

Gerald Salisbury (1936–2015)

Gerald Salisbury, of Bovingdon in Hertfordshire (Colour Section Plate 3), died on 14th July 2015. He had been a member of the BSBI since 1991, but probably one unknown to many. However, in the context of botany in Hertfordshire he was very much a central figure, if one that kept himself out of the public eye.

Gerald was born at an ancient farmhouse called ‘Mauldens’ at Bovingdon on 20th December 1936, the son of an architect father and a teacher mother. It was then still a working farm and Gerald grew up surrounded by livestock, even if his parents were not directly involved. But it was his uncle, the famous Sir Edward Salisbury, former Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew and past Recorder of Higher Plants for the Hertfordshire Natural History Society, who became his mentor at an early age. Apart of course from his role as Kew’s Director, Sir Edward was the author of some well-known botanical contributions, notably *Weeds and aliens*, in the Collins ‘New Naturalist’ series, and *Downs and dunes*, about the ecology of calcareous grasslands. He has also been called the ‘father of ecology’, so Gerald had a great source of inspiration not only in developing his lifetime’s passion for plants, but also for his understanding of the environment generally. Sir Edward lived at the family home, Limbrick Hall, south of Harpenden, and Gerald visited him regularly, in between taking up his lifetime’s professional work as a farm livestock manager at Flaunden, on the borders with Buckinghamshire.

It was not until the 1960s that he really got involved with local natural history studies. He became an early member of the fledgling Hertfordshire & Middlesex Trust for Nature Conservation, as it was then known, and also joined the Hertfordshire Natural History Society, about the time that Sir Edward finally left office as ‘Recorder’ and when the late John Dony, my predecessor as Vice-County

Recorder, had produced his *Flora of Hertfordshire* (1967). He also attended the regular field meetings of the Society, and it was at one of these that he met Jill Saunders, and recognised her as a local girl from the same village. Sharing lifts to meetings, they became life-long partners, and it was Jill’s support throughout the rest of his life that encouraged him to make the contribution that he did.

After the publication of the 1967 *Flora*, there was a period of relative inactivity in studying Hertfordshire’s plants, but in the mid-1980s, the Hertfordshire Natural History Society pressed for a new *Flora* to be compiled, as the existing one, good though it was, was becoming out of date. It was at this point that I made Gerald’s acquaintance, as one of those who attended the inaugural meeting of the Hertfordshire Flora Project in Hatfield, in 1987. Gerald (and Jill) offered to help in west Hertfordshire. They subsequently spent hundreds of hours steadily working through the west of the County, tetrad by tetrad, hunting for plants, collecting specimens for verification, and, above all, compiling fastidiously well-documented record cards, not only of tetrad records, but especially for identifiable ‘sites’. Recorders had been encouraged to focus on definable areas of land that had ‘special’ plants on them, and to thoroughly record these localities separately, data that eventually made a core foundation for the Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre’s database. Gerald did this with more thoroughness than anyone, each card bearing a coloured map of the locality, often with an attached photograph to show the habitat. He would also collect voucher specimens carefully, and each year supplied the Flora Survey with a sheaf of cards and specimens to gradually fill in most of west Hertfordshire. Without his work, we can safely say the *Flora of Hertfordshire* (2009) would have been a much poorer effort.

Gerald had not only been involved with plant recording. He had also been partly instrumen-

tal in getting the local Wildlife Trust to acquire an important local wildlife site, Frogmore Meadow, part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest that had been recognised in the Chess Valley near Sarratt. It needed grazing, and so Gerald took on the role of site warden and stock manager. His dedication to this site alone enabled one of the few old, species-rich damp grasslands in that area to survive in pretty good shape to the present.

When he retired, around 2001, he also took up active field survey work in support of the Wildlife Trust's needs, carrying out botanical surveys of numerous sites across the County for them, both the Trust's own reserves and also other wildlife sites. His botanical expertise, which, as he said to me, had burgeoned as a result of the Flora Project, was much in demand, and he was always a willing volunteer.

Gerald lived at 'Mauldens' almost all his life, only leaving it after a heart attack in 2013 and when his final illness took hold, to be looked after by Jill until his death. 'Mauldens' was

very special to him, and, to anyone who visited him there, he was always extraordinarily hospitable. Neat china teacups would be the order of the day and he would give guided tours of the rambling house and its garden, a riot of both cultivated and 'wild' plants. It was very much a countryman's house, not a tidy mansion, with a real rush-fringed pond, old apple trees, log stacks under an open outbuilding, old barns and a rough lawn, with wild flowers a-plenty, but not a 'jungle'. Inside, the house was much as it probably had always been, frugal to an extent, and with low beams and a massive old fireplace. An enormous family portrait, inherited from the grander surroundings of Limbrick Hall, took up one wall of the living room.

His passing has left quite a hole in Hertfordshire's botanical life. While he may not have been at all as well-known as his famous uncle, his contribution to Hertfordshire's botany was arguably greater.

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Gerald Salisbury at Aldbury Nowers nature reserve, Hertfordshire, 2006. Photo: Trevor James © 2006