

Obituaries

FRANKLYN HUGH PERRING (1927–2003)

Dr Frank Perring, who died of cancer on 11 October 2003, did as much as any other individual to influence the activities of the B.S.B.I. in the second half of the twentieth century. As a young man his partnership with Max Walters ensured the successful completion of the *Atlas of the British Flora* (1962). This initiated a new era in natural history in the British Isles and much of northern Europe, popularising a method of displaying the results of recording which was to become almost universal at both national and local level. Subsequently he led the Society into a close partnership with the Nature Conservancy and its successor bodies with the recording of rare species for the first British *Red Data Book* (Perring & Farrell 1977, 1983), before playing a key role in developing the modern Wildlife Trust movement.

EARLY YEARS

Franklyn was born at Forest Gate, East London, on 1 August 1927, the son of Frank Arthur (an antiques dealer) and Avelyn Millicent Perring. His early years were spent at Woodford Green at the edge of Epping Forest and at a weekend cottage on the Blackwater estuary. Here, encouraged by his Uncle Stanley, a biology teacher, he became interested in natural history, climbing ancient trees, catching crabs, roach and perch and collecting wild flowers and frogspawn. He received a further stimulus from C. J. Sims, his biology master at Earls Colne Grammar School. After National Service in the army in Northern Ireland, India and Malaya he read Natural Sciences at Queens' College, Cambridge, obtaining his B.A. degree in 1951 with a 2i in Botany. He went to University thinking that he wanted to be a plant pathologist, but "six weeks in the long vacation in a Pathology Laboratory cured me of that".

In 1949 Frank and his first-year undergraduate friend Richard West decided that they would like to find somewhere in Britain to carry out a botanical survey in the summer vacation where nobody had ever done

one. Their enquiries in the Outer Hebrides led to a letter from Peter Morrison of Heisgeir (the Monach Isles) which ended "Come on, boys!" Thus encouraged, they hitch-hiked in a lorry to Glasgow and after two whole days arrived at Paible, from which they reached Heisgeir in a lobster-boat. They used the deserted schoolhouse on Ceann Ear, built in the 1880s, as a base for their studies, returning the following year to complete the work, when they were joined by Michael Locke, a like-minded zoology student. Recognising the potential of the building as a base for fieldwork, in 1953 they wrote to Inverness County Council offering to buy it; they received a favourable reply and gave £50 for it, but "got a bit of a shock when £25 was added for legal fees". In 1966 the Monach Isles were declared a National Nature Reserve under agreements with North Uist Estate, the Commissioners for Northern Lighthouses and the three owners of the schoolhouse; subsequently their European importance has been recognised. Frank and Richard returned to Heisgeir in 1970 with Roland Randall, a visit that led to a Flora of the islands (Perring & Randall 1972). In 1996 Scottish Natural Heritage took a lease on the schoolhouse and in 2004 a rescue plan was launched, leading to several successful work-weeks. When a charitable Trust for Heisgeir was formed in 2004, together with the Friends of the Schoolhouse (Cairdean an Taigh-Sgoile), the owners gifted the schoolhouse to it.

Frank stayed in Cambridge to obtain a PhD under the supervision of Dr R. E. Hughes at the Department of Agriculture for his thesis *Studies in some chalk grassland plant communities with particular reference to climatic and edaphic gradients* (1956a). This led to three papers in the *Journal of Ecology* (Perring 1958a, 1959, 1960a). When Jon Bennie (2003) repeated Frank's observations 50 years later he commented that his "detailed, legible notes put my rain-smudged notebooks to shame". During his undergraduate and postgraduate years Frank's sense of humour was displayed by the practical jokes he played on the staff, and his editorship of the occasional publication *Tea Phytologist*.



FIGURE 1. Frank Perring at work in the Cambridge office of the B.S.B.I. Maps Scheme. Note the pile of 'bus tickets' on the desk in front of him and the row of county floras behind.

