

# OBITUARIES

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## IAN JAMES HOPKINS (1959–2022)

Ian Hopkins lived all his life in Staffordshire. He was born to parents James (known as Jim) and Sheila at Basford, Stoke-on-Trent on 5 September 1959. His interest in Staffordshire plants began in childhood and his knowledge of the botany of the county grew steadily to attain an unmatched level.

Ian attended Harpfield Primary School, Thistle Hough High School and Stoke Sixth Form College. His biology degree was gained at Staffordshire Polytechnic.

In 1982 Ian was a member of the team conducting the Staffordshire County Ecological Survey, led by Colin Hayes. This carried out a Phase I and II habitat survey, identifying key sites of nature conservation value. Colin's abiding memory of Ian wasn't so much his undoubted botanical and site assessment skills, but more the stoical way he accepted a lift from Colin each day from his Basford home to his place of work, throughout the seasons, in an open-top MG sports car. Colin wonders whether this was what made Ian the quiet individual he was: commuting like that wasn't particularly conducive to chatting to get to know someone. He concludes that Ian was dedicated and committed to his work, with an attention to detail and meticulous care that were models for the whole team.

Ian became a member of the BSBI in the same year, 1983, that he began work with a group of other biologists and geologists under the leadership of Keith Bloor based at the City Museum & Art Gallery (now the Potteries Museum & Art Gallery). Within this Stoke-on-Trent Environmental Survey (which continued through 1984) his prime focus was on botanical species identification, but he also contributed to the identification of a broad range of other taxa. The City of Stoke extends 14km north



Ian Hopkins in Trentham Gardens, Staffordshire, c. 1973.

to south and variously from 5 to 7.5 km east to west. The whole of the area was surveyed on a monad basis. Ian authored *Plants*, one of a series of booklets outlining the results in 1984. This extended to an impressive 65 pages and gave details of frequency, habitats and interesting notes for all the taxa that were encountered. A year later saw the publication of Ian's *Revised checklist* for v.c. 39. In the course of preparing it he combined the data amassed by E.S. Eedes for his 1972 *Flora of Staffordshire* (much of which was edited out of the original manuscript because of space restrictions applied by the publishers), the large amount of more recent information gleaned by the then very active North Staffordshire Field Club and his own observations.

Ian returned to the Polytechnic (which later became Staffordshire University) as a member of staff. He held a number of positions as a technician, the last of which was in Microbiology in the

Biological Sciences Department. At one stage he was in charge of rooftop greenhouses that supplied the undergraduate identification labs. Throughout he joined field visits where his support was highly valued. There and in the labs he was the person to whom matters of detailed identification were referred. Ian was devoted to his subject and would often be found in the staff tearoom studying botanical literature. At the University he worked with Arthur Callaghan on *Conidiobolus* spp. and *Basidiobolus ranarum*, with the results being published in *Fungal Ecology*.

Ian never drove a car, using public transport and walking considerable distances throughout the county. His holidays were spent botanising elsewhere in the British Isles. All his observations were recorded systematically in notebooks.

A small committee was set up in 1998 to prepare a new Flora for Staffordshire and he was deeply involved from the start. At the end of each season he meticulously copied his data on to record cards for each tetrad. He was one of the two most prolific annual recorders. The *Flora* was published in 2011, with Ian as joint author. Although he had little to say in face-to-face conversations, and even less on the telephone, all his written communications were neatly and clearly presented and packed with relevant and interesting details. He had an exceptional ability and knowledge that enabled him to identify any unusual garden throw-out. Of the

various chapters that he wrote for the *Flora*, the one detailing the history of botany in the county was particularly masterly.

Ian became Joint Vice-County Recorder for v.c. 39 in 2014. He continued detailed recording after 2011 until the beginning of the Covid epidemic, totalling many tens of thousands of further new records for that decade. With Covid, he made the decision to move the five miles from Basford to Trentham in order to help support his elderly father who was not in good health. Tragically, after a short time he also became ill and was diagnosed with colon cancer. In spite of treatment this led to his early death eighteen months later.

I am grateful to Ian's sister Julie and to Dave Skingsley, Colin Hayes and Keith Bloor for sharing their memories of Ian.

## References

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**John Hawksford**