Derek Alfred Wheeler Hill
BSc PhD CChem FRSC FLS
4 Feb 1925–22 Dec 2009

Derek Hill was the second son of Charles and Madelaine Hill. Derek grew up in Purley and first went to prep school at the top of Purley Downs, which at that time was not built-up. From the age of 6 he walked to and from school, alone, twice a day. Derek enjoyed walking and remembered noticing the red ‘dot’ in the centre of the wild carrot flower which was an early indication of what was to become a lifelong interest in botany. His next school was Purley County School for Boys which was an early indication of what was to become a lifelong interest in botany.

The outbreak of war in 1939 saw a huge change to his life with a move to North Wales. Derek remained in the south working with paint at Hadfields in Mitcham, rising to the rank of Chief Chemist and eventually Technical Director.

When Hadfields sold out to another company, Derek took the opportunity to work on his own. Buying a share in a small factory in Croydon, he began a consultancy known as Surface Coatings Research (SCR) in 1967. This involved trouble-shooting flooring problems, leading him into involvement in the world of civil engineering, evolving mastics for bridges, camouflage for airfields, sealants for dry docks, adhesive to stick ‘cats eyes’ to the road and Ministry of Defense contracts. He was also called as an expert witness in various court cases, one involving a murder! His successes became well known, and in one instance the case was withdrawn when it became apparent Derek was defending.

Derek met Pamela in 1944 and they were married in 1951, deciding to live in Reigate where buying a plot was more economically viable than buying an existing build. They were fortunate to be offered a plot in Colley Way, and after a spell in a caravan got on the waiting list for a licence to build. During this period Derek studied part time for his PhD to add to his Associateship of the Institute of Chemistry he had previously obtained. The house was ready to occupy in 1954.

Derek became a keen apiarist and had varied success with honey yields, although the insects were kept for interest rather than crop. Honey was eaten with relish by the family which soon consisted of a daughter Alison and 2 years later Rosemary. He loved family holidays in Wales where he began more serious botanizing, and after attending Cecil Prime’s lectures, he joined the Surrey Flora Committee in 1984 at the instigation of Ted Wallace whom he drove around on various botanical excursions. Derek eventually became Chairman of what was now the Surrey Botanical Society on the retirement of Joyce Smith and Alan Leslie in 2002 until eventual ill health led to Derek’s retirement in 2005.

I first met Derek early in his bryological career in the New Forest at the BBS Southern Group inauguration meeting, auspicious because Jeff Bates, to the excitement of all attending, refound Plagiocystis bifaria in the forest after many years absence. Derek attended almost all meetings of the Southern and South-eastern local group meetings and we became firm friends. On the resignation of Paul Adams he took up the post of Vice-county Recorder for Surrey, a position which he took very seriously, keeping meticulous records and going out into the field whenever possible until ill health made this more difficult.

Derek had a wonderful sense of humour and our frequent phone conversations contained much laughter. He was a very gentle man, easy to like and I will miss him.

Derek is survived by Pam, his wife of 58 years, his daughters Alison and Rosemary, and three grandchildren. I would like to thank Pam for providing the details of Derek’s early years and of their years together, and I send my sincere sympathies to them all.

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