

Wyre Forest Study Group

Ron Boyce 23rd October 1932 - 18th December 2016 - an appreciation

ROSEMARY HILL



Ronald Boyce was born in South Shields on 23rd October 1932. The Second World War cut a gap in his childhood when access to the beach and to transport was very limited. After the war ended a Sunday School trip held at Rainton Park Woods was virtually the first time he had seen a sizeable wood or a river apart from small polluted remnants. This might well have been an experience which in the modern world would equate to a visit to a tropical rainforest and it was his favourite place. His mother taught him his wild flowers at an early age and was willing to tolerate the mini aquaria resulting from childhood trips to local ponds and streams. Even when this extended to asking him to retrieve his wandering snails from the kitchen when they had lived up to their name! His father also knew the doorman to the Dove Marine Laboratory at Cullercoats so he was able to study the marine aquaria at no cost. These opportunities, and the encouragement of the Head of Biology at his Grammar School, Robert Hunter, helped forge his passion for natural history. He joined the Northern Naturalists' Union and became their oldest continuous member. They were surprised to find he was still an active member when he attended the occasional field meeting when on holiday up north.

He obtained a degree in Zoology and Entomology from Newcastle University when it was still part of Durham University. This would not have been possible for him except that grants became available at the right time. He married in 1959 and had two children, Heather and Walter. His longstanding interest in photography was fostered by the Photographic Club at the Grassland Research Institute but when this closed down, he joined the Conchological Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1991 and the British Entomological and Natural History Society in 1992. He was Programme Secretary for the Conchological Society until nearly 80 years of age and attended most of the meetings and provided photographs from these events for the Society's publications. In recent years he became a member of the Wyre Forest Study Group and went to

many of their meetings. He greatly enjoyed the variety of natural history and the exchange of information among the members that takes place at meetings on all the specimens found. One WFSG member described Wyre to me as 'a little bit of the north that had made its way further south' and this may explain why the Forest had such a strong appeal for him.

Ron loved to be outside, searching for rarities in all parts of the country and in the company of other experts. Every day he would go out to see what was new in the garden as if he had never seen it before. He was always keen to garden and most sessions were interrupted while he sought to photograph and identify some creature that he had found. Connecting with nature is what kept him young and responsive to life. Apart from many trips to Durham and Northumberland, a favourite holiday destination was New Zealand where he could get to grips with a different fauna and flora and indulge his passion for photography. On the last trip he made to that country when he was 80, he was still game to climb a 600-year-old volcano and gaze down into the crater.

He still achieved a lot despite a life punctuated with hospital visits and treatments in his last few years. If not well enough to be active, he would still sort shells from beach sand ready for identification. He would claim not to know the names of marine micro molluscs, and he did not say when he had found something different. However when I had the surprise of finding something I had not seen before, he could almost invariably name it correctly. Once his immune system became impaired, he was unable to travel to crowded places so his trips to Wyre became even more important in his life. He was very fortunate that the treatment he received enabled him to continue to do most of the things he loved and have a high quality of life until his closing days.

This article is adapted from one published in Mollusc World.



Ron Boyce with friends in Wyre: Rosemary Hill, David Long, Rosemary Winnall, Brett Westwood, Susan Limbrey
30 October 2010
Ellen Pisolkar