

ERIC FAIRGRIEVE GREENWOOD MSC, FLS, FRSB, FMA (1938–2022)

Eric Greenwood was born on 15 February 1938 in Preston, the younger son of Herbert and Alison Greenwood. His father came from a long line of proud Yorkshire folk and his mother was of Scottish descent. His older brother Duncan Greenwood FRS (1932–2010) became an eminent soil scientist. Eric was the first in either the Greenwood or the Fairgrieve family to be born in Lancashire. His deep research interest in family history started as a young child, talking to his grandfather Fairgrieve. His grandmother Fairgrieve, a Headmistress, failed miserably to teach him to read, as did his primary school. He was nearly ten when he finally ‘broke the code’ and after that he never looked back, although his spelling was idiosyncratic and his handwriting remained an issue as family members, museum staff and botanical colleagues can all testify.

In his schooldays Eric attended the Friends School in Lancaster, a long daily return journey which was never a chore because, like so many boys of that era, he was able to indulge his passion for steam trains. Having been brought up at Fulwood, Eric was a lifelong supporter of Preston North End and was a follower during the glory days of his hero Tom Finney. Throughout his life he checked the football scores each week and was happy if Preston stayed comfortably in the middle of the Championship.

Eric’s interest in botany started at an early age and he learned to garden as a wartime child when his family turned their garden into a smallholding; he had plenty of tales from those challenging but satisfying times. We know from the BSBI Database that he recorded Mistletoe on Rowan at Victoria Avenue, Fulwood, Preston c.1950 at the age of 12. He later became an active member of the Preston Scientific Society.

Despite Eric’s early educational struggles he studied Botany at King’s College, Durham and the University of Newcastle where his research covered the colonisation of colliery spoil heaps. On his journeys to and from Preston Eric would devise complicated train routes on obscure lines. Barnard Castle, Hawes and Aysgarth were some of the stations he passed through on lines that are now long gone but have developed into wonderful wildlife sites.

After attaining his master’s degree Eric returned to Preston. Once the *Atlas of the British Flora* had been published in 1962, it was clear that a keen Vice-county Recorder was needed for West Lancashire (v.c. 60). Eric had joined the BSBI in 1963 and his skills as a keen botanist had been noted by the local botanical community, so he was appointed in January 1964, following two recorders with very short terms of office. He was thus able to attend the BSBI’s ‘Local Officers’ Conference in Cambridge in September 1964. With help from members of the Natural History Section of the Preston Scientific Society, he set out to rectify the dearth of records from the vice-county. Local recording had hitherto tended to be limited to 10-km precision and Eric decided to begin recording at the tetrad level, a major step forward in those days. The recording team appear to have immediately got to work with the aim of producing a flora.

Eric briefly pursued a teaching career until he was appointed Keeper of Botany at the City of Liverpool Museum in 1966, where he remained in various guises until retiring in 1998 as Keeper of the World Museum Liverpool. Being based at the museum, Eric played leading roles in the Liverpool Botanical Society. He was a council member for



Eric Greenwood leading a meeting of the Lancashire Naturalists' Trust on the Lancaster Canal, 1967.
Lancashire Evening Post

56 years, including a long term as President, and he led numerous excursions, particularly in v.c. 60. He was editor of a major work *Ecology and Landscape Development: A History of the Mersey Basin* (1999).

In 1970 Barbara Walker answered the advert for a trainee Keeper in Natural History. She and Eric were married in 1973 at which time Eric moved from Preston to Wirral. With Barbara originating from the Isle of Man, they would regularly venture to the island recording the flora and researching the museum collections. In recent years they adopted many tetrads in recording for the proposed new flora of the Isle of Man. Eric and Barbara's daughters Emma and Fenella were born in the 1980s and Eric was a loving and proud father to both girls.

