroad. *Pteropsida*, *Rubi* and *Hieracia*, three of his particular interests, are very well represented and there is also an appreciable collection of named *Taraxaca*. He has bequeathed this invaluable collection the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh Herbarium, whose curating staff are most grateful, if rather daunted by the processing task ahead. It required two crammed-full carloads to transport the packages! To the end he resisted new technology – persisting with his typewriter and card indices.

He was frequently asked to leave a botanical curriculum vitae to aid anyone who might be involved in writing an obituary. However, it was appreciated that its production would be unlikely on account of his natural diffidence. It is hoped that no item has been left out which was of special importance to him. In 1972 J. E. (Ted) Lousley had told one of us that Allan Stirling was shaping up to be one of the best Scottish field botanists. This prediction was justified – Allan Stirling was definitely one of the best.

We are grateful for information supplied by John Mitchell, David McCosh and Jim McIntosh.

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PETER MACPHERSON & ALISON RUTHERFORD