

ALAN GEORGE HILL (1935–2019)

Alan Hill was born in England on 27 March 1935 and grew up in Portsmouth. He attended Portsmouth Grammar School but, as he once told me, he derived little benefit from his formal education and left school with few if any qualifications,

Alan's father was a boiler inspector for the Admiralty, and as such was posted to various shipbuilders and naval bases around the UK. In the early 1950s he moved to Belfast, bringing Alan and his sister Beryl with him. Needing to find employment, Alan got a job as a rent collector for an estate agent in Belfast. This rather lowly start was the beginning of a long career in the house letting and mortgage industry. Pursuing part-time studies in building surveying, he became a Chartered Surveyor and finished his career as a senior surveyor for Abbey National Building Society in its Belfast office.

His job as a house mortgage surveyor took him all over Northern Ireland, and he simultaneously developed an interest in the natural history of the Province. Initially this interest was primarily

ornithological, and he became an accomplished 'twitcher', but during the 1980s he developed an interest in botany, and I first met him when he attended a plant identification course that I was running under the auspices of the Extra-mural Department of Queen's University, Belfast (QUB). He also began to make botanical trips to the Continent around this time, including a trip to the Pyrenees in 1990 led by Ralph Forbes of QUB's Extra-mural Department which I also took part in. This was, in fact, the first of a number of continental botanical trips that Alan and I took together, sometimes joined by the late Patrick Carruthers, a retired Irish linen manufacturer, as well as several that he made with other friends or even, latterly, by himself. He made his final foreign trip, with me, to the island of Rhodes in 2008. In the years between 1990 and 2008 he visited, among other regions, Slovenia, Normandy, the French and Spanish Pyrenees, Andalusia, the Cantabrian Mountains, Sardinia, the Dolomites, the Black Forest, Turkey, Greece, Hungary, the Algarve, Switzerland, Bulgaria, the Amalfi coast and the Gargano Peninsula.

It was during the 1980s that Alan joined the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club, and he served on its Committee for several years, including one year as its President. In 1986 he joined BSBI and was a frequent attender of field meetings in Ireland. He was the Vice-county Recorder for Co Monaghan (H32) between 2001 and 2008. There are 7,400 records from Ireland in the BSBI database attributed to him, almost all of them made between 1987 and 2005, and the vast majority (95%) with one or more companions rather than on solo excursions. He became a member of the Irish Regional Committee and served as its Field Meeting Secretary from 1995 to 1999 and as the Northern Ireland representative on the Records Committee from 2002 to 2005. He was a sensible and calm presence on committees, making succinct and helpful comments on matters that directly concerned him.

During the years that I knew them, Alan and his wife Elma lived in Holywood, Co Down, on



Alan Hill (left) on a pondweeding excursion with Chris Preston and Paddy Reilly in Co Cavan, July 1996. *Anne Carter*

the outskirts of Belfast; they had no children. Elma died very unexpectedly in February 2011 and almost simultaneously Alan fell and broke his leg. By that time his health had deteriorated markedly and he had ceased to attend botanical field excursions, although he did make occasional bird watching trips locally with an old bird-watching acquaintance. He died on 9 March 2019.

On continental trips and on our many excursions around Ireland Alan was a considerate companion with a sense of humour marked by a strong sense

of the ridiculous. He acquired an impressive knowledge of the continental orchid flora as well as a good knowledge of the Irish flora and built up a considerable library of identification aids and manuals, most of which he generously passed on to me when he decided around 2015 that his field excursion days were over because of ill-health. I look back on our excursions together with great pleasure.

Paul Hackney