

OBITUARIES

VICTOR JOHN SCOTT (1929–2011)

Victor was born in Aston Abbots in 1929 in a house that was later to become the village shop and died in a cottage (just 30m up the road) where he had lived since he was 6 years old. His interest in flora and fauna started as a young child, when he was frequently to be seen roaming the countryside eager to spot a flower, butterfly or bird. He began his working life as a junior gardener at a large house in Aston Abbots, where he stayed for thirty years, rising to become Estate Manager. He went on to become a lecturer for the Royal Horticultural Society and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, giving talks on natural history and horticultural subjects to many and varied organisations.

During the Second World War he was a regular visitor to Aston Abbots Abbey, which housed the Czech government in exile. He learnt to speak some Czech and established an enduring friendship with the former President Benes. In 1969–71 he helped with the Wing Airport Resistance Campaign (WARA) that successfully resisted the building of a new airport in Cublington.

Victor was a long time member of the Bucks Archaeological Society and became president of the Natural History Section in 2003, following the death of Sir Thomas Barlow, the previous incumbent. Sir Thomas's mother, Lady Nora Barlow, founder member and first president of the Section, had shared her love of natural history with Victor in his formative years.

Prior to becoming President, Victor had been Chairman of the Committee. In his role as Chairman, Victor, with the support of his wife Christine, had organized events for the programme for many years, and it was not uncommon for him to lead two of the six field trips and deliver one out of the six indoor lectures each year.

Victor was famous for his fungus forays, but his specialism was flowering and flowerless plants, and his local knowledge on these was unsurpassed. Members benefitted from being taken to many Buckinghamshire sites to be shown both common and rare species, and have the peculiarities and requirements of these explained.

Victor had a field naturalist's sixth sense. For example, he could spot a woodcock nesting on a patch of brown leaves, and take a photograph without disturbing it.

When Victor gave a talk the room was packed. The quality of his slides, the depth of his knowledge and his infectious enthusiasm were irresistible. He had a loyal following. Part of his charm was his anecdotal style. The writer remembers once when giving a talk he was trying to impress upon his audience the importance of using scientific names and keeping records. When on a field trip in a mountainous area of Greece, his field notebook served a more unusual purpose. Unwittingly he had strayed into Albanian territory, and an armed guard wanted to know what he was up to. Victor handed over his field notebook. By very lucky chance the guard was a naturalist too, recognised the scientific names, so with smiles and warm handshakes let Victor go safely on his way. This is just one example of the many stories Victor retold that engaged the interest of his audience.

Victor's legacy to Buckinghamshire was left in the hearts and minds of the countless students that were lucky enough to have known him and had been inspired to enjoy the subject he was so passionate about.

Victor is survived by his wife Christine, to whom we extend our sincere sympathy.

*Margaret Kendrick
Sheila Thompson
Diana Gulland.*

IAN TOPLIS (1932–2010)

Ian Toplis passed away suddenly, but peacefully on 6 April 2010.

Born in Sidcup, Kent on 4 January 1932, he spent his early life in and around London. His father was an electrical engineer from London; his mother, from Dundee. He was a boarder at St. Albans School during the Second World War. When not at school he spent time in Scotland and Harrow, to where his parents had moved.

After leaving school in 1948 he went on to art college, where he developed an interest in set design and considered the idea of working on film sets. However, he went on to train as an architect at the Northern Polytechnic in London from 1949, where he enjoyed an active social life and weekends rambling. After National Service, where he joined the Royal Engineers and seemed to spend most of his time in an underground bunker in Whitehall, he lived in London during the early 1960s. He worked for British Rail designing a variety of buildings for them and making use of the free travel offered as a perk, with trips to the Soviet Union, Finland and Morocco, amongst other places. He joined the Questor Theatre Company, where he continued to design stage sets for their performances.

His parents had retired to South Heath, and in the mid 1960s Ian moved to Great Missenden and began work for Buckinghamshire County Council as an architect and landscape designer, where he designed buildings including part of the shopping centre in High Wycombe and landscaped roundabouts on the A413 outside Chalfont St Peter. Through his father's love of amateur dramatics, they met the local Hobbs family who lived at the Lee. He was introduced to their daughter, Betty, who had attended the old Wendover School by the clock tower and was now a teacher. They married in 1967 at Great Missenden Church and settled in Wendover in 1969.

