

RONALD MALCOLM PAYNE

(1922–2010)

Ron Payne, who joined the BSBI in 1947, died on 2 December 2010 at Westcliff-on-Sea, aged 88. He had wide interests in entomology and botany, starting in his teens with Coleoptera, then taking up Odonata and Orthoptera, and concentrating on Diptera from 1960 to the 1980s. His life-long botanical interests then prevailed and he became an acknowledged authority on grasses and the floras of towns and walls.

Ron was born on 9 June 1922 in Balham, South London, the only child of Lawrence and Winifred Payne, and the family moved to Richmond in 1926. He was educated at Broomfield House private school in Kew and at East Sheen County School. His father Lawrence Gilbert Payne was a botanist who specialized in ferns, and was involved with the London Natural History Society from 1923 and went on to become its president; two uncles were also naturalists but there had been no previous interest in entomology in the family. Ron related (Payne, 1967) how he had become an entomologist at the age of 17 after not having been much interested in natural history as a child, not having succumbed initially to the family influences. However, when an uncle gave him a copy of *Common British Beetles* by Rev. C.A. Hall, this awakened his interest and started him on the Coleoptera. Ron's entomological contributions have been extensively recounted in Chandler 2011 and Chandler & Hawkins 2011, together with a full list of his publications. This account will therefore concentrate on his botanical interests.

Ron's career was in the civil service, in which he rose through the grades after joining the Board of Trade in 1939. He was not called up for active service in the Second World War as he had a heart weakness, but he was in the Home Guard. During the war he spent three years in Leicester, and then returned to London where he married Sheila Groves, a fellow civil servant, in 1948. From the early 1950s they lived at Loughton in Essex where

their two daughters Maggie and Heather were born. Ron was particularly active in the London Natural History Society, which he joined in 1942; he served on that Society's Council from 1948 to 1953 and for longer periods on the Entomology, Botany, Nature Conservation and Epping Forest Field Section committees. He was editor of the *London Naturalist* for 15 years from 1953 to 1967. During this time his first strictly botanical paper was published on the Ferns of Epping Forest in 1960, in which he claimed to have seen all but one of the species of ferns in the London area within a 4 mile radius of the 'Wake Arms' near the centre of the Forest. He also botanized widely elsewhere in Essex during this period and many of his records, particularly of ferns (he found *Gymncarpium dryopteris* new to Essex), appeared in the *Flora of Essex* (1974).

He was made an Honorary Vice-President of the London Natural History Society after a move to Cardiff precluded further involvement in the Society. The stay in Wales however was brief, as in 1969 he received a promotion and moved back to Essex to work in the Customs and Excise office at Southend, and the family then lived at Westcliff-on-Sea. Combining his entomological and botanical interests he enlarged on the work he had begun earlier (Payne, 1966) on the species of flies visiting flowers, and he produced a series of papers recording the flower visitors of particular plants (Payne, 1975, 1975, 1979, 1981, 1984).

In 1978 Ron and Sheila moved to East Harptree when he took up the post as Deputy Collector of VAT for the West Country. During his stay in the Mendips Ron's interests began to turn more to botany, especially to the grasses. He was involved in the Bristol Flora project and subsequently contributed the section on arable weeds and plants on walls in the *Flora of the Bristol Region* (2000).

Ron's grass collection began in 1943 when, while working in Leicester, he was encour-

aged by C.E. Hubbard to collect grasses from the Midlands for Kew. He amassed a large herbarium of grasses from all over the world, including many received from other collectors. This collection, which was donated to Reading University in 2004, comprised 4500 sheets of grasses representing over 1750 species, and according to Jury (2004) he was reputed to have seen all British grasses except *Poa flexuosa*. He speculated on the origin of the name Yorkshire Fog (Payne, 1989), but his botanical publications were mostly of a more general nature, and the flora of walls was a particular interest (Payne, 1978a, 1990b, 1998, 2001c, 2005d, 2010b and in press). He took part in many BSBI field meetings, including foreign tours. On these he ensured that the local expert guides did not neglect the grasses in favour of more showy flowering plants and found, for instance, the bizarre “caterpillar grass”, *Beckmannia eruciformis*, in Hungary in 1985. Ron was also involved in botanical meetings to the Alps and the Mediterranean, including to Morocco with Franklyn Perring.

Ron retired from the civil service in 1982 but he and Sheila remained at East Harptree until 1991, when they moved to Watlington in Norfolk. Whilst there, he became involved in the Norfolk Flora project and made a major contribution to the *Flora of Norfolk* (1999). He also made many local botanical contributions and was an active member of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society. He contributed to their journal (Payne, 1993, 1995), but following a disagreement with the Editorial Committee over presentation of his papers, he published his later botanical work while in Norfolk either privately: *The Flora of Walls in West Norfolk* (1998), *The Flora of Roofs* (2000b), and the *Flora of Ely* (2002c), or in *BSBI News* or in the parish magazine *Watlington Gossip*. His Norfolk botanical survey notebooks were deposited with Norwich Castle Museum. During this period he became BSBI referee for alien grasses, 1992 – 1998; and also for *Bromus* 1995 -1999. He said he received around 5-10 of the latter specimens for checking annually.

Following Sheila's death in 2007 Ron returned to Westcliff-on-Sea, where he spent the remainder of his life in a flat on his own. He rejoined the South Essex Natural History Society and resumed his study of the wall flora of that district. Due to his failing eye sight he was by then unable to drive, but undaunted, whenever possible, he set off every day in the flowering season, either on foot, scouring Southend for plants growing on walls; or by train to further afield, visiting towns and in particular churchyards, right up to Stratford and Barking in the east end of London, resulting in his most recent publications (Payne, 2010b and in press). During this period he was careful to record the precise location of his finds, and from January 2008 to within a few weeks of his death, he would send his handwritten lists of plants to Ken Adams (BSBI recorder for v.cc.18 & 19) on a daily basis by first class post. In response to the suggestion that he save them up and post them once a week to save on postage he replied that he might ‘pop off’ one day and the records would be lost. In addition any plants that he could not name were sent immediately by post to either Gillian and Ken Beckett or Ken Adams for ‘instant’ (chased up by phone call the following evening) identification. Only a short time before his terminal illness he had cataracts removed from both eyes in quick succession. This didn't stop him botanizing however; on both occasions he was out in the field the next day, delighted to be able to see in detail once again. He reckoned that the antibiotics would prevent any problems.

Apart from the Societies mentioned above, Ron was a Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society and of the Linnean Society. Throughout his life his greatest contribution was to local Societies, with which he became involved wherever he was based.

I am grateful to Ron's daughter Maggie Gibson for biographical details and the photographs of Ron included here, and to Peter Chandler and Roger Hawkins; and Keith Hyatt, for access to their entomological and LNHS accounts of his life.

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KEN ADAMS



Ron Payne at the age of 20 and on his 80th birthday