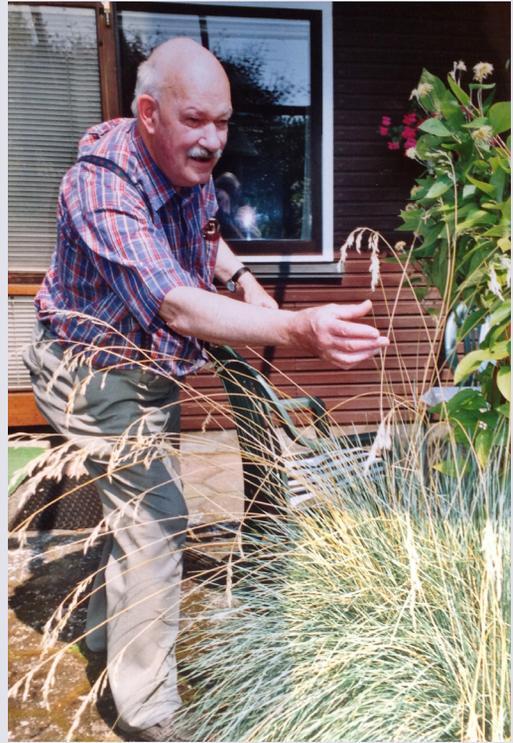


## THOMAS BRUNO RYVES OBE (1930–2019)

Bruno Ryves, as he was always known, was a gentle giant who died at his home at Kingston Hill, Surrey on 10 May 2019. Although a member of the BSBI since 1990 (plus an earlier lapsed membership), he was little known as a field botanist, attending very few meetings – and then shyly. He was very reluctant to add to any tetrad scores and hence never joined the Surrey Botanical Society or its forerunner the Surrey Flora Committee. But he was a good correspondent, and much enjoyed his beer, whisky and pipe. He put so little tobacco into his pipe that he used up more matches than tobacco! He rarely used a notebook, and took no photographs.

Bruno's botany started at the very early age of 8 when he was escorted by an elderly lady botanist in search of *Arabis scabra* (Bristol Rock-cress) in Clifton Gorge. Natural history was in the family. His grandfather Alfred Ryves, a high court judge in India, had discovered a new species of spider (about the size of a pinhead!). His uncle Ryves was also a keen entomologist and a butterfly expert. A more distant relative, B.H. Ryves ('Ted'), wrote *Birdlife in Cornwall* (1948). But botany was yet to flourish in the family.

Bruno was the son of a doctor, born in Lee Green, south-east London, on 1 October 1930, together with his twin sister Marga who was delivered first (and in the previous month!). He was evacuated in May 1940 to Cheltenham and attended Cheltenham College, from where he went up to read physics at Trinity College, Oxford. Here he cycled the lanes looking for plants with Ian Prance, later to become Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. This and other distractions, including courting his future wife, Ann, led to a disappointing class of degree. National Service followed, and he then proceeded with an external degree at London University where he achieved the top marks in the country. His scientific career in nuclear physics began at Harwell, and continued at the National Physical Laboratory at Teddington, Middlesex. Here he remained very contentedly completing his experiments until his retirement. He sought no promotions, very happy



Bruno Ryves in his garden in Galsworthy Road, Kingston Hill, Surrey, c.2005. *Maryann Irvine*

scurrying around in a white coat, but his great value and expertise were appreciated in 1990 by the award of an OBE from the Queen.

Bruno's interest in botany was likewise recognised in 1990 by his election as a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London. His interest in plants soon developed into a fascination with alien (non-native) species, especially those with minute flower parts. Garden escapes scarcely counted! Rubbish tips and wool alien fields were his delight. He was, twice, the co-leader of a BSBI tour of tips in the London area, making use of a 30-seater coach. A unique achievement! Searching for wool aliens in Bedfordshire and especially on a fruit farm at Blackmoor, N. Hampshire, was a favourite pastime. Such hunts were great fun, but tiring, walking up and down rows of crops. By evening it was time to

reflect over a drink on the finds of the day which might include *Ammi majus*, *Ammi visnaga* and *Am I sober?* By good fortune, Dr C.E. Hubbard lived near to Bruno, at Twickenham, and so Bruno could deliver, in person, fresh alien grasses for a reliable identification. The results were written up by Bruno in *Watsonia* in 1974 and 1988, together with shorter articles on other groups of plants such as *Lepidium* where he described a plant new to science, *L. fallax* Ryves, in 1977.

Bruno's interests then concentrated solely on the Poaceae, and he became a very capable agrostologist, spending much time in the herbarium at Kew. Here Tom Cope remembers having trouble naming a specimen and leaving it out on a bench for further consideration. Bruno walked past it and with barely a glance said 'OK, that's so-and-so'.

Bruno became the BSBI referee for alien grasses (and also earlier for *Amaranthus* as a stop-gap), and he welcomed grass specimens from anywhere in the world. He visited many countries in this pursuit, either with his family, his work, or with me. His career duties took him to perform experiments in Belgium, China and south-western North America. The family (or part thereof) went to the Amazon, South Africa and Pakistan. The Ryves family were far from the norm. When the car broke down high up in the Karakorum Mountains (in bandit country) out rushed Bruno happily to the nearest crags, his youngest son David descended to the River Indus to collect water samples (he later became a fine palaeoecologist at Loughborough), whilst Ann, a well-known Surrey artist, and her daughter Maryann started on sketches to turn into paintings back in England.

Between 1988 and 2001, Bruno and I explored some twelve countries including northern Argentina, central Chile, Sri Lanka, Trinidad & Tobago and south-west Turkey. Duplicates of all major finds ended up in K, with the surplus going into BM, RNG, TRIN, herb. E.J. Clement and elsewhere. A warning on our numbering systems seems necessary here: we collected independently so that a voucher

numbered Ryves & Clement 89 will not be the same gathering as Clement & Ryves 89.

When Bruno retired in 1995 he spent two days a week at Kew. The day started with a preliminary glass at the nearby public house, followed by the production at his desk of the notoriously difficult crossword in *The Listener* (which often took the full week to solve) until he later descended to the *Times* crossword. With few overseas trips, he began to offer to name for any British herbaria any undetermined Poaceae. Even the Natural History Museum took up the offer. One result of this was the 'discovery' of a grass from Angola, new to science. It was dutifully written up in 2003 in *Kew Bulletin* (58: 739–741) as *Styppeiochloa catherineana* Cope & Ryves, which is closest to *Danthonia* in the British flora. It was named after Bruno's wife (Ann Catherine Ryves) in acknowledgement of her patience in allowing Bruno to spend so much time at Kew.

Bruno was very proud of his book *Alien Grasses of the British Isles*, published by the BSBI in 1996, and co-authored by his two scribes, E.J. Clement and M.C. Foster. It gave references to all species ever found in Britain, with illustrations by G.M.S. Easy of many of them, and keys to some of the larger groups. There is still, worldwide, no equivalent book. A *Supplement*, by T.B. Ryves and E.J. Clement, was also distributed by Summerfield Books in November 2003. Such was the thoroughness of the original book that the supplement is only four pages long, and it has been much overlooked.

In 2018 Bruno suffered a stroke – this came after a serious fall down the steps into the wine-cellar at home when he suffered concussion before being found some hours later. Before this tragedy struck, Bruno had very generously given his entire grass herbarium, some 7500 specimens, and his associated books to NMW. At first offer (following delays by others) Tim Rich rushed down to collect the bounty, fully recognising its scientific value.

Bruno died in his sleep at home, aged 88 years – a scientist to the end, his body going to further medical research. He will be greatly missed by his