

OBITUARY: ANN CAMPBELL (1931-2024)

Ann was born to Clifford and Audrey Corbett on the 1st August, 1931 at "Sunnydell" on the Mall in Brading, a house designed by her architect father and built by his father-in-law's building firm. She started school at Linden College in Shanklin, a small private school of less than forty pupils followed by Ryde Secondary School at eleven.

She had a passion for nature from an early age, spending hours alone on Brading Down and the marshes with her sketchbook, discovering wild flowers, birds and other fascinating creatures. Art was another passion and many of the plants and creatures found were drawn in incredible detail. She had a formidable knowledge of wild flowers, and an entry in the County Press in 1945 described how, at the age of 13, she discovered the Island's first Early Spider Orchid for many years.



After passing the School Certificate, Ann went on to the Sixth Form at Sandown Grammar School, where she first met her future husband, Ian Campbell from Ryde. She trained and qualified as a teacher at the C.F. Mott College of Higher Education in Liverpool, whilst Ian was at Forestry School in North Wales.

The couple returned to the Island and married on 10th April 1952. Their first home was a keeper's cottage in woodland near Havenstreet, a huge difference from the family home in Brading. There was no gas or electricity, and meals were cooked on two primus stoves! A tin bath hung outside the front door. Their eldest son Peter was born in 1953. Alastair, Victoria and Cicely followed after the family moved to Calbourne and later to a house on Hamstead Drive at Ningwood. A move to Longcross in the New Forest followed in 1960, and James was born in 1961. They spent seven years there, amongst the heathlands and ancient woodlands, where Ann took delight in finding rare plants and creatures. She found time to resurrect her love of painting, especially in oils, and showed some of her works in a small art shop in Lyndhurst where they sold well. She took a keen interest in her children's schooling, and she never stopped learning herself, even finding time to go to evening classes. Ian's career progression resulted in further moves to Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Ayrshire in Scotland, Cannock Chase and Devon, with the children growing up and leaving home along the way.

The couple retired to the Island in 1988, to live in Bembridge. Ann joined the Society and began recording the local flora. The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland was embarking on a national survey of plant distribution for the Atlas 2000 project and Ann systematically worked through sites in the East Wight; in total, the IWNHAS database holds 8575 records in her name. She was a meticulous recorder and would always send full details of unusual plants, together with a pressed specimen.



Particularly noteworthy finds include the first record of Sea Knotgrass, *Polygonum maritimum*, on the Island since 1870. She found 141 plants on the shore at Thorness Bay in 1995 and it became a place of pilgrimage for botanists. Sea Knotgrass gradually declined until it was last seen in 2002. She made the first modern Island record of Basil Thyme, *Clinopodium acinos*, in an old quarry on the north side of Brading Down in 1997. Always a rare plant, it has not been re-found here since 1998 despite much searching. She found Cat-mint, *Nepeta cataria*, on brackish land below Embankment Road, Bembridge, in 1998. There have been no further Island records. She liked to keep an eye on rarities local to her, in particular Yellow Bartsia, *Parentucellia viscosa* and Slender Tare, *Ervum gracile* from the slumped cliffs at Forelands. At the time, Forelands was the only known Island site for these species.

When the botany group began the project to reinforce the population of Wood Calamint in 1999, Ann compiled species lists of the plants growing in the immediate vicinity, and it was she who raised a couple of Wood Calamint

seedlings from a soil sample taken from the site in an experiment to investigate the seed bank. Consequently, she took on the task of raising plant plugs from Wood Calamint seed collected under licence each year. A total of 488 plugs was planted out between 2009 and 2019, allowing sub-populations to establish and improving the plant's survival prospects.

After Ian passed away in 2017, Ann stayed on at the family home and celebrated her 90th birthday with her children, six grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren and other relatives present for a very happy day. After a few months of illness in 2024, she had a short time at the Elms Nursing Home in Bembridge where she died peacefully in her sleep on August 30th, shortly after her 93rd birthday.

Compiled by Anne Marston with material supplied by Peter Campbell and Colin Pope

Photos: **Top:** one of Ann's drawings **Middle:** Ann's herbarium sheet for Sea Knotgrass. **Bottom:** Ann at Wheeler's Bay 1999