In the early days at Liverpool Museum Eric began to take on editorial roles for the BSBI. He was the sole editor of *Proceedings* from 1966 until 1969 then an editor of *Watsonia* (1970–1975), being an ex-officio member of Council during this period. On stepping down as an editor he was elected an honorary member of BSBI. He was also a member of the Publications Committee between 1966 and

1980, and later served as an elected member of Council (1984–1988). He had particularly fond memories of delicious dinners at Jack Gardiner's house after Publications Committee meetings; after the meal Jack would order a taxi to take Eric to Euston for the sleeper train back to Liverpool. After breakfast at the station and a spruce up, Eric was at his desk at the Museum before 8 am.

In the late 1960s Eric had established the Northwest Biological Field Data Bank at Liverpool Museum, a pioneer local biological records centre. Later he was on the Museums Association's Working Party on Records Centres in Museums. He chaired the national committee of the Biology Curators' Group from 1979 to 1985, where he championed museum natural history curators and their collections and was part of the movement within the BCG that recognised biological recording as a key part of museum work. Eric also contributed to the Linnean Society's working party which produced the report *Biological Survey: Need & Network* (1988). This helped initiate progress towards the establishment of the National Biodiversity Network a decade later.

Eric was closely involved with the Lancashire Naturalists' Trust (later Lancashire Wildlife Trust) from its early days and took an active grass-roots role in recruiting members in the 1960s. He served on the Council until 2010 and on the Conservation Committee until 2017. He was always very concerned about the changes in our local flora, many of them negative, and had a keen interest in the management of LWT reserves. His extensive scientific and ecological knowledge and advice was invaluable to the work of the Conservation Committee. His work with the LWT extended to that of being on the Lancashire Environmental Records Network Technical Working Group, the Lancashire Endangered Plants Group and the Lancashire Botany Group. Eric was particularly keen on venturing out with local botanists to monitor locally endangered populations of plants such *Orchis morio*, *Parnassia palustris*, *Primula farinosa* and *Spiranthes spiralis*. Eric was also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Biology and a committee member and Chair

of the North Western branch for many years. He helped organise many of their events, including community and outreach events surveying the flora. In recognition of this work, he was awarded the RSB President's Medal in 2020. In recent times we would both attend Bioblitz events based at Stanah Country Park near Fleetwood, exploring the Wyre Coastal habitats and nearby former industrial sites.

By 2002, after 38 years of intensive local recording, Eric was ready to begin the task of compiling the *Flora of North Lancashire*. He chose North Lancashire as a cohesive area which included that part of the Forest of Bowland in v.c. 64, but administratively in Lancashire, thus covering modern-day Lancashire north of the River Ribble. We celebrated the publication of the *Flora* at the Brockholes LWT Reserve in 2012 and Eric was awarded the Presidents' Award from the BSBI and the Wildflower Society for the *Flora*.



Eric Greenwood inspecting *Dipsacus laciniatus* (Cut-leaved Teasel) at Bidston Marsh, 2022. Barbara Greenwood

Around this time Eric and I would often venture out together recording in North Lancashire and in 2013 we agreed that I should take over as the Vice-county Recorder. Two years later Eric published another book, *Hunting Plants: The story of those who discovered the flowering plants and ferns of North Lancashire* (2015). He celebrated his 80th birthday with his family by venturing to the summit of Clougha (413 m), this being a tribute to the late Albert Wilson who (with J.A. Wheldon) had produced the first flora of West Lancashire in 1907 and who had climbed Ingleborough on his 80th birthday.

In early 2022 Eric was diagnosed with terminal bowel cancer, but he was able to complete one profitable field season which included refinding *Puccinellia rupestris* on the top of the sea wall at Rock Ferry after an absence from the Mersey Estuary of over 100 years. He also completed four final papers for the BSBI before his death on 18 October 2022.

The covering letter for one paper, on changes to the coastal flora of Wirral, was dictated to the editor of *British & Irish Botany* from a hospital trolley.

Eric is sadly missed by family and friends, especially when specimens are being researched and interesting plants are found, but as the author

of the *Flora of North Lancashire* he, like James Alfred Wheldon and Albert Wilson, will not be forgotten.

Dave Earl

with contributions from Barbara Greenwood and Steve Garland