ATLAS OF THE BRITISH FLORA

In 1953 Max Walters asked Frank to become 'Senior Worker' for the B.S.B.I. Distribution Maps Scheme¹, a post he accepted and took up in October 1954. It appears from Frank's account (Perring 1992) that Max "popped the question" on a botanical excursion to Odsey; there is no suggestion that the job was advertised or that other applications were considered. However unorthodox these recruitment procedures may appear to a later generation, this was a job ideally suited to Frank's talents and the one in which he was to make his name. With boundless energy, much charm and a character which was completely impervious to discouragement, Frank set about mobilising the membership of the B.S.B.I., and the wider public, to record the plants of some 3,500 10-km grid squares in Britain and Ireland. The Society, described by Max Walters (1954) at the start of the scheme as "flourishing and expanding", was in a good position to take on the project, but it involved a considerable departure from its traditional practices. Senior figures, long set in their ways and with little experience of co-operative research, had to be persuaded to adopt the new taxonomy of 'CTW' (first published in 1952), trained to read Ordnance Survey grid references and encouraged to use the unfamiliar field cards (hitherto used in only a few county flora schemes). Frank's first lecture on the scheme, he once related, was in North-East England, to an audience which included the formidable

Professor J. W. Heslop Harrison. Frank succeeded in recruiting even him to the cause, and Heslop Harrison was to contribute master cards to the scheme for the Hebridean islands, restricting his objections to occasional taunts in the pages of the *Vasculum*. B.S.B.I. field meetings were arranged to visit areas where resident botanists were absent, and a generation familiar with National Service soon came to refer to the new recording methods as 'square-bashing'. New recruits were sought from the wider public: a single article in *The Observer* by John Gilmour brought over 800 replies. In the Republic of Ireland, where manpower was particularly short, David Webb (sometimes accompanied by Frank) played a crucial role in field recording and data extraction. In addition to field work, the other aspect of data-gathering was the collection of records of rarer species from herbarium specimens and literature sources. In this too Frank played a major role, extracting many thousands of records onto 40-column 'individual record cards', colloquially known as 'bus tickets' (Fig. 1).

The extent to which the scheme drew on all available recorders is illustrated by the concessions made to less expert recorders. A special card was prepared for those unwilling to relinquish the taxonomy of Bentham & Hooker: those species which were too broadly defined to be meaningful in the 1950s were listed but lacked code numbers by the name, so that they would not be entered onto punched cards. Another card, specially designed for use by school children, listed the scientific and English names of 113 common and supposedly unmistakable species.

A key part of the project was the use of mechanised data-handling methods. Field card records were transferred to 'master cards' and then each one punched individually onto the 40-column cards, with holes denoting species code number, vice-county, grid reference and date. The cards (together with the individual record cards) could then be sorted into species and grid square order. They were then fed through a tabulator for mechanical mapping by a specially modified (and, at the time, unique) machine (Fig. 2). As so often happens, the time taken to process the records was underestimated, not least because the success of the scheme had brought in more data than expected. The initial plan to complete data collection in 1959 and publish in 1960 proved impossible and, "to the consternation of the Nature Conservancy", who, with the Nuffield

¹ Walters (1954), Walters & Perring (1956), Perring & Walters (1962), Perring & Sell (1968), Allen (1986), Harding & Sheail (1992) and Perring (1992) describe the scheme from various perspectives.



FIGURE 2. Frank Perring demonstrating the tabulator modified to print the maps for the *Atlas of the British Flora*.

Foundation, had financed the scheme, two extensions of the original deadline were required (Harding & Sheail 1992). The project was successfully brought to completion with the publication of the *Atlas of the British Flora* in 1962. Publication was celebrated at a special dinner in Chelsea on 28 April. It was on this occasion that Frank produced what was perhaps his most celebrated pun when, in paying tribute to Max Walters, he referred to “the most important factor in the Scheme – the ‘Max’ Factor”. In his speech Lord Hurcombe said that “although the Nature Conservancy had spent £25,000 financing the work they felt they now had good value for money”. He drew attention to the potential use of the *Atlas* in preventing the loss of treasured national resources, an early appreciation of its potential use in conservation work. Max Nicholson commented that “ornithologists ... had been put to shame by the botanists, and other Societies would soon have to follow the lead given by the B.S.B.I.” (Bowen 1962). These were perceptive words, and the *Atlas* proved to be one of the most influential natural history books published in the 20th century.

