

CLIVE MARTIN LOVATT (1955–2022)

It is with great regret that we have to report the sudden and unexpected death of our friend and colleague Clive Lovatt on 1 March 2022, at the age of 67. Clive was born on 15 February 1955 in Coventry, where his father was a bank manager, whilst his mother later ran an antiques shop in Tewkesbury. His older sister, Wendy, became a general medical practitioner. Clive's father was a keen walker and naturalist and encouraged Clive's interest from an early age. Clive attended primary school in Kenilworth and then Warwick School, despite having a fight with a friend on the entrance exam day and not completing the afternoon's paper. At school he also enjoyed dancing which led to a keen interest in Morris dancing and folk music. He was a squeeze box player and owned a large collection of melodeons. He belonged for a time to a Morris group in Shepton Mallet.

Clive obtained a place at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge in 1974 to read chemical engineering but transferred to botany in his second year. On graduation he moved to Bristol University in 1977 to work for a PhD under Dr Lewis Frost. His thesis *The history, ecology and status of the rare plants and the vegetation*



Clive Lovatt. Liz McDonnell

of the Avon Gorge, Bristol (1982) ran to two volumes and 722 pages. Dr Frost, he later wrote, 'in his own way, let me get on with my historical researches even though some were regarded as peripheral' (*Nature in*

Avon 67: 57, 2007). Whilst undertaking his research he joined Bristol Naturalists' Society and we first met him on their field meetings. The most memorable occasion was a meeting Clive was leading in the Gorge on 25 April 1981 when he turned up late, having rescued a woman who was in imminent danger of drowning in the nearby Bristol Docks. For this feat he received a Royal Humane Society award and certificate.

Shortly after the completion of his thesis he married Pam. At the age of 26 Clive became a teacher at Wells Cathedral School, teaching science and enjoying Saturday rugby. This was the last year teaching was allowed without a diploma. After a short time he changed career to train as an accountant with David Pearman's old firm in Shepton Mallet, eventually being employed by Deloitte in Kenya. His move to Africa meant leaving behind many botanical books with friends for safe custody. He spent 25 years there, mainly in Malawi where he kept a large number of Alsatian dogs. Before returning to Britain he maintained his correspondence with local botanists and he agreed in 2004 to write the annual 'Bristol Botany' report for Bristol Naturalists' Society, following the retirement of Professor Willis.

Clive returned to Britain in 2010 and after his divorce he briefly lived at Mountain Ash in the South Wales valleys before buying a house in Shirehampton, close to his beloved Avon Gorge. In 2011 he joined the staff of BSBI as part-time Administrative Officer, working from home. His role included administering the contracts with the country conservation agencies and keeping the books for the Honorary Treasurers. He was present during the tortuous change from an unincorporated charity to a charitable company, becoming Company Secretary after the transition. On inheriting money from his mother and an aunt he was able in 2016 to retire gracefully from these posts that he had found increasingly uncongenial. He was also able to buy a town house in Stroud which was large enough to accommodate his botanical library and gave him views over Rodborough Common.

From almost the moment he arrived in Bristol Clive was wedded to the Avon Gorge and its

unique flora. He pursued botany with increasing enthusiasm. We remember that in April 1985 whilst square bashing for the *Flora of the Bristol Region* on Worlebury Hill, Weston-super-Mare with Liz McDonnell and Captain Roe, author of the 1981 *Flora of Somerset* and who was probably on one of his last field meetings, Clive announced that we had to record absolutely everything as we might never return to that locality again. Clive would often carry on botanising long after the rest of the party had worn themselves out and returned home or gone to the pub. His botanising would continue until the arrival of dusk. If the botany at a site was good Clive could become completely engrossed in his pursuit and he would lose all sense of time. This is best illustrated when a quick stop at a motorway service station revealed some fine arable weeds. This quick stop turned into a three-hour stay and resulted in a fixed penalty parking fine.

Once back in England Clive had resumed more active botany with the Bristol Naturalists' Society and became the President of the Botanical Section and chaired the library committee; he was also the honorary archivist. Over the years he contributed many well researched and erudite historical articles for the society's monthly newsletter. He also joined the Gloucestershire Naturalists' Society, eventually becoming a joint author of the annual county botanical report in *The Gloucestershire Naturalist*. At about the same time Clive joined the Somerset Rare Plant Group and recently became their treasurer. He led many immensely enjoyable field meetings and workshops for these societies. He was in the process of writing an 'Historical Flora of the Avon Gorge' at the time of his death.

In 2014 the BSBI approached him to become the Vice-county Recorder for West Gloucestershire following our retirement. He gladly accepted this role and recorded many first county and vice-county records during his botanical exploration. Lately he had been assisting in the county wildlife trust's Habimap Project.

Clive was a prolific collector of botanical books which occupied several floors of his town house. He particularly enjoyed his collection of annotated

county Floras which included multiple copies of J.W. White's *The Flora of Bristol* (1912) and the *Flora of Gloucestershire* by Riddelsdell et al. (1948). Latterly he would spend hours trawling eBay and whenever a copy of White's *Flora* was offered for sale, either with annotations or even just with the signature of a notable botanist on the fly leaf, he would snap it up. He collected all manner of botanical ephemera and announced one day with great glee that he had secured several medicine bottles from the pharmacy of one of his botanical heroes, G.C. Druce of Oxford. He kindly shared the hoard with his friends. Whenever he saw a painting of the Avon Gorge, usually in watercolour, Clive would snap it up eagerly and these covered the walls of his home. These views of the Gorge together with his large herbarium of pressed plants contained in three cabinets originally owned by J.W. White have been donated to Bristol Museum, as has the bryophyte herbarium of R.M. Payne which Clive had custody of.

Clive was very active in his final days, leading a Bristol Naturalists' meeting at Portishead, delivering our joint county botanical report for 2021 for publication and he spent his final day studying *Sphagnum* species in the Forest of Dean with three friends.

We make no apology in selecting quotes, with some slight adaptation, from Clive's botanical hero James Walter White's *Flora of the Bristol Region*, his favourite historical flora, and incorporating our own

words. Clive strove to emulate the standards of this botanist and his publication throughout his own botanical research and field work. In the words of White:

He endeavoured to make botany more interesting to those with a love for wild flowers, who were willing to learn more, respecting the natural riches that surround them. He was a very patient teacher. With friends he enjoyed many delightful experiences that fall to the lot of a field botanist wherever he may bend his steps. If there be any lesson to learn or advantage to gain from studying the doings of people of botany it must be the same that is taught or conferred by his example as the mark he has left upon the world. Namely we should emulate his diligence and that the desire to rank with him in good repute should be stimulated and strengthened. In any case it is surely fitting that we should sometimes pause and turn aside from the occupations of today, thankfully to remember and acknowledge what Clive has done for us.

We have lost our treasured and valued great friend of more than 40 years. He was our go to botanist, someone we could share our plant identification doubts with, someone who would appreciate and share our great botanical moments and finds with and he shared his doubts and triumphs with us. In travelling around the county there is nowhere that either we have fond memories of botanising with our kind friend or that we wished to take him and show him some botanical treasure. He is sorely missed.

Clare and Mark Kitchen