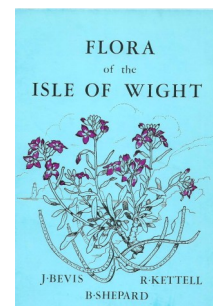


BILL SHEPARD 1921-2024

Bill was a familiar figure in the Isle of Wight Natural History and Archaeological Society for many years. He had long-standing interests in birds, beetles, botany and local history, and memories of him are numerous. Above all else, he is remembered as one who encouraged and mentored all who shared his interests. Here we present a selection of memories in acknowledgement of his contribution to Island life. His catchphrase "Well, I'm blessed" was often heard, and we have certainly been blessed by knowing him.

Bill was the vice-county recorder for the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) from 1973 to 1994. Together with Jim Bevis and Reg Kettell, he compiled thousands of records based on extensive field surveys to produce the '*Flora of the Isle of Wight*', published in 1978. A supplement to the *Flora*, and a series of Habitat Studies, were produced as a follow-up to this publication. Bill's contributions to the *Proceedings* are listed at the end of the article.

He was always interested in different field techniques and methods of recording wildlife. Hearing of a snorkelling expedition in Bembridge Harbour lagoon to locate the Foxtail stonewort, *Lamprothamnium papulosum*, Bill suggested an abseiling trip over the edge of West High Down to search for Oxtongue Broomrape, *Orobanche picridis*!

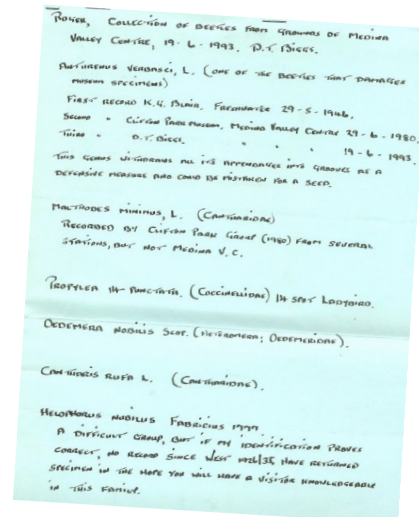
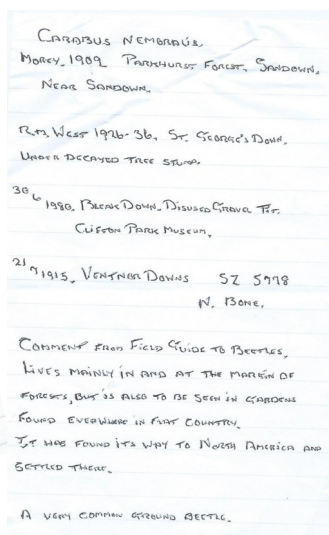
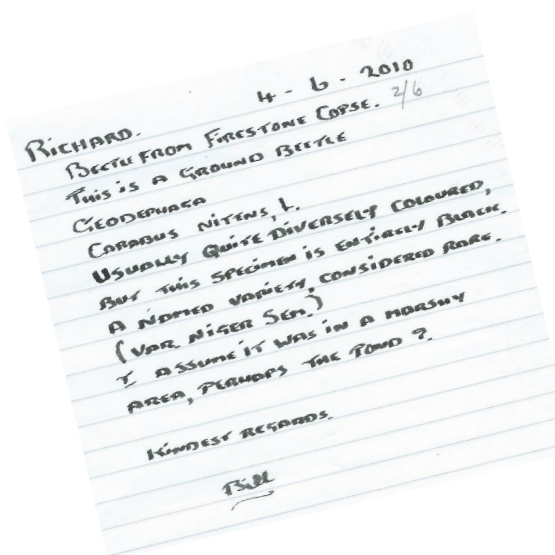


Bill had great enthusiasm for trees and spent much time observing and cataloguing the magnificent specimens on the Osborne estate. In 2006 a National Lottery project, spearheaded by Tina Whitmore, was launched, with the aim of developing public information on the Island's trees. Bill immediately seized the opportunity to put his extensive knowledge of the location of unusual and veteran trees across the Island to use. He readily gave of his knowledge and time to assist and the outcome of the project was a series of Histree Trails, published in 2008. They are now out of print, but their content is still available on the Society's website. <https://iwnhas.org/resources/downloads/histree-trails/>