OTHER WORK AT CAMBRIDGE

1954–1964

While taking part in the more general work of the Botany Department, Frank became interested in *Arctium*. With Peter Sell, he grew a large range of *Arctium* plants in an experiment which covered half an acre of experimental plots in the University Botanic Garden (Sell 2004). This led to an early piece of ‘network research’ in which B.S.B.I. members were invited to measure plants in the field (Perring 1960b), to Frank’s account of *Arctium* in *Flora Europaea* (1976a), his one formal contribution to that major collaborative project, and eventually to the taxonomic conclusions summarised in the recent volume of Sell & Murrell’s (2006) *Flora*.

In tandem with work for the *Atlas*, during the 1950s Frank gave special attention to botanical records for Cambridgeshire (v.c. 29). Max Walters was B.S.B.I. vice-county recorder from 1949 to 1961, then handed over to Frank, who served until 1971. They worked on the vice-county records with Peter Sell, publishing lists in the B.S.B.I.’s *Proceedings* and in *Nature* in

Cambridgeshire (e.g. Perring, Sell & Walters 1955, Perring 1956b, 1958b, Perring & Sell 1959) and planning for a new county flora in 1960 to commemorate the tercentenary of John Ray's *Catalogus* (the very first County Flora) and the centenary of C. C. Babington's *Flora of Cambridgeshire*. This was to be based on the Cambridge Natural History Society's card index and site lists, from which and from records submitted for the *Atlas* Frank compiled a master list. In the event *A Flora of Cambridgeshire* appeared in 1964, with a section on Bryophyta by Harold Whitehouse, and was the first County Flora for vascular plants to use O.S. 10-km grid squares (though not as yet dot maps) to indicate plant distributions.

CHARACTER AND INTERESTS

Frank was irrepressibly exuberant, with an infectious enthusiasm and a seemingly inexhaustible fund of ideas (as well as puns, some brilliant, some execrable). He made no real distinction between botany as his profession and as a spare-time passion, whether in fieldwork or when lecturing, teaching and writing. "One of Frank's great assets was his combination of a businesslike and at the same time cheerful manner. Bustle, in the best possible sense of the use of the word, I would always associate with him, and he never allowed rules and regulations to get in his way" (Sell 2004). He would indeed head straight towards his goal, oblivious of the fact that he was cutting across official pathways. When faced with an opposing argument he was never at a loss for a highly plausible response. He was not so much intolerant of opposition as incredulous that it could exist; criticism rolled off him, and he never bore a grudge. Nevertheless, those with more conventional minds could sometimes find him an exasperating colleague, and not all of them shared his forgiving nature. He was at his best with volunteers, whereas his methods could put considerable strain on those who worked under him. Few failed as spectacularly to cope with him as the Monks Wood secretary who, on her first day at work, left in tears at lunchtime, never to be seen again.

In an unpublished 'Biographical Sketch' written in 1965, Frank summed up his non-botanical interests:

"Rarely if ever relax – read perhaps two novels a year – at Christmas and during the summer holiday – nearly always spent abroad ... Favourite reading Jane Austen and

Dickens: take one of the latter on each long journey: I remember reading *Pickwick* in the *Pickwick Hotel*, San Francisco. Very fond of music, especially Mozart and Britten. Britten's *Spring Symphony* and Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro* and *Violin Concerto* spell out for me the Englishness of England which I want to see preserved."

To these could be added some equally English but less highbrow interests, including West Ham football club, rugby, horseracing (but not betting) and bell-ringing. And England was not his only love: he said earlier in the same *Sketch* that his travelling on field meetings had made him "a strong 'Britainophil', particularly fond of Ireland which I try to visit at least once a year – just to enjoy the slower pace and the brighter talk".

HEAD OF THE BIOLOGICAL RECORDS CENTRE

1964–1978

Originally, it was planned that, at the completion of the *Atlas* project, the Nature Conservancy would take over the machinery and record cards "as the basis of a permanent recording system" (Walters 1954). In 1963, the Nature Conservancy agreed to transfer Frank and his staff to the recently opened Monks Wood Experimental Station near Huntingdon. (Frank had become Director of the Distribution Maps Scheme in 1959 when Max Walters resigned after the first five years of the project.) Throughout his period at Monks Wood Frank served on the B.S.B.I. Maps Committee, which was renamed Records Committee in 1966, and he was Secretary of the Records Committee from 1967 to 1981. These twin positions gave him a dominating influence on the recording activities of the Society.

