

MAUREEN WHITAKER

1932-2021

Maureen was born on 4th January 1932 to Sydney Hall Burden and Dorothy Ethel Burden in Crouch End, a suburb in the London Borough of Haringey, about five miles north of Westminster. She was an only child, and her father died during the following year. She and her mother moved to Whyteleafe, a village below North Downs in the Tandridge district of Surrey, to be nearer to family. She attended Oxted School for Girls with her cousin Denise. On leaving school she joined the BBC, where she spent her entire working career. She was a sound engineer, and worked on programmes such as *Doctor Who*; boxing broadcasts with Harry Carpenter, the BBC's 'voice of boxing'; and the marvellous radio adaptation of *The Hobbit*, among many other things. Her mother died in 1954 when Maureen was just 22.

While working at the BBC she met Patrick Whitaker; they began as colleagues and married in 1973. When they were of an age to retire, they moved to the Isle of Wight to be near to Pat's mother and sisters. They lived in Priory Road, Seaview and a near-neighbour was Beth Dollery, a stalwart of the Isle of Wight Natural History and Archaeological Society. They struck up a friendship and Beth invited Maureen to join her on meetings. She joined the Society in 1993 and became very involved in the botany group. She was keen to learn more and attended identification courses held at Medina Valley Centre and at the Field Studies Council's centre at Juniper Hall in Surrey.

About the time Maureen joined, the Society moved its Headquarters to the Swiss Chalet at Rylstone Gardens in Shanklin. Our first computer was purchased, and Maureen was the one with the 'know-how'. She had a PC at home, and she used to go to a computer club to keep up-to-date with all the innovations which were coming thick and fast. The Society was just beginning to explore the computerisation of biological records and she worked with John Stafford in setting up the computer with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)'s 'Recorder' software.

Maureen was a mainstay of the Society's office team as the headquarters moved again, first to Salisbury Gardens in Ventnor and later to Cowes. She set up the membership database and produced reminders for subscriptions. She also produced the envelope labels for the twice-yearly membership mailings and helped with the 'stuffing' on the day.

Maureen was also instrumental in exploring a simpler spreadsheet-based system for recording vascular plants and was a great help to the botany group in producing recording sheets with the names listed in English rather than the traditional abbreviated Scientific nomenclature. This innovation gave many people the confidence to start actively recording for themselves during botany meetings. These sheets remained in use until 2019, when they were revised to include a slightly greater range of species. In 1996, she produced a handy summary booklet listing the Island's plants and their abundance based on *The Flora of the Isle of Wight* produced by Jim Bevis, Reg Kettell and Bill Shepard twenty years previously.

She made good use of the botany group's combined records to produce a yearly booklet listing all our finds for each meeting; this was eagerly anticipated and a best-seller at our indoor meeting. There were well-chosen photographs on the front cover and snippets of information gleaned from past issues of the *Proceedings* which related to the sites we had visited.

She was part of the committee which worked on the production of the *Isle of Wight Flora*, published in 2003. She gave useful advice on word-processing and layouts and she gallantly deciphered and typed some of the chapters which had arrived in exquisite hand-written script.

Maureen took an active part in the botany group's conservation projects. Beth introduced her to the Field Cow-wheat and Wood Calamint site clearance tasks. When an intensive survey of the Wood Calamint site was undertaken in 1999, prior to a project to create additional habitat, she made a meticulous photographic record of the area. She helped with the winter clearance task for many years and the summer monitoring programme which has helped to further our understanding of how the plant grows.

In recent years, Maureen had to withdraw from her very active participation in the Society when her caring responsibilities for Pat and his sisters grew, but she continued to attend botany group meetings as often as she was able. Pat died in the spring of 2020 and Maureen died on 9th July 2021, following a stroke.

It was always a joy to meet up with Maureen, whether on a Thursday morning with the office working group, or on one of our field meetings. She made an immense contribution to the Society, and to many of us personally through her friendship, and we remember her with great affection.



Maureen Whitaker (left) with Beth Dollery at a botany meeting at Bembridge Point

Authors: Anne Marston with Nigel Hamway, Beth Dollery and Jackie Hart