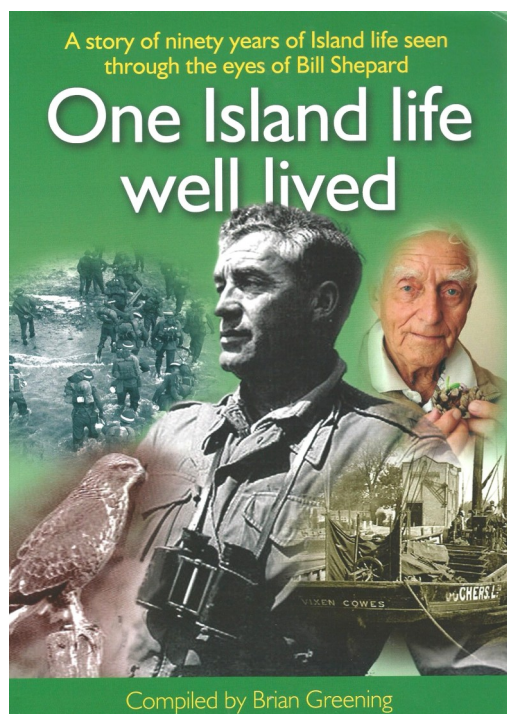
Bill was such an encourager. Every sighting or specimen was acknowledged, with a letter written in capitals with his trademark fountain pen. He was so courteous, and a wildlife observation which was probably an everyday one for him was often greeted as if it was a startling new discovery which would enhance our knowledge of the Island.

In one family, Bill was known as 'The Beetle Man' and another called him 'Billy Beetle'. They would look out for him on his daily walks and worry if he did not appear. If a specimen had been dropped around to him, the box in which it had been sent over would be carefully returned... often through the living room window, if it had been left open on a summer's day.

His local history knowledge was extraordinary, but he wore it lightly, again generous in sharing what he knew. His 'Newport Isle of Wight Remembered' has a wonderful array of references to the town from a range of sources, not least the County Press, alongside reminiscences of Orchard Street and the Quay, and gives a real flavour of the town that he loved. He had an exceptional gift for landscape and habitat interpretation, integrating his knowledge of local history, farming practices and natural history. For example, he traced the manorial boundaries around Newport, testing Hooper's Rule for ageing adjacent hedgerows along Betty Haunt Lane. He was also involved with the Island Rivers' Group *Mill Trail* around Newport and interviews with him can be seen on their website <https://islandrivers.org.uk/explore/multimedia/newport-memories/>



In 2012, Bill and Brian Greening published a book 'One Island Life well lived' - A story of ninety years of Island Life seen through the eyes of Bill Shepard. The final pages include tributes to Bill - one of them is printed below. It was written by Susan Telfer in 1992, giving her personal thanks for his selfless hours of education.



The Flower Man

When I am old, before I turn to dream,
And let go of life, forsake the ceaseless stream,
I will take a final walk inside my head,
And say farewell to where the Flower man led.
To where the quiet copse held a Ransom's breath,
Which mixed with bluebells, whispered winter's death,
Or up the sun-kissed cliff top, sea breeze steep,
Through cowslip brodered beds spread ankle deep.
Remember Gromwell, new found and first seen,
With sweet *Stellaria* twinkling in the green,
Share blue-eyed alkanet's unblinking gaze,
Bent seaward where the Fulmars float on haze.
And all the days of summer still and hot,
Merge in one moment, and sigh, forget me not.
The day I heard the Flower man had left
I wandered to his meadow, thoughts bereft,
And everywhere I looked I heard his voice
The gentle teachings taught from his life's choice.
Veronica, Fairy flax and Gorse,
I heard him say 'It's echium of course',
And since that day he left it's been the same
For every flower I pass now calls his name.
My final walk before my time to go,
Will be past every flower that I know,
And when the trumpet blows across the stream,
I'll follow where the Flower man's been.
Brush through the nodding grasses that he knew
And follow friendship's footsteps up to Rew.

Bill's legacy in print

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