

## ROBERT WILSON (1943–2018)

With the sad death of Rob Wilson, Northamptonshire has not only lost its Vice-County Recorder but also a talented artist and photographer who was instrumental, with Gill Gent, in producing the first flora of the county since the work of G.C. Druce.

Robert (Rob) Wilson was born in Kettering on 22nd March 1943 and went to Kettering Grammar School and Nene College, Northampton. He trained as an architect, but his career developed in the area of graphic design.

Rob always had a strong interest in wild flowers, but before he fully developed this, his area of research was canals, narrowboats and, most of all, the canal people. He made many lasting friendships with the people who lived and worked along the canals, and was the author of several books. He also enjoyed creating activities for the children. His own boat was called Speedwell, an appropriate name for a botanist! He was also keen on the sport of motor-racing.

As Rob's botanical interests began to blossom, he joined a class on wild flowers given by Seán Karley, and through this he met Gill Gent. Gill encouraged Rob to persevere with his botanical studies and supported him when he joined her as joint Vice-County Recorder for Northamptonshire in 2004. He became the sole Recorder when Gill retired from the post in 2013.

Rob was a long-time member and President of the Kettering and District Natural History Society (the 'Nats'), and collaborated with Gill Gent in the production in 1995 of *The Flora of Northamptonshire and the Soke of Peterborough*, which together make up v.c.32. This was the first Flora to have been attempted since George Claridge Druce's *The Flora of Northamptonshire* in 1930, and the gathering of records by Rob, Gill and other Nats members took place over nearly 25 years. I think he must have enjoyed this, because 2012 saw the publication of a new edition of the Flora. It was originally intended as an update of the 1995 Flora, but grew into a whole new project. Records from the BSBI *New Atlas* (2002) were included, and volunteers

collected new records over five years. I count myself privileged to have been included among the volunteers as a very inexperienced botanist!

Close botanical friends of Rob included Jeff Best and Cliff Christie, as well as Gill Gent and her husband Peter. I first met Rob in 2010, and his gentle encouragement and patience were invaluable as I developed my own passion for plants. He organised meetings for botanists throughout Northamptonshire, and produced an excellent newsletter called *Wild Thyme*. In recent years this updated us all on progress with recording for the 2020 BSBI Atlas, and he was very active in recording for this until his illness. He made a number of first records for the county and his contributions to the BSBI Database go back to 1987 – some 35,000 records!

He was a man of many passions, including his wife of 40 years, Anna, and together they gave a home to a succession of much-loved rescue dogs. One of Rob's pleasures was to go on holiday, usually in May. He loved mountains and alpine regions in France, Italy, Crete and Northern Cyprus, and got to know several areas well – he acted as leader for some specialist group holidays. Rob's artistic side was given expression in the Christmas cards he designed and made for his friends and family. His appreciation of music was mainly in the genre of modern jazz and he loved the work of John Coltrane. He always supported Anna, taking an interest in her own pursuits such as her Shakespeare group, singing and the John Clare Society. He began keeping journals in 1986, and the numerous volumes record holidays and botanical adventures in meticulous detail, illustrated with his drawings and photographs.

Rob sadly passed away at home on 9th May 2018 after a battle with cancer. Rob will be greatly missed in Northamptonshire, and I hope that Brian Laney and I can live up to his splendid example as Recorders for Northamptonshire.

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Alyson Freeman