

ROSALINE (ROSE) JESSIE MURPHY (1924–2023)

Rose Murphy was born at Hendon Hospital, London on 7 October 1924 (a somewhat frail baby) to a Scottish mother, Elizabeth (née Clarke), and an Irish father, George Murphy. Her sister Muriel was born in 1925, and her brother Desmond in 1927. Her father was a commercial traveller, and worked at many different things over the years. Early on they lived in London, including at Roehampton, but her father's job took the family to Derby when Rose was aged three, and six years later they moved to Weston-super-Mare. As 'town' children Rosaline and Muriel loved spending time in meadows and Desmond caught minnows in a pond. Rose's early interest in, and love of, botany started at this early age: the fields full of cowslips and cuckoo-flowers and the ditches or 'rhynes' full of flowering water-crowfoots were her first memories of flowers. Rose's father noted her interest in plants when she was 13 or 14 and bought her a grey scrapbook.

Rose failed her 11+ exam but her father paid for her to go to grammar school. Later in her teens she took trips to look for rare plants in the local area, such as *Helianthemum apenninum* on Brean Down. Rose achieved distinctions in her Botany and Zoology 'A' levels but failed Chemistry. She was accepted at the University of Bristol providing she took extra Chemistry classes. Her father lent her the money for university and was repaid later. Aged 20 Rose developed pleurisy, but not TB, and was quite ill, being nursed at home for three months rather than in a sanatorium. Subsequently Rose changed her university course to Bacteriology and Zoology for the one year and Botany for three years, leaving with only a modest degree.



Rose Murphy, 1991. Pam Tompsett

Still recovering from pleurisy, Rose's father suggested looking for a job in the milder climate of Cornwall. She joined the Cow and Gate dairy at Lostwithiel, where she worked in the main laboratory for two years. When she was 25, she became friendly with Prof. F.A. Turk and his wife Stella, whom she met quite often travelling on the local trains. Rose accepted the offer of a room at their home, Shangri-la at Reskadinnick near Camborne, where she lived for the rest of her life. She took a job at the Milk Marketing Board at Treswithian, Camborne, but a year later moved (aged 26) to a better paid job at

the Royal Cornwall Infirmary (City Hospital) and a year or so after that she was transferred to Tehidy Hospital, an isolation hospital for patients with tuberculosis, where a good laboratory technician was needed. Aged 30 and weighing 8 stones, Rose got up early, cycled to Tehidy from Reskadinnick and enjoyed a large free breakfast which was on offer! She later transferred to the Camborne-Redruth Hospital laboratory.

Meanwhile, W. J. (John) Burley, originally a gas engineer living near Reskadinnick and a close friend of the Turks, had changed careers after WWII by gaining a scholarship to Oxford University, subsequently taking up teaching at Newquay Grammar School for Boys in 1955. He later wrote the Wycliffe series of crime novels. In 1960 he suggested that Rose might take up a vacant biology teaching post at Newquay Grammar School for Girls, although it meant arising at 5 am to get to Camborne for the 6.15 train to Chacewater and then changing trains for Newquay. Lodging in Newquay during the week improved the situation.

After about three years the Camborne Grammar School for Girls had a vacancy for a Head of Science to teach Biology, Physics and Chemistry. The Nuffield syllabus posed severe problems for both staff and pupils; Rose was sent on a training course to Sheffield College and on her return to Camborne all her 'A' Level pupils passed their exams with flying colours. In 1975/6 the school changed to a separate Sixth Form and Lower School Co-ed Comprehensive at Treswithian. Rose moved with the latter, becoming Head of Biology which she much preferred. She retired after eight years teaching there just before her 60th birthday.

Botany was an interest that continued alongside the day job, but after retirement from teaching in 1984 Rose was free to pursue the interest fully. Her garden at her home at Shangri-la was her sanctuary when working – especially after the trials of teaching during the day – but once retired Rose was free to explore further afield.

Early on, Rose was particularly interested in bryophytes, joining the British Bryological Society in 1957. In 1961 she found a liverwort on Tresco which

did not fit the description of any known species. It was named *Telaranea murphyae* in her honour by Jean Paton. In recent years DNA studies have shown that it is a male clone of the New Zealand *Telaranea* (now *Tricholepidozia*) *tetradactyla*, so Rose's claim to fame in the bryophyte world was short-lived. However, her name lives on in the name of the rare hybrid dock *Rumex* × *rosemurphyae* (*R. conglomeratus* × *rupestris*), named by David Holyoak from dune slacks on Penhale Sands. Alec Gray, the daffodil grower who created the famous dwarf *Narcissus* 'Tête-à-tête', named a daffodil cultivar 'Rosaline Murphy' (a hybrid between *N. asturiensis* and *N. rupicola* subsp. *watieri*) in honour of Rose in 1958.

