

## Those we lost in 2019.

**John Meiklejohn  
Bert Reid  
John Clarke  
Pam Gough**

Some naturalists fade into old age and quietly disappear. Others leave us at less than the expected natural life span. John Meiklejohn and Pam Gough were in the first group both living well into their nineties and only known by repute to younger naturalists. Bert Reid became ill and died aged 76 – a great loss far too soon. John Clarke fought illness for years and he also died aged 77 before he could achieve all he wished for wildlife conservation. They all made great contributions to Worcestershire’s natural history and wildlife conservation.

### John Meiklejohn

John died on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2019 aged 93.

#### From Harry Green.

Every naturalist in Worcestershire knew John Meiklejohn. He was the man who could identify anything: plant, moss, lichen, beetle, spider, fish, snail, snake, bird or mammal. And he was always willing to explain how to do so – count the spines on a beetle leg, look for hairs on a plant’s sepal. He was a patient and clear teacher.

Besides being a school teacher he taught adult classes on natural history subjects for Birmingham University Extra Mural Department for many years. Several generations of Worcestershire naturalists were inspired to become natural historians by his enthusiasm, kindness and teaching ability. He gave many talks and conducted many walks about natural history. His old hand-operated slide projector was famous even when the modern electronic world started to take over.

His passion was to accurately name things in the natural world and to record them. When the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre started in the 1970s he immediately became a leading light. When the first efforts stumbled some years later through disappearance of funding he and a small group of naturalists kept it going until it was rescued by the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and re-started at their HQ at Lower Smite Farm. There the foundations were laid for a Modern Biological Records Centre by the hard voluntary efforts of John Meiklejohn and John Partridge. He even, reluctantly, learned how to use a computer, although he stuck to his beloved card index.

My first memories of him come from the 1960s when we were searching for rare Marsh Warblers in marshy places near his house in Defford. A little later he provided accommodation and support for several researchers into the bird’s life histories and ecology. One of them caught a large green beetle in mist nets set to catch birds for ringing and release. John identified it as the rare Noble Chafer – the first to be found in this part of Worcestershire much to amazement of national experts. In many cases he recorded firsts for Worcestershire.

Other memories ... I often took him insects to identify and in later years this often involved not just the beetles but trial of his latest home-made wine and many stories of his youth on a farm, his wartime travels round the world, and later round Europe with his family.

He helped with local wildlife conservation in many practical ways – erecting stalls at Tiddesley Wood Open Day, helping at log sales,

tree planting and all the basic physical efforts needed to conserve habitat but he often followed side-tracks explaining what that beetle was when revealed under a log, naming that centipede in woodland leaf litter, and that unusual plant in grassland.

He was awarded the Worcestershire Wildlife Medal in 2001 and part of the citation read “John’s influence on wildlife conservation is greater than might be immediately apparent. His great contribution has been to raise awareness to the wonders of natural history in many people through his enthusiasm, helpfulness, and inspirational teaching. He is no elitist or parader of knowledge. He will talk to and teach anyone. Never is it too much trouble to look at any specimen, to identify it and inform the finder. He is undoubtedly Worcestershire’s leading naturalist”.

For Worcestershire’s natural history John made a real difference, he taught many people, recorded many things, and was a great friend.

### From Simon Wood

The sharing of knowledge and the name John Meiklejohn go hand in hand from his career as a teacher to his involvement with Worcestershire’s Biological Records Centre. John was a champion of knowledge about the natural world. It must have been no surprise to those who knew him that he began collating and verifying data at the start of the fledgling records centre.

I first met John when I came to visit before being offered the role of WBRC Manager in 2003 and straightaway I knew that his enthusiasm and knowledge were something that would make working alongside him very rewarding. The regular Thursday office pairing of the “two Johns” (Meiklejohn and Partridge) brought a fantastic mixture of good humour and experience to the office especially as I was mostly alone for the rest of the week: I valued it greatly. Our constant reminders of John are not just in the data (a large number of our records are from him) or his large photographic collection: we are still using the same wooden ruler he brought to WBRC in the 1980s!

