

## MICHAEL MAURICE SHAW (1949–2020)

*BSBI Handbook No. 20 Hawkweeds of South-east England* was reviewed enthusiastically by Geoffrey Kitchener in *BSBI News* 145 and its author lived long enough to be gratified by its reception and its sales. He did not, alas, realise his ambition of working on a companion volume covering the South-west.

Michael Maurice ('Mike') Shaw was born on 7 March 1949 in Bristol to Maurice and Florence Shaw, née Ralphs. Mike was four when his father was appointed Bursar of Coton House, a residential training centre for electrical engineering



Mike Shaw at the Booth Museum of Natural History (Brighton) in 2015, working on the herbarium of the late A. Wilberforce Jones. Nick Sturt

apprentices at Associated Electrical Industries outside Rugby. The family moved and it was while roaming free in the grounds of Coton House and the nearby village of Churchover that Mike and his younger brother Peter developed an intelligent interest in everything they saw around them. Peter recalls that Mike's study of botany began in these 'idyllic years' and he was already pressing specimens in a tennis racket press which he had adapted for the purpose.

Their father's position with AEI rendered both Mike and Peter eligible to sit the AEI scholarships to Rugby School, which they both won, gaining places as day-boys. Taking the sciences at GCE A Level, Mike steered himself towards medicine and went on to train at Guys Hospital (1967–72). It was during a placement at Weir Hospital, Balham that he met a young nurse, Jean. They were married in his final year. Their long, happy marriage produced Roger, an IT consultant, and Elizabeth, a teacher.

After a few years in different medical posts Mike opted for general practice in 1977 and moved to Aldwick Bay, Bognor Regis. His innate sense of duty made him a respected and popular family GP but also limited his field botany for many years, although he did find time for that traditional pastime of doctors, golf. His partners knew to their cost that he was totally averse to playing the safe shot and thus one imagines that Mike will have kept up his plant studies while searching for his ball in the rough! With the family growing up, there was gradually more scope for botany. He was already a member of BSBI and the Wild Flower Society when he was introduced to the Sussex Botanical Recording Society (SBRS) by Paul Harmes, BSBI Recorder for East Sussex; they had struck up an acquaintance on a few WFS events and Paul recalls that Mike decided to join during a particularly exhilarating meeting on Amberley Wild Brooks at which several prominent SBRS members were present.

It was not long before Mike impressed not only Paul but also Paul's West Sussex counterpart Alan Knapp, so that he was inveigled onto the SBRS Committee. With the untimely death of Alan in 2010 it was natural that the mantle of Recorder should

fall upon Mike – in any case there was no escape as Mary Briggs had him in her sights. He performed his role with all the thoroughness and aplomb which he brought to his medical career, forming a particularly complementary partnership with Paul in the East. Similarly, Mike was automatically co-opted onto the SBRS Working Group preparing a new county Flora. Here his thought, care and capacity for sheer hard work proved invaluable as the team struggled to overcome the loss of Alan and to boil down a mass of data into a coherent treatment of the vascular plants of Sussex present and past.

Mike stepped down from v.c. 13 Recorder at the end of 2015 to take responsibility for the Flora accounts of two critical groups, working on *Rubus* subgenus *Rubus* with David Allen and Rob Randall, and on *Hieracium* with the help of David McCosh. In addition Mike contributed many of the close-up photographs of plants in the text and his skill with the digital camera is certainly to the fore in the *Hawkweeds of South-east England*. On many field meetings of the SBRS Mike proved a popular leader or companion, always ready to help with a tricky determination or defuse tense debates with a jocular remark. The seriousness which he brought to his school studies was still evident in the form of careful preparation for any outing he was to lead and diligent homework afterwards as he worked on specimens gathered and faithfully reported back.

In what was to be his last season of field botany Mike, like many in 2020, re-discovered his home patch, in this case the western end of the West Sussex coastal plain, and in terms of numbers he was one of the most productive Sussex recorders over that summer. He managed to re-find a number of species which had previously evaded him when looking for missing tetrad records in the final stages of the survey for the *Flora of Sussex*; but as a dedicated lover of aliens and adventives it was unusual birdseed germinations or something strange on the allotments which gave him the most pleasure. Among his crop of treasures in 2020 were *Amaranthus blitum* (Guernsey Pigweed) growing as a pavement weed in Bognor Regis (first W. Sussex record in 20 years), *Malva alcea* in another pavement crack at Nyetimber (first W.

Sussex record) and a self-sown plant of *Paulownia tomentosa* (Foxglove Tree) at the base of a wall in the car park at Bognor Regis railway station.

I visited Mike in October. He had been given his cancer diagnosis a month or two before and decided not to take up the treatment offered. We sat in his sunny conservatory and talked of plants. The garden was immaculate; a few choice *Hieracia* were in discreet cultivation behind a shed. He told me he was tidying up his *Hieracium* herbarium for despatch to the Natural History Museum (**BM**). We planned to meet again soon but the Covid situation put paid to that and in the event Mike's health declined quickly; he died peacefully on 12 December. The pared-down funeral dictated by Covid restrictions meant that the large number of botanical friends who would have wanted to gather

to pay their respects were unable to attend, but the written tributes read out by the minister in front of family presented a vivid portrait of the man. The esteem in which his medical colleagues held him was very evident but a fellow Rugbeian also gave us a glimpse of the young Mike – studious in lessons but possessed of a wicked sense of humour outside them. It reminded me of an occasion when I was on the receiving end of Mike's mischief. We were out recording together for the Flora at a quiet country station: Mike spotted an official approaching clearly about to draw attention to the large Keep-out signs but instead of warning me he retreated quietly in order to enjoy my embarrassment from a safe distance.

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Nick J.H. Sturt