As Head of B.R.C., Frank's job was to continue the work on vascular plants initiated by the *Atlas* project and to set up similar schemes for other groups of organisms. The *Critical Supplement to the Atlas of the British Flora* (Perring & Sell 1968) dealt with several major critical genera, and included complete treatments of *Alchemilla*, *Euphrasia*, *Hieracium* and *Sorbus* and numerous other critical species, hybrids and infraspecific taxa. In the *Critical Supplement* the maps are accompanied by explanatory text, and the volume remains a valuable work of reference. It was another product of Frank's productive partnership with Peter Sell, and the accounts of *Hieracium* and *Pilosella*, contributed by Sell and West, occupied over a third of the book.

Frank had intended to round off the *Atlas* work with a book on the phytogeography of the British flora, and (with Max Walters) he had actually signed a contract to write one. However, even before the publication of the *Critical Supplement* his primary interests had switched to plant conservation, which was henceforth to be his major botanical pre-occupation. The maps in the *Atlas* had provided a very dramatic visual representation of the rarity of some species and the decline of others. Frank decided to focus B.R.C.'s botanical work on gathering more precise data on the distribution of the rarest species, and Miss M. N. Hamilton was recruited as a new member of staff to carry out this work. In 1968–69 lists of the known localities of species believed to be confined to 1–8 and 9–15 10-km squares were circulated to B.S.B.I. vice-county recorders, Nature Conservancy staff and others, with a request for updated information on each population. Additional impetus was given to the work by the Wild Plants Protection Bill, a Private Member's Bill introduced in 1968 by the Conservative MP Peter Mills which failed to pass into law but nevertheless highlighted the need for information on the rarest species. The work was widely publicised (e.g. Perring 1971a, Perring & Walters 1971) and eventually led to the pioneer *British Red Data Books: 1 Vascular Plants* (1977), compiled by Frank and Lynne Farrell, Noelle Hamilton's successor at B.R.C.

Frank's other initiatives at B.R.C. included 'network research' projects. The most successful of these was the Winter Mistletoe Count, a survey conducted in the winters of 1969/70 to 1972/73 to map the distribution of *Viscum album* at tetrad scale (Perring 1973). By 1975 four Network projects were underway, recording arable weeds, black poplars (*Populus nigra*), *Symphytum* taxa and holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) (see *Watsonia* 10: 294–299, 1975). The investigations of the taxonomy and distribution of *Symphytum* arose from the confusion of *S. officinale* and *S. xuplandicum* in the *Atlas* survey (Perring 1969a, 1970a, 1975). Frank took a particular interest in the genus, eventually writing, jointly with Professor Theo Gadella, the account in *The European Garden Flora* (Gadella & Perring 2000).

The early 1970s were a productive period in Frank's career. He edited *The Flora of a changing Britain* (Perring 1970c) and *The British Oak* (Morris & Perring 1974) with an entomological colleague at Monks Wood. This book was based on papers given at a highly

successful B.S.B.I. conference held at the University of Sussex in 1973 and achieved a wide circulation. It was often cited as a recommended text for University courses, not only in Britain but even as far afield as Iceland (where there are no oaks). His contribution (1974) to *The changing flora and fauna of Britain* symposium made effective use of distribution maps to illustrate "changes influenced by man" and "changes not influenced by man", as did several other papers in the same volume. Also published in 1974 was *English names of wild flowers* (Dony, Perring & Rob 1974) which provided standard English names by using hyphenation to generate a series of English 'genera' and 'species'. A standard list was required as 'CTW' did not provide English names for all species, but the subject proved to be remarkably emotive and the treatment developed for this slim volume continues to excite controversy.

Frank played a key part in launching *Atlas Florae Europaeae*. In this project the taxonomic work of *Flora Europaea* (1964–1980), edited by a team of British botanists including Max Walters, was united to the methods developed by Frank and Max for the *Atlas*, with the additional inspiration of Hultén's earlier *Atlas över Växternas utbredning i Norden* (Perring 1967a). As the first volume of *Atlas Florae Europaeae* stated, "a map presented by Dr. Perring at the Tenth International Botanical Congress in Edinburgh, 1964, which showed the 50-km square distribution of *Silene acaulis* in Europe, can be regarded as the starting-point of the present work" (Jalas & Suominen 1972). Frank acted as secretary to the nascent committee, visiting a number of European countries in 1965 and producing a further nine maps at Monks Wood before responsibility for the Secretariat was handed over to Helsinki in December 1965. During his period at B.R.C. he was the British regional collaborator on the Committee for the Mapping of the Flora of Europe, and he remained an active Advisor to the Committee until his death.