John was kind enough to host me for dinner on a good number of occasions and there was always a little tippie of homemade wine available to drink there or to take home. Having grown up on such brews I was aware that guestimates of alcohol content had a large variance so I didn’t want to have any problems driving home!

! John’s hard work over the 30 plus years he spent involved with WBRC mean he will never be gone, his name is always in the records, and we would not be the same organisation as we are today without him. He is greatly missed.



01. Brass plaque fixed to the wall of the WBRC Office. Ruth Bourne



02. Worcestershire Recorders Committee celebrate John Meiklejohn's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Left to Right Rosemary Winnall, John Day, Harry Green, Geoff Trevis, Ann Hill, Bert Reid, John Meiklejohn, Tessa Carrick, Gary Farmer, John Partridge, Patrick Taylor.



03. John Meiklejohn in action teaching 1986



04. John Meiklejohn and Harry Green looking for beetles in dung. Rosemary Winnall.

**From John Partridge**

I was a 'junior partner' to John at the Records Office for around fifteen years. I first approached John at one of the early Recorders' Meetings (probably 1997) to ask about spider records, as I was just getting interested. He invited me along to what was then the room in the loft, and after I had looked at the records, asked me if I would like to try putting some entries onto his record cards while I was there - the beginning of my apprenticeship. I later swapped from cards onto computers when they became available, whilst John continued with his beloved cards. We did, however, get him into

using Recorder 2000, both at Smite and at home, enabling him to check what had been recorded without having all the cards with him. John also took me out on many recording trips to the Trust's reserves, and slowly introduced me to his wide range of species recording, guiding my first steps with many groups. I shall always be grateful for the time that he spent educating me, with his very patient manner.

**From Lynda Reid**

The Worcestershire Biological Records Centre started life in the 1970s with grants to employ out-of-work biologists funded by a government body, The Manpower Services Commission. John helped voluntarily from the beginning.

When the MSC ended the funding disappeared. The project had generated sets of record cards and had entered some of the existing data. John presided over a holding operation so nothing got lost. We had use of a room upstairs in the Commandery in Worcester for a few hours a week, and John recruited several helpers. It was clerical work, not needing any knowledge of natural history. The challenges came in reading the handwriting of people who supplied data. Everything was put onto record cards by hand with no attempt to assess the quality of the records. Most of the records were flora although John tried to pull together data for a mammal atlas (already started by the MSC team) and we had Tony Simpson's micromoth records.

We were evicted from the Commandery after a few years and given access to the Worcester Museum when it was closed to the public. This was not easy as everything we got out to work on had to be cleared away before we left for the day.

When we had worked through most of the data we had, John started taking us out to collect records from under-recorded areas. We had a few very agreeable outings, noting everything we saw.

**From Pamela and John Clarke.**

John and I were so lucky to meet John when we first moved to Kemerton in 1982. We always remember the vision of John appearing at our cottage door on Bredon Hill introducing himself and generously offering any help he could give us. Little did he know that he'd be helping us for the rest of his life. He navigated us through keying flowering plants at his fascinating night school classes, went out with us in the field on numerous occasions patiently introducing us to the world of lichens, beetles and much more. He visited us when we lived on Colonsay and we spent a fantastic week with him exploring the island through his eyes. At the end of long days and even longer evenings spent scrutinising specimens I remember trying to creep up to bed only to be called back with 'look, look - you must just see this'. His enthusiasm for - and love of the natural world and his generosity of spirit were boundless. We will miss him and the world of natural history recording is now a poorer place.

**From Arthur Cundall**

Days with John

Whether the idea of visiting Braunton Burrows together came from John, after listening to my account of the area, or whether it was mine, I cannot recall. I knew of a field in which the owner permitted camping, to which we travelled on a warm Friday evening in June, John providing a two person tent and all the cooking gear and indeed acting as cook.

