

OBITUARIES

WILLIAM ALDRED THOMPSON (1936–2019)

Bill Thompson, who died on 23rd January 2019, had been a BSBI member for 37 years. He was born in Edinburgh on 14th March 1936. His father was teaching at a school in Biggar at the time and Bill remained in Edinburgh until the outbreak of World War II, before spending the war years with his mother in Preston. After the war the family moved to Devon, where his father took up a teaching post in Exeter. Bill attended Hele's School, eventually being awarded an open scholarship to read Classics at New College, Oxford. After completing his national service in the RAF he went to Oxford in 1957, eventually attaining his degree in 1961. His interest in botany began during his university years. It all started when he was walking on Woodbury Common, in Devon, where he attempted to identify some of the plants.

After leaving university, Bill joined the Health Service as a graduate Trainee Administrator with the Manchester Regional Health Authority. His first appointment was in Preston, after which he moved to the Black Country in 1969, where he took up a position with the Dudley Area Health Authority. He was elected to the Institute of Health Service Administrators in 1972, achieving honours in the final examination. He spent the rest of his working life with the Authority, retiring as deputy group secretary in 1996.

During his time in the Midlands, Bill became an important contributor to four regional Floras. He contributed some 2,500 records for the *Ecological Flora of the Shropshire Region* (1985), mainly in the Bridgnorth and Ironbridge districts, but also found a number of rarities on old coal-mining waste heaps in Telford and along the Severn Valley Railway. Having made a close study of the regional hawkweeds (*Hieracium* species) he was the main contributor of such records from 1975 onwards. Subsequently, he was involved in recording in Montgomeryshire. *The Flora of Montgomeryshire* was published in 1995 and he and Peter Benoit were acknowledged as the two mainstays of the project from the outset, without whom the work could not have been produced. Bill provided records for a part hectad, and with Jim Bevan wrote the hawkweed section, but more importantly set up an expert filing system to store

details of the rarer plants of the vice-county, leaving an excellent database for the current status and history of these species.

In 1987, Bill joined the Worcestershire Flora Project, set up in that year with the intention of producing a new county flora. Bill initially took on the roll of coordinator and recorder for some of the northern hectads, although later on he made visits to several other hectads where the recording effort had somewhat diminished. The northern hectads included parts of the Black Country and south Birmingham district, all of which required a great deal of urban recording. It soon became apparent to me what an excellent all-round field botanist Bill was; his wide knowledge of alien plants, in particular, meant that there were many new county records for species so often conveniently ignored by average botanists.

In 2001, Bill and his wife Norma moved to Whaley Bridge in Derbyshire, and between 2001 and 2003 he contributed some 1,100 records for the north-west of the county around Whaley Bridge and Chapel-en-le-Frith. His move to Derbyshire meant that his input during the latter years of the Worcestershire project was rather limited. Nevertheless, for *The Flora of Worcestershire* (2014) he provided at least 30,000 records, and made a major contribution to the hawkweed and alien species accounts. I benefited greatly from his help, advice and knowledge throughout the project. In addition, the authors of the *Flora of Birmingham and the Black Country* (2013) had access to his v.c.37 records for the north of the county, many of which were the only records for some difficult and critical species which otherwise would not have been included. He also wrote the hawkweed section, and the fine collection of the regional hawkweeds he amassed is now housed in the National Museum of Wales.

Apart from botany, Bill also had a love of hill-walking, which had been nurtured during family holidays to the Highlands of Scotland, where he and his father spent days in the hills, and, with Norma, many hours were spent in the Brecon Beacons, Black Mountains and Snowdonia. He also eventually managed to find time to reach the highest point in each

of the English counties. However, his favourite walks were in the Lake District, and he requested that his ashes should be scattered on a Lake District summit of the family's choice. He also had a keen interest in football, initially as a supporter of Preston North End, at that time in the top flight, but latterly his interest was with non-league clubs, always watching the local team.

In 2006, Bill and Norma finally settled in Kirkbymoorside, in North-east Yorkshire, where he continued recording, producing many records, especially from the south of the county. He had been planning to write a local Flora for the Hambleton AONB, which now sadly will not happen.

I enjoyed many hours with Bill, discussing botany, determining voucher specimens and especially field

recording, each session usually ending up with some refreshment in the local pub. I will remember him as a modest and courteous man, very conscientious and thorough in all he did, and also having a wry and cheeky sense of humour. When he moved away from Worcestershire he was a great loss to the county's botanical scene.

Bill is survived by his wife Norma, two sons, a grandson and granddaughter. I am grateful to Norma for providing me with information about his early years and career, and to the botanists who provided details of his botanical contributions before and after his time in Worcestershire.

Roger Maskew