In addition to the formal recording initiatives he launched at Monks Wood, Frank gave generously of his time to inexperienced botanists, both young and old. The revival of the county flora tradition in the 1960s owed much not only to the recording methods pioneered by the *Atlas* team but also to the personal encouragement he offered to prospective authors. During 1961 and 1962 he was Secretary of a B.S.B.I. *ad hoc* committee set up, after a conference on Local Floras, to

draw up guidance for Flora writers; the results, including a list of recent and forthcoming Floras, were published in *Proceedings* in 1964 and revised in 1971 (Perring 1964, 1971b). In the preface to his *Flora of Flintshire*, Goronwy Wynne (1993) has recounted what happened when he visited Monks Wood to ask for Frank's advice on what he should do as vice-county recorder. "He suggested in no uncertain terms that it was high time that Flintshire had a county Flora of its own, and that I, as Recorder, should take it on. I left that meeting with a mixture of euphoria and sheer terror" Frank also ran many field courses, both for the Field Studies Council (especially at Preston Montford) and the Shropshire Adult College at Attingham Park in Shropshire, one of the counties he 'adopted'. Four of the latter courses, held between 1969 and 1972, led to the production of a duplicated *Flora of Attingham* in 1975. (Sarah Whild and Alex Lockton have recently published a new *Flora* based on a comparison of the current flora with that documented by Frank's teams.) Ten years later *Ecological Flora of the Shropshire Region* was published (Sinker *et al.* 1985). Frank was author of only one chapter, on biogeographical elements, but his influence in the preparation and recording for the project was much greater than this might suggest.

As Head of B.R.C., Frank worked tirelessly to promote biological recording on numerous journeys abroad and in international and national journals (e.g. Perring 1967b, 1969b, 1970b, 1971c, 1972, 1976b, c, Soper & Perring 1967, Heath & Perring 1975) as well as in many local publications. He presided over the computerisation of the database in 1970–71, when record cards were transported to London in batches of 300,000 to be transferred to magnetic tape. Thereafter he promoted the role of the Centre as a computer database and proved adept at publicising its activities. On one occasion in 1972, after an appeal for recorders on the television programme *Tomorrow's World*, B.R.C. was submerged under an avalanche of mail which it took his staff several weeks to process. The role of B.R.C. in zoological recording expanded after 1967, when John Heath was appointed to the staff. Frank was in the forefront of the campaign to establish Local Records Centres (Perring 1976d), although for many years their development was hampered by uncertain funding.

Although Frank's years at B.R.C. were marked by many successes, he was

increasingly hampered by his inability to work with his managers. B.R.C. was run as a self-contained unit which was not well integrated with other sections at Monks Wood. Even in the Nature Conservancy days B.R.C.'s frog emblem (it would now be described as a logo) had come to symbolise Frank's independence of view, and at one meeting Martin Holdgate, then a Deputy Director, commented that, as far as he was concerned, "the frog could jump into the lake". Matters became worse after 1973 when the Nature Conservancy was split to form two organisations, the Nature Conservancy Council and the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology. Frank lobbied as hard as he could to get B.R.C. placed in N.C.C., even inspiring the Earl of Cranbrook to enter a plea for this option in a House of Lords debate (12 April 1973). However, there were influential figures in N.C.C. who were determined not to have him in their organisation, and B.R.C. remained at Monks Wood under the new I.T.E. 'The split' traumatised Monks Wood, and Frank, in particular, was unable to get on with the rather rigid I.T.E. management. One occasion when the Director, John Jeffers, feigned sleep while Frank addressed a party of visiting dignitaries encapsulated the situation and became incorporated into Monks Wood's oral history.