The Burrows are extensive, supporting a diverse flora on the lime rich sand dunes and it was a privilege to botanise in John's enthusiastic company for the whole of Saturday in an area that was new to him. Before returning home, hot and dusty as we were, we called on my mother-in-law, who lived nearby, for afternoon tea.

In subsequent years there were many other outings together, listening to nightingales, exploring Bredon Hill, identifying fungi in his well equipped study, all infused with his enthusiasm and vast knowledge. A true Naturalist.

## Bert Reid

Bert Reid died on 17th August 2019 aged 76.

### From Harry Green

One evening in the 29th September 1979 the Worcestershire Nature Conservation Trust invited local members to a meeting in Evesham to help establish the South-east Worcestershire Local Activities Group – SEWLAG. 120 members filled the hall and after presentations and two wildlife films a tall smiling man came up to me as said quietly that he would like to help and, yes, he would join the committee and, yes, he would be treasurer. Bert Reid had entered the workings of the Trust and remained there for the next 40 years. We soon discovered he was an excellent naturalist who recorded hoverflies and plants in Tiddesley Wood as soon as it became a reserve in 1984.

From the local group Bert was soon elected to the Trust Council as trustee and served many roles – in the old committees, as the Hon. Secretary and as Chairman. His quick brain and the ability to see through clutter to a good conclusion was a great asset to us. During my spell as Chairman 1983-1993 he helped me sort out many problems during walking discussions in Tiddesley Wood.

When the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre (WBRC) came to the Trust he joined the steering group, served on the governing board when it formed, and also on the Worcestershire Recorders Committee.

Alongside the committee work helping to run the Trust and the WBRC he made a great contribution to Worcestershire’s natural history. He tramped through many miles of countryside recording plants so playing a leading role in collecting data for the Worcestershire Flora Project. He computerised the many thousands of records, prepared the maps for the book and wrote the introductory chapters on Geology & Soils. During this time he became fascinated by dandelions and their numerous micro-species and became a national expert in their identification. His contribution to the Worcestershire Flora on this complex group is outstanding.

Throughout all these activities Bert remained true to the local group, SEWLAG, both on its organising committee and in practical activities especially in Tiddesley Wood. He helped with the creation and growth of Tiddesley Wood Open Day from a couple of stalls and Bluebell Walks to the large and important event it is now over 30 years later. He always joined in the hard work of setting up and taking down the event, leading natural history walks on the day and he managed the finances for many years. He also laboured at the growing log sales.

Bert received two Worcestershire Wildlife Medals – one in his own right 2005 and the second with the small group that brought the Worcestershire Flora Project to its conclusion 2015 with the book. The medal is awarded “*For dedicated service to nature conservation in Worcestershire*”.

Sadly in the last few years he became increasingly ill. He died on 17th August 2019 aged 76 years. The Trust and Worcestershire natural history lost one of its greatest volunteer supporters and activists. Those of us who knew him for 40 years, especially in SEWLAG, lost a friend and companion who had been with us on the long journey working for nature conservation in Worcestershire.



05 & 06 Bert Reid.



07. Bert Reid left with Adrian Darby looking for rare arable weeds. Harry Green

## Pamela Gough

Pamela Gough died on 17th December 2019 aged 95

### From Tessa Carrick

Dr Pam Gough (1924- 2019), Pamela Marjorie Gough, a great supporter of Worcestershire Wildlife Trust as well as the Sussex Wildlife Trust and the Wildlife Trusts Wales, died on 17th December, aged 95. Pam served on the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust Council in the 1970s and 1980s where her background in education was useful. As a Council member and trustee Pam regarded it as her duty to visit all the Trust reserves. She investigated the history of several reserves. She discovered that a Mr Eades had once farmed part of the wildflower meadow that the trust acquired near Hanbury and so this grassland of national importance became Eades Meadow. In her research on Tiddesley Wood she discovered that it was commonland used for foraging pigs until 1223! She was the first to investigate the history of Shrawley Wood, Worcestershire’s Small-leaved Lime wood of national importance, finding historical documents from 1545. Pam was delighted to be awarded the Trust’s Wild Service Award and proudly displayed the certificate in her living room.

