

RICHARD KENNETH BRUMMITT PhD

(1937 – 2013)

Dick Brummitt, who died on 18 September 2013, was a major figure in plant taxonomy and nomenclature on the world stage, and he was also very active in the BSBI especially in the 1970s and 1980s (see Colour Section, Plate 1). Born in Liverpool on 22 May 1937, he was brought up in North Wales during the war and later back again in Liverpool. His brother, John, was also a botanist and became BSBI Recorder for Denbighshire. Dick went to Liverpool University and did a PhD on the taxonomy of *Calystegia*, a genus in which he maintained a lifelong interest. (He would relate that at his PhD viva the external examiner, Tom Tutin, ushered him to a chair which was draped with *Calystegia* rhizomes he had dug from his garden and mischievously asked Dick to explain them – Dick had by some confusion implied in his thesis that it lacked rhizomes. Needless to say, he passed.) Dick immediately got a job in the herbarium at Kew, working on *Flora Zambesiaca*, but from the first he had a great interest in nomenclature and especially in developing indexes that would both make available and standardize botanical information. After commencing an index to subspecies, which resulted in a massive card index and several papers, he began an *Index to European Taxonomic Literature* in collaboration with the *Flora Europaea* organization, and this later developed into the worldwide *Kew Record of Taxonomic Literature*. He managed *Index Kewensis*, and with Emma Powell he compiled the *Authors of Plant Names* in 1992, making available for the first time an internationally accepted list of 30,000 authors' names and abbreviations. He compiled *Vascular Plant Families and Genera* in 1992, another world standard. Yet another was the *World Geographical Scheme for Recording Plant Distributions* with Sue Hollis, again in 1992, clearly his *annus mirabilis*, with a second edition in 2001. This latter was a product of the Taxonomic Database Working Group of which he had been a co-founder. In 2007 he

collaborated with his PhD supervisor Vernon Heywood, along with others, in a new edition of *Flowering Plant Families of the World*. These are only a selection of his more significant productions. He officially retired in 1999, but continued to work in the Kew herbarium on a regular basis until he died.

For many years from 1975 he was secretary of the Nomenclatural Committee for Spermatophyta of the IAPT and was deeply involved in revisions of the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature, and he was an adviser to the International Plant Names Index. In nomenclature he argued for common sense and convenience, and was often involved in controversy when he felt that factional interests were opposed to the common good. In taxonomy, he was equally firm in his opinions, becoming embroiled at the highest levels in arguments about the value of cladistic methods and the debate on the significance of monophyly and paraphyly in classification; he very strongly believed in the validity of paraphyletic taxa on grounds of evidence, practicality and common sense, and considered that his opponents were succeeding in cowing a silent majority into accepting their claims.

Dick joined the BSBI in 1957, and his most important contribution came through the Publications Committee, of which he was a long-standing member, and secretary for ten years from 1973, taking over from his Kew colleague Peter Green. This was the period when, among much else, the Handbooks on *Umbellifers*, *Docks and Knotweeds*, *Willows and Poplars* and the second edition of *Sedges* were being produced. He was our long-standing referee for *Calystegia* and *Heracleum*, as well as for nomenclature.

Dick transformed the taxonomy of *Calystegia* in Britain, following on from his work for his PhD thesis (1963). As he later wrote, 'The genus is taxonomically difficult, with no really discrete taxa which can be treated as uniform species, with the possible exception of

C. soldanella (L.) R. Br. Geographical intergradation from one taxon to another pervades the whole genus.' (Brummitt 1996). His first publication (1960) concerned the introduced pink-flowered plants that had previously been called *C. dahurica*, and which were now given the name *C. pulchra* Brummitt & Heywood; it also hinted at the existence of native pink-flowered plants that he was later to describe as *C. sepium* subsp. *roseata* Brummitt (1967). In 1971 he described another pink-flowered plant, *C. sepium* subsp. *spectabilis* Brummitt, an Asiatic plant widely naturalized in Scandinavia and recorded once in Merioneth, and probably now extinct.

In 1996 he published *C. silvatica* subsp. *disjuncta* Brummitt, the western Mediterranean subspecies of *C. silvatica* that is widely naturalized in Britain along with subsp. *silvatica*, the eastern Mediterranean subspecies. In 1980 he published names for two hybrids. *C. ×scanica* Brummitt (*C. sepium* × *C. pulchra*) and *C. ×howittiorum* Brummitt (*C. pulchra* × *C. silvatica*), but in later years he became reluctant to use these binomials, along with *C. ×lucana* (Ten.) G. Don (*C. sepium* × *C. silvatica*) because of the variability of the hybrid clones and the uncertainty in many cases of the exact parentage (Brummitt 1998, Brummitt & Chater 2000). A joint paper with workers at the Natural History Museum (Brown et al. 2009), based on nuclear ribosomal ITS1 studies, supported the suggestion that hybridization, probably resulting from introductions into cultivation, has contributed to the evolution of new taxa, but much further work is still required and the taxonomy of the genus in Britain remains to some extent uncertain.

Dick was a great believer in the value of collecting specimens, all the more so at a time when the conservation movement often discouraged it and so in effect led to the loss of information about the very plants it was trying to conserve. He collected most notably in Africa, in Western Australia, in Japan and in California, but also in many parts of Britain and Europe, and one of his last expeditions was to Kamchatka in 2003. At Kew he was the generous host to innumerable botanists

from Britain and abroad, and was unfailingly helpful in giving advice, especially on nomenclatural matters. Dick and his wife Hilary, who died tragically young, had two sons and a daughter. His son Neil follows Dick in a botanical career, at the Natural History Museum. Ill health in Dick's last years meant that he never wrote the monograph of *Calystegia* that he had intended, but he left taxonomy and especially botanical nomenclature in a better state than they were in when he started, and he left more helpful and significant works than most botanists are fortunate enough to be remembered by.

References:

- BROWN, J.M., BRUMMITT, R.K., SPENCER, M. & CARINE, M.A. (2009). Disentangling the bindweeds: hybridization and taxonomic diversity in British *Calystegia* (Convolvulaceae). *Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society* **160**: 388-401.
- BRUMMITT, R.K. & HEYWOOD, V.H. (1960). Pink-flowered *Calystegiae* of the *Calystegia sepium* complex in the British Isles. *Proceedings of the Botanical Society of the British Isles* **3**: 384-388.
- BRUMMITT, R.K. (1963). A taxonomic revision of the genus *Calystegia*. PhD thesis, University of Liverpool.
- BRUMMITT, R.K. (1967). *Calystegia sepium* subsp. *roseata* Brummitt, subsp. nov. *Watsonia* **6**: 298.
- BRUMMITT, R.K. (1971). *Calystegia sepium* (L.) R. Br. *Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society* **64**: 73.
- BRUMMITT, R.K. (1980). Further new names in the genus *Calystegia* (Convolvulaceae). *Kew Bulletin* **35**: 327-334.
- BRUMMITT, R.K. (1996). Two subspecies of *Calystegia silvatica* (Kit.) Griseb. (Convolvulaceae) in the Mediterranean region. *Lagascalia* **18**: 338-340.
- BRUMMITT, R.K. (1998). *Calystegia*. In RICH, T.C.G. & JERMY, A.C. (eds.). *Plant Crib 1998*: 230-233.
- BRUMMITT, R.K. & CHATER, A.O. (2000). *Calystegia* (Convolvulaceae) hybrids in West Wales. *Watsonia* **23**: 161-165.



Dick Brummitt with *Calystegia sepium* ssp. *roseata*, Ynys-hir, July 1996.
Photo © Arthur Chater