It is also true that Frank was a much better tactician than he was strategist. Current initiatives brought out the best in him, but the long-term planning needed to run a database was often neglected in favour of the short-term fix. In his later years B.R.C.'s technological capacity actually decreased, as the *Atlas* methods became obsolete but I.T.E. failed to invest in adequate replacements. By the late 1970s, for example, mechanical mapping was no longer possible and maps were hand-plotted by members of B.R.C. staff. To some extent the true situation was concealed from the outside world by Frank's presentational skills, although his tendency to over-commit B.R.C. was a further cause of problems, especially as he could not rely on management support in meeting his promises. Frank was never interested in organisational niceties and made no distinction between the activities he undertook for I.T.E. and those which he undertook for B.S.B.I. I.T.E. management increasingly tended to regard him as a B.S.B.I. employee whom they had the misfortune to pay. When he left B.R.C. at the end of 1978 it needed all Dick David's negotiating skills as B.S.B.I. President to ensure that a replacement botanist was appointed to the staff.

BOTANICAL SECRETARY OF THE LINNEAN SOCIETY
1973–1978

Frank was an active Fellow of the Linnean Society of London for 39 years. As Botanical Secretary from 1973 to 1978, he helped to organise a number of successful conferences at Burlington House, including one on bracken, the proceedings of which he edited with Brian Gardiner, the Zoological Secretary, for publication in 1976 (Perring & Gardiner 1976). Professor Irene Manton was then President of the Linnean Society – its first woman President and a forceful character – and she and Frank made a good team. In January 1978 the Society celebrated the bicentenary of Linnaeus' death and Frank also participated in its visit to Sweden at the end of June that year. In April 2002 he organised a well-attended joint Linnean Society/B.S.B.I. meeting entitled *Where do we find and train the next generation of field botanists?*

WORKING AS A VOLUNTEER WITH THE
NATURALISTS' TRUSTS

Frank's involvement with the (then) Naturalists' Trusts began in 1956, when the Cambridgeshire and Isle of Ely Naturalists' Trust (CAMBIENT) was set up. He served on its Council continuously until a revision of the constitution brought about his retirement after a quarter of a century in 1982. He was Secretary of the Technical Committee from 1957 till the end of 1967, a post which gave him useful knowledge of the operation of nature conservation legislation (particularly the S.S.S.I. system) and experience in assessing the value and management requirements of specific sites. He became Secretary of a reformed Field Committee in 1964, a post he held till 1968, when he continued as a committee member. Initially this committee co-ordinated the efforts of 18 voluntary 'regional officers' and 25 'watchdogs' appointed to look out for developments likely to harm sites, and later it took on responsibility also for work parties and field excursions and began the formation of local groups; it thus combined interests which were dear to Frank throughout his life – the harnessing of volunteer labour (for both conservation and recording), and public education. In his 1965 'Sketch' he said, "I spend most of my time in the winter in practical conservation – leading parties bush clearing, or tree felling in the areas owned or administered by the Trust." From 1968 till 1970 he was Chairman of the Executive Committee.

Frank moved to Oundle in 1971 and the focus of his activities moved away from Cambridgeshire. He was already interested in the botany of Northamptonshire, having produced a paper for the B.S.B.I.'s *Proceedings* in 1955 on the plants of the county mentioned in John Clare's poetry and prose works (Perring 1955). By 1976 he was active in fundraising for the Northamptonshire Trust, organising Medieval Fairs at Southwick in 1977 and 1979 and at Ashton in 1981, to help purchase reserves such as Short Wood, Glapthorn Cow Pastures and Titchmarsh Heronry. He served on the Trust's Council and Executive Committee and as its Chairman from 1985 to 1987. He was joint editor of *The Nature of Northamptonshire* (Colston & Perring 1989). In 1987 Frank formed the Peterborough Wildlife Group, becoming its first Chairman. The Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust celebrated its 30th birthday in 1993; in the same year it, the Cambridgeshire Trust, the Beds & Hunts Trust and the P.W.G. united as a single Wildlife Trust and Frank joined the Editorial Board of its new publication, *Wildlife Action*.

GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY FOR
NATURE CONSERVATION
1979–1987

In 1979, at the age of 51, Frank left Monks Wood to become General Secretary of the Society for the Promotion of Nature Conservation, the umbrella body for 41 autonomous Naturalists' and Nature Conservation Trusts, which changed its name to Royal Society for Nature Conservation in 1981. Believing passionately in the importance of the Trusts and their work at the local level, he also recognised that the cause of nature conservation had to be promoted more widely and that the Trusts would benefit from more co-ordination and more financial resources. In 1981, against all odds, Frank was able to launch a new national magazine, *Natural World*, available to all Trust members. He campaigned to standardise the names of the Trusts, suggesting that "Naturalists' Trust" conjured up a 'fuddy-duddy' picture in many people's minds and even (rather implausibly) that there was a danger of confusion with naturalists; he argued forcibly that one name – "Wildlife Trust" – would present the Trusts as a united movement. There was considerable opposition at the time, and not all the Naturalists' Trusts had changed their names by

the time Frank retired, but in the end even the first-established Naturalists' Trust acceded and changed its name to "Norfolk Wildlife Trust" and R.S.N.C. itself has adopted the title "Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts". In October 1985 the Society launched its British Wildlife Appeal under the patronage of the Prince of Wales and the chairmanship of Sir David Attenborough, raising £15 million for the Trusts by the end of 1990. That the concept of a national appeal was accepted by the Trusts as the way forward reflects considerable credit on Frank's powers of argument and persuasion and it undoubtedly enhanced their standing. Frank enthusiastically embraced the burgeoning Urban Wildlife Group movement, successfully bringing it into the R.S.N.C. 'family' and seeing it as an opportunity to engage with a new and often younger audience. During his eight and a half years at R.S.N.C. the number of constituent Trusts rose to 48, Watch Club (created in 1975 for young people) grew rapidly, some 500 nature reserves were established (to reach a total of 1,680), over 30 Urban Wildlife Groups were founded, and the Trusts' membership rose from 129,000 to 180,000.

As in I.T.E., Frank's time at R.S.N.C. was not all plain sailing: he got on well with David Attenborough (Fig. 3), but his relations with Walter Lane, R.S.N.C.'s Executive Chairman, were stormy. Nevertheless, his energy, entrepreneurial flair and cheerful optimism usually triumphed and were widely appreciated by his colleagues. He was appointed O.B.E. in 1988 for services to nature conservation and claimed, characteristically, that it must stand for "Obsessive Enthusiasm".

AN ACTIVE RETIREMENT

1987–2003

Frank retired from R.S.N.C. on 31 July 1987 but continued to work tirelessly. An early project was to write, with Max Walters, *The Macmillan Field Guide to British Wildflowers* (1989), a guide illustrated by Andrew Gagg's photographs. Frank was primarily responsible for the "apt, pithy and sometimes amusing descriptions [which] are, in fact, the greatest merit of the book" (Oswald 1990), e.g. the "rugby-ball-shaped pods" of scurvygrasses and common whitlow-grass and the "wide-awake looking" flowers of common dog-violet. A less well-known publication was the text he wrote



FIGURE 3. Frank Perring with Sir David Attenborough at the President's Reception, Royal Society for Nature Conservation, November 1993. Photograph: R.S.N.C.

(anonymously) for a wild flower poster distributed in *Woman* magazine (14 May 1988); the same issue features "the hottest film heart-throb in Hollywood".

In 1988 Frank set up, with Anne Cryer, and chaired Wildlife Travel, a company offering expert-led overseas holidays in search of flowers and other wildlife and donating its profits to the Wildlife Trusts (more than £100,000 over 17 years). Frank himself led or co-led some 50 of the trips, first to the Mediterranean but later to more distant places including Australia, Nepal, St Petersburg and the Arctic, China and South Africa. Many of the company's clientele became 'regulars' and the annual get-togethers were gatherings of friends rather than customers.

Frank was elected President of the B.S.B.I. at the 1993 A.G.M. at Lincoln, giving his Presidential Address, 'Druce in Northamptonshire', the following year (Perring 1995). He was elected an Honorary Member in 1997. The rather belated Presidency perhaps reflected the reluctance of the Society to give such an unpredictable person a position of at least nominal authority, and the Honorary Membership was certainly long overdue. But as far as one could tell Frank took no offence and continued his cheerful service to the Society in several capacities. He remained a familiar figure at the Society's main meetings, and in particular at the Society's Annual Exhibition Meeting (which he attended for 49 successive years) and the Scottish Exhibition Meeting. When the Society put the sale of its publications in the hands of F. & M. Perring as 'BSBI Books', most members assumed that Frank was in partnership with his wife Margaret; in fact 'F.' was Margaret's father-in-

law Frank, and she fiercely defended her independence in this venture, even after the death of Frank senior in 1982, saying that it was one thing which she was *not* going to allow her husband to take over! However, he was usually to be seen helping on the stall at these B.S.B.I. meetings.