In 1969, he applied for a teaching post at Hammersmith College of Art and Building, which was incorporated into Thames Polytechnic, working at the sites in Hammersmith, Woolwich and finally Greenwich, the institution today known as the University of Greenwich. He lectured in both architecture and architectural history and decided

to undertake a part-time PhD alongside this, researching the design and building of the Foreign Office. This was conferred in 1982. His thesis was later re-worked and published as a book, *The Foreign Office, an Architectural History* (Mansell, London, 1987). This was the first of many publications on architectural history, and he became an acknowledged expert on the work of Sir George Gilbert Scott.

His first wife Betty died in 1982, leaving him to bring up their children, Alison and Fraser. However, he again found happiness with his second marriage to Jane in 1992, when he also took early retirement from teaching.

This latter stage of his life was filled with activities that combined his professional and personal interests. Ian served on Wendover parish council, using his professional knowledge to help steer the planning committee. Ian designed the symbol of the clock tower for the parish council of Wendover which is now used on bags, seats and tea towels, amongst many other things, to promote the town and prove a lasting reminder of his design talents. He was recently involved with the U3a as one of the conveners for the architectural module, was vice-chairman of Bucks Historic Buildings Trust, CBA advisor and on the Council of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society since May 2008. He was also active in conducting tours of Scott's masterpiece, the Foreign Office, during Open House weekends.

During his retirement he was also able to undertake more in-depth research into the life of Sir George Gilbert Scott and had collated the information into a biography which is hoped can be published posthumously. He contributed a section on Scott to *Recollections of Nineteenth-Century Buckinghamshire* published by the Record Society in 1998. He also worked on the life of Sir Albert Richardson for *The Records of Buckinghamshire* and updated the section on Wendover for the most recent edition of Pevsner's *Buckinghamshire in the Buildings of England* series. At the time of his death, he was working on an exhibition on the life and works of Sir George Gilbert Scott, which was to be held at Buckinghamshire County Museum in 2011, the bi-centenary of the architect's birth.

Ian still enjoyed travel and with Jane embarked on many trips abroad, to Jordan, Italy and Germany in particular. He made a last trip to Italy, going on the Orient Express to Venice, shortly before Jane passed away in 2006. Ian's enquiring mind, wide range of knowledge across many divergent areas

and his eye for design, along with his cheery disposition, will be missed by many. He leaves a daughter and son, Alison and Fraser, and two grandchildren, Isobel and Emily.

Sue Fox

WILLIAM HUGH DELAFIELD (1936–2011)

It was with great sadness that we heard of the death of William Delafield from meningitis on 9 October 2011. He had been a benefactor to the Society since 1998, funding various projects.

William was born in Leighton Buzzard, and was educated at Berkhamsted School from 1944 to 1955 before going up to Brasenose College, Oxford. He had been a volunteer at Bucks County Museum whilst a pupil at Berkhamsted School, during R. Courtney Sansome's time as Curator. He combined farming at Deddington in Oxfordshire with his role as Director of the William Delafield Charitable Trust. The Trust's policy for distribution of grants is mainly in the area of restoration of records or archives of historical societies, and restoration of historic buildings including churches. Recipients of grants are usually restricted to bodies within the counties of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire, the four counties which William was associated with.

William visited BAS Library in 1998 to intro-

duce himself and the Trust, and to renew acquaintance with the Museum. At the time of his visit the Society was hoping to raise funds to purchase a computer for the Library to hold data on the books and archives. We prepared an application and were granted the sum. Following that we applied for, and received, funding over a period of years for the purchase of archive storage boxes and micron polyester pockets for the Muniment Room stock. However, the biggest project funded by the Trust was the conservation of our 400 prints. The project lasted 6 years and the grant paid for the expertise of Julian Clare, a conservator at Windsor Castle, to clean and restore the prints and place them in archive sleeves, thus preserving them for posterity. Amongst other local bodies receiving help from the Trust was Berkhamsted School which received a grant for archive preservation and storage, and the Kederminster Library, which obtained help towards the cost of commissioning a fireguard.

Diana Gulland

JOHN ANTHONY (TONY) COLMER (1940–2011)

Tony was born in Merton, near Wimbledon on 15 March 1940 and died at Budleigh Salterton on 18 September 2011.