Pam gained a BA in Geography with first class honours from London University and an M.A. in Ancient History and Archaeology from Birmingham University. In 1979 she was awarded a Ph.D. from Birmingham for field work carried out in Wiltshire. She taught in schools until she joined the staff of Shenstone College in 1967 and remained there until the teacher training work ended. Although she was a reserved person who was happy with her own company she was enthusiastic about leading many geography field courses all over the country and abroad. She also shared her interest by running an interesting Landscape History Group for the Bromsgrove U3A.

Sitting in her book-lined living room, Pam once surprised me by describing an adventurous journey she had made with a friend, travelling the length of Norway by car. She was a life-long member of the Geographical Society (later the Royal Geographical Society), and supported many other societies including the Worcestershire Naturalists and the Wild Flower Society. She did flower surveys in Worcestershire for the latter.

The wonder of the countryside was of supreme importance to Pam and she requested that “*All things bright and beautiful*” should be

sung at her funeral as it represented her religious views. Pam was buried at Westall Park Burial Cemetery on 14<sup>th</sup> January and a celebration and thanksgiving of her life followed at All Saints' church, Bromsgrove, of which she was a highly respected member. She will be remembered as a person who loved the countryside and was passionate about understanding and sharing how the current landscape developed.



08. Eades Meadow named from Pam Gough's researches 12<sup>th</sup> July 2003. Harry Green

### John Clarke

John Clarke died on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2019 aged 77.

#### From Adrian Darby

I first met John Clarke in 1982 when he and his wife Pamela came to Kemerton to act as unpaid wardens on my farm at Kemerton. He had been brought up on a smallholding next to Wytham Woods outside Oxford and had worked part-time on a local farm since his teens. Despite the fact that he had no formal training in nature conservation or biology he was a very effective self-taught naturalist and was a superb finder of nests. He and Pamela immediately threw themselves into the task of identifying all the plants and animals to be found at Kemerton, and in this they received enormous help and support from John Meiklejohn and many other local naturalists. He engaged in a number of projects to improve the farm for wildlife and identified the high water table which showed the possibility of creating the Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve. John was always interested in the interaction of Farming and Wildlife and in 1985 he and Pamela wrote *Reconciling Farming with Wildlife – a Study of Conservation Management Techniques*.

The Clarkes stayed at Kemerton for four years and then moved up to Colonsay in the Inner Hebrides where they had bought a cottage. They stayed there for eight years with John continuing to work as a self-employed contractor in farming and wildlife conservation. His interests there were wide but he was particularly concerned with Chough breeding biology and co-authored a report on the importance of mining bee larvae as a food resource for Chough. He also researched and compiled a report for JNCC on *The History of Agriculture, Inner Hebrides, 1866-1990*, based on the annual census returns. He was able to gain the trust of crofters and by the time he left he had all of them signed up to various farming and wildlife schemes.

During their time on Colonsay John and Pamela came back to Kemerton each year for an annual visit which enabled them to keep an eye on the emerging Kemerton Lake project. They finally decided to come back to live permanently in 1994. They worked part time for Kemerton Conservation Trust which had been founded while they were away. During the remainder of his time John acted as a self-employed consultant. He was a conservation advisor to Overbury Estate, a local quarry company and several other farms,

and carried out a number of short contracts such as a baseline study of plants on 40 farms in the Upper Thames Catchment Area.