From the time of his PhD study Frank had a special interest in the flora of France. In retirement he took a lead in the B.S.B.I.'s relations with French and other European botanists, taking part in several joint events, culminating in the symposium *Botanical Links in the Atlantic Arc* held in Camborne, Cornwall, in May 2003; this was principally concerned with studies of plant species and species-assemblages occurring on or close to the Atlantic-facing coasts of Europe and was attended by over a hundred delegates from Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, France and Sweden. The resulting book (Leach *et al.* 2006) is dedicated to Frank's memory; though in failing health, Frank enjoyed the occasion, and he would have enjoyed also the pun in the preface (if indeed he did not originate it): "For a large number of species the Atlantic Arc is clearly an important refuge – not just an 'arc', but also an Atlantic *Ark*."

Over his last ten years Frank led a B.S.B.I. initiative, in collaboration with the Field Studies Council and the University of Birmingham, to help people get to grips with species identification and biological recording. He set up a working group within the B.S.B.I. (a characteristic move, allowing him to bypass the Society's committee structure!) to consider training and education and brought together an impressive array of botanical educators from around the country. Frank's vision was to launch a suite of training courses, backed up by academic accreditation, to provide a rigorous but enjoyable introduction to botanical fieldwork within the context of biological recording. The B.S.B.I. identified a special need among those working in nature conservation, so the main university certificate has been particularly designed for professionals in Wildlife Trusts, consultancies and Government Agencies and those seeking such employment, though keen amateur naturalists are not excluded. Many hundreds of students have now passed through the programme and it is recognised by employers as a course which will give practical and reliable identification skills.

Frank believed passionately in 'catching them young' (see Perring 1969c) and, with

handsome financial donations from the late Allan Hamerschlag, with whom he and Margaret became friends on a Wildlife Travel holiday in Australia, he worked with the F.S.C. to organise 'Spotlight on Plants' courses for sixth-formers at Field Centres. He also collaborated with John Hewitson of Oundle School and 'Science and Plants for Schools' and others to produce *A Key for Identifying British Trees and Shrubs* on the internet (www-saps.plantsci.cam.ac.uk/trees/). This friendship produced spectacular results for the B.S.B.I. after Frank's death, as in 2005 Allan Hamerschlag left the Society its largest ever legacy.

At Frank's funeral, on 24 October 2003, a very large congregation bade him farewell in St Rumbold's Church, Stoke Doyle, Northamptonshire, in a way he would have fully appreciated. Frank had been Secretary to the Stoke Doyle Parochial Church Council, and he was instrumental in changing the management of the churchyard so that it became a flowery meadow. At his remarkable memorial service Max Walters spoke of their long friendship: the text of his address is published in *BSBI News* **95**: 66–67 (2004).

FRANK'S CONTRIBUTION TO BRITISH AND IRISH BOTANY

We hope that this obituary gives some idea of the range of Frank's activities, though we have certainly not covered all those that are known to us, and of course there must be others of which we are unaware. Although the *Atlas of the British Flora* was planned before Frank joined the team, his creativity is apparent from his involvement in the *British Red Data Books: 1 Vascular Plants* and in *Atlas Florae Europaeae*, and in his role in reforming the Wildlife Trusts. He was sufficiently unorthodox to come up with new ideas and press for their implementation, while being just sufficiently orthodox to be able to work with established organisations. A constant theme running through his career was his desire to communicate his love of botany and belief in the necessity of plant conservation outward to new audiences. When harnessed, his energies could produce remarkable results, as the Maps Scheme showed. Subsequently no organisation perhaps succeeded in getting the best out of him, and certainly the tensions within the organisations in which he worked were more apparent. Nevertheless, his achievements were

formidable. With the exception of the nine years at R.S.N.C., the B.S.B.I. was central to his activities from the time he was asked to join the 'Maps Scheme' in 1953 until his death fifty years later. Frank can justly be regarded as one of the B.S.B.I.'s pivotal figures in the post-war period, one of those who did most to change it from the Society left by G. C. Druce when he died in 1932 to that which it had become at the end of the millennium.

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