Tony attended school in Wimbledon before going up to Oxford University to study modern history at Queen's College from 1959 to 1962. He spent his working life with the Inland Revenue as one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Taxes, moving from London to Wigan in Lancashire and finally to High Wycombe.

Tony's great interests were archaeology and

natural history at both of which he excelled. It was on a London University Diploma in Archaeology course that he met his future wife Angela Traylen (obit. *Records* 48, 320) who shared his interests. Whilst living in Lancashire they joined the newly formed West Lancashire Archaeological Society, and when they moved to High Wycombe in 1975 they joined BAS. They regularly attended lectures, supported summer outings and became very involved with the Natural History section, which Tony chaired from April 1988 to April 1993. They

organised numerous field trips, some starting and ending at their house when tea and home-made cakes were served. One of their early projects was counting species for the Black Hedge project. They became volunteers for the National Trust at Hughenden Manor and wardened a nature reserve at Chequers Knapp. Tony became a volunteer in the Society's Library and catalogued our collection of maps, using his extensive knowledge to identify them.

Tony was particularly proud of his grandfather, Francis Colmer (1873–1967), a gifted artist who painted many views of Buckinghamshire. He loaned a collection of Francis's paintings and drawings to the County Museum for an exhibition held in 1991, and subsequently donated seventy-five works. He bequeathed a further nineteen framed

watercolours to the Museum.

Tony retired in 2002 and he and Angela decided to move to Devon, finally finding the house and location they wanted in Budleigh Salterton in 2004. They quickly became active members of the Fairlynch Museum in Budleigh, acting as stewards and helping with cataloguing. Tony joined the Otter Valley Built Environment Committee, commenting on planning applications. They settled quickly and loved being so close to the sea, which could be seen from their garden. Sadly Angela became seriously ill in 2006 and died in 2007. Tony took over Angela's work on the reclassification of the Museum's archaeology collection until he died after a short illness in September 2011.

Diana Gulland

CHRISTOPHER NORMAN GOWING (1923–2011)

Christopher Gowing, who has died aged 88, was Curator of Buckinghamshire County Museum for 28 years and was responsible for its expansion and development over three decades from the 1960s.

He was born in Prittlewell, Southend, where his father was Archdeacon. After Lancing College he began a degree at St Edmund Hall, Oxford but volunteered for the Army early on in the war. He joined the Royal Army Service Corps, serving in North Africa, Cyprus, Italy and Germany and achieving the rank of Captain. After the war he returned to Oxford to complete his PPE degree and a Certificate of Education.

Christopher's museum career began in 1951 in Hampshire, working in Basingstoke and Alton. The outstanding ceramic collections, now at the Allen Gallery in Alton, provided the stimulus for his interest in studio ceramics, a subject in which he later became expert.

He took up the post of Curator of Buckinghamshire County Museum in 1960, only three years after the County Council had taken over responsibility for its management from the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society. Under Christopher's direction the Museum service expanded and flourished. From a staff comprising only the curator, secretary, carpenter and attendant in the early 1960s, by the 80s there were additionally curatorial

staff for local history and natural history, a field archaeology team, education officer and conservator. The Schools Loans Service became a major element of the Museum's operation comprising several hundred items circulated to schools throughout the County.

He initiated the expansion of the Museum in Church Street, Aylesbury, into adjacent church buildings, enabling the creation of new Natural History, Rural Life, and Aylesbury Galleries and laying the basis for the further development of the Museum that was to take place in the 1990s.

The collections also grew under his guidance. Among his many astute purchases over the years were additions to the topographical art collection, contemporary crafts, and items of 18th century furniture, glass and silver. Notably, he built up at Aylesbury one of the most comprehensive collections of British studio ceramics in the country, many of which are illustrated in the book *British Studio Ceramics in the 20th Century* which he co-authored with Paul Rice in 1989. He was also the author, with G B Clarke, of *Drawings of Stowe by John Claude Nattes in the Buckinghamshire County Museum* (1983), one of a stream of museum publications which appeared under his watch from the 1970s onwards.

The steady gains which Christopher made for

the museum service were achieved in his quiet, gentlemanly way, yet always with realism and farsightedness. He trusted his staff and gave them their head and the resulting collegiate atmosphere made Bucks County Museum a happy and creative

place to work. His many former colleagues remember him with gratitude and affection.

RE, MF, GL, JR