Rose was in many groups and societies and though quite a private person, very much enjoyed the company of like-minded people, talking about plants. She regularly attended field meetings organised by the Wild Flower Society, which she joined in 1982. In addition to many trips with local WFS members, Rose travelled to all parts of Great Britain to see as many species as she could, meticulously noting them in her Wild Flower diary. Her visits ensured that Rose joined 'Parnassus', the Society's highest branch of members who have seen more than 2000 species. Rose also attended many field meetings around the country organised by the BSBI, which she joined in 1951. Many who met Rose on field trips remember her fondly. She often attracted a keen audience when demonstrating the features of a plant, her teaching skills honed from her days at the Grammar School.

Rose became BSBI Vice-county Recorder for East Cornwall in 1985. As she could not drive, she had thought that the West Cornwall vice-county would be the more suitable area, but Len Margetts, the retiring Recorder, persuaded her that East Cornwall, which was less well recorded, would be a worthier challenge. With help from others Rose managed to get of all parts of the vice-county, often taking the train to Liskeard or Bodmin Road and meeting Mary Atkinson for a full day's recording. She accompanied Ruth Lees, Mardi Tempest and Hazel Meredith to areas further west and Ian Bennallick often drove her to sites. Rose also enjoyed visits to the Isles of Scilly

with Rosemary Parslow very much and returned several times. For places outside Cornwall Paul Gainey, Nicholas de Sausmarez and Colin French provided transport.

Ian Bennallick joined Rose as joint East Cornwall Recorder in 2002 until Rose stepped down in 2004 when she was made an honorary member of the BSBI. Rose's dedication to the role and attention to detail made her one of the best BSBI recorders at the time. Taking notes and organising records was Rose's forte and the many files of her hand-written lists, maps and other information have passed to Ian as Vice-county Recorder. These remain a valuable resource when checking sites of plants and are irreplaceable. Rose could not pass a stationery shop without getting something. Everything was in colour-coordinated folders or files and neatly put away.

Rose was also part of the Cornish Biological Records Unit from the mid-1980s until 1997, and during that time liaised with organisations such as the National Trust, Cornwall Wildlife Trust and the English Nature botany unit, as it was then. With Pam Tompsett she undertook surveys of waste sites for the Environment Agency, arable fields for the National Trust and the historic castle sites for English Heritage. Tintagel Castle was a particular favourite place.

In 1987 Rose instigated the publication 'Botanical Cornwall', producing 13 issues until 2005. This included a range of articles from Rose, and other local and national experts, as well as reporting on new finds for Cornwall. In it she increased the drive towards the recording of flowering plants and ferns at the tetrad scale. The result of all the fieldwork was published in 1999 as the *Flora of Cornwall* which Rose co-authored with Colin French and Mary Atkinson. In 2002 Rose founded, with others, the Botanical Cornwall Group, which now holds regular field meetings during each year.

Rose's eye for detail and efficiency also saw her take on editing journals for local natural history and recording groups, including The Lizard Field Club reports, Camborne and Redruth Natural History Society and the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Federation of Biological Recorders. Rose was also

involved in the Kernow Microscopical Society and later joined the Linnaean Society.

With a wealth of experience and an investigative mind, Rose tackled the distribution (in Cornwall) and identification of more 'difficult' genera including *Carex*, *Festuca*, *Fumaria*, *Rubus*, *Taraxacum* and *Ulmus*. Rose tutored several workshops on these, and for grasses, ferns, and willowherbs and it is not surprising that they were always successful. Rose spent many hours preparing the material and handouts and as with her earlier teaching career she went above and beyond. Her investigative mind led Rose to write two BSBI handbooks, *Fumitories* in 2009 and *Evening-primroses (Oenothera)* in 2016. If it was not for her failing sight Rose would have started work, aged 94, on another BSBI handbook, on mints (*Mentha*).

One of Rose's main interests was ferns, and she was fascinated by the *Dryopteris affinis* aggregate and the polypodies (*Polypodium*). A member of the British Pteridological Society since 1989, Rose quickly became a familiar person at BPS field trips and meetings. Many of her fern specimens are lodged at the BM herbarium. Her interest led to the publication in 2012 of *Ferns, Clubmosses, Quillworts and Horsetails of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly* which was instigated by Rose, and co-authored with Chris Page, Rosemary Parslow and Ian Bennallick.

Rose's voluntary services to botany was recognised in 2009 when she was awarded the Marsh Botany award (and £1000) from the Marsh Christian Trust. Ian Bennallick and Dorothy Brookman accompanied Rose to collect the award at Kew and when she was presented with the award Rose's smile said it all.

Despite failing eyesight and increasing immobility Rose was still very keen on chatting about plants and current affairs to her regular visitors to her home in her last year. After a couple of falls, Rose died peacefully at Royal Cornwall Hospital Trillick, on 8 February 2023, aged 98. Though she will be missed by all, she will be with us every time we read one of her books, see her writing – so clear and legible – on her notes and remember the trips out to look for plants and the cream tea at the end!

Ian Bennallick and Pam Tompsett