Sadly he became ill in 1996 and for the last twenty three years of his life suffered a series of debilitating conditions which left him increasingly incapacitated. Despite this, his second period at Kemerton was extraordinarily productive. He was always full of ideas, and as he lost the ability to carry out physical tasks himself he became increasingly effective in persuading others. The way in which he involved more than 120 households around Bredon Hill in his ten year study of the breeding biology of the spotted flycatcher – published as *The Spotted What!?* caught the attention of Michael McCarthy who devotes a whole chapter of *Say Goodbye to the Cuckoo* to the story of 'the Flycatcher Man'. He was very successful in getting local landowners and farmers to co-operate as was shown by the success of the Carrant Catchment Area Restoration Project which is cited as a case study in the latest version of the Worcestershire Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

At the end of his life, although he was increasingly weak and in pain, he was still working, and last spring watched nesting flycatchers through his sickroom window. Last summer he could still derive pleasure from going round the Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve on a motorised buggy and being driven around the Overbury Estate to look at the dense population of nesting skylarks on Bredon Hill. However for the last two years he was too weak to go to the Annual Meeting of Worcestershire Recorders which had always been one of the highlights of his year. We used to go together and saw it as our 'works outing'. I am sure there will be many members who will share happy memories with me and will join in expressing our sympathy to Pamela.

#### From Geoff Trevis

I first started working with John in 2002 and quickly came to realise what an exceptional and knowledgeable man he was. His work at the Kemerton Lake reserve extended our knowledge of habitat management for hymenoptera and the site became recognised as one of regional importance for this group. 109 species have been recorded there including an estimate one year of 40,000 nests of the Yellow-legged Mining Bee *Andrena flavipes*! However, his interest extended well beyond this one reserve and he provided important advice about orchards and other sites around Kemerton, including the Community Orchard.

He took me round the nearby Overbury estate where he had been giving advice on developing herb rich field margins. When I had the privilege of visiting, these margins were alive with bumblebees, solitary bees and wasps, a sight rarely seen these days. Birds also benefitted and John told me of the increase in species such as Skylark and Corn Bunting. I hope his legacy here will continue.

I am sure others will write of his extensive interests in the area around Kemerton and his involvement with the Carrant Brook Catchment Project. He was also involved with Buglife in establishing a population of crayfish in the lake at the Kemerton Lake reserve.

John was a generous man who gave freely of his time to all who were interested in conservation in the area of south Worcestershire, and probably to a few who were not so interested to start with. He encouraged volunteers to become involved and enlisted experts to help record the wildlife he was doing so much to conserve. I regard it as a great privilege to have had the opportunity to work with John and to learn so much from him. I am sure I, and many other people, will work hard to continue what he started.

#### From Harry Green

I first met John via John Meiklejohn when he and Pamela were living in a cottage high up on Bredon Hill above Westmancote, a short walk from an amazing lane with banks full of wild flowers. Many of his great attributes are mentioned by Adrian Darby and Geoff Trevis but a few things stand out in my mind.

The great solitary bee colony that developed on the banks by the lake at Kemerton reserve was badly damaged by rabbits scratching and digging out the bee nest burrows. John's solution was to cover the bank and bee holes with wire netting! He grew rare arable plants (weeds) in his greenhouse and had many more specimens of the scarce Shepherd's Needle than I have ever seen anywhere else to plant into field margins. He was passionately interested in Spotted Flycatchers and befriended many house owners round Bredon Hill at times giving an owner a half coconut shell to tuck in a creeper on the house wall which flycatchers used as a nest base. He wrote about the study in *Worcestershire Record*. He encouraged us to go biological recording at the Kemerton and pictured me somewhere with an insect net covering my head, face and more labelled as a new species for the area. He wrote many "*Kemerton Cuttings*" for the *Record* telling many interesting tales – a sailing Great-crested Grebe nest for example.



09. Field recording at Kemerton Lake Reserve. Left to Right Geoff Trevis, Kevin McGee, Brett Westwood, Bert Reid and John Clarke. Harry Green.

#### End piece

I knew and worked with all the people mentioned on these pages. Three were long-standing friends. Pam Gough I knew less well as her spell on the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust Council was a long time ago. Their names will live on in the data base of the WBRC. They all made a difference for the good in recording, understanding, and the conservation of Worcestershire's wildlife. Harry Green.