

OBITUARIES

MARGARET BARRON (1925–2016)

Margaret Barron, who died on 16th December 2016, was best known to BSBI members as the long-serving Recorder for v.c.96, East Inverness-shire, a position which she occupied for 28 years (1979–2007). In addition to this role, she was an active participant in many other societies local to her home town of Inverness, not least the Inverness Botany Group, for which she served as secretary for 31 years.

Born on 8th March 1925, Margaret was the youngest of three children born to Marion (née Cornet) and Llewellyn Jones, a Chartered Accountant in Inverness. The young Margaret was a sporty girl, excelling at swimming and hockey whilst at school at Inverness Royal Academy. Her interest in botany seems to have developed later in life. It was also during her school years that she met her future husband, Hugh Barron, a fellow pupil at IRA (as it is known locally) whose mother was a friend of Margaret's mother.

On leaving school in wartime 1943, Margaret immediately joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS – the women's branch of the Army) as a Wireless Operator, serving until 1947. Following her discharge from the Service, she enrolled at Edinburgh University to study for a Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com.) degree, graduating in 1950. During her time at university she also resumed playing badminton, another sport at which she excelled. After graduating she spent a year working for an insurance company in London. These years were the only significant period of time that Margaret spent away from her natal town.

On her return to Inverness, she and Hugh (who by then had also been demobbed from the Royal Marines) were married in July 1951, and settled into life on his family farm at Charleston, near Dunain, which was then on the outskirts of town. Here they initially kept dairy cattle, but later converted to beef production. It was during this period that Margaret's interest in botany developed, and she became active in the Inverness Botany Group. This local society had been set up in 1955 in response to a lecture given by Grant Roger of the Committee for the Study of the Scottish Flora (CSSF) (Barron *et al.*, 2010).

Margaret was the mainstay of the Group for many years, and was largely instrumental in its development as a very successful local society, serving as Secretary from



Margaret Barron leading a field trip up from the River Findhorn at Ardoch, 2004. Sue Murray.

1975 to 2006. During this time she organised the winter programme of indoor lectures and arranged and led the summer programme of field meetings. She instigated a quarterly newsletter, wrote most of the articles, edited each issue and was responsible for the production and distribution of what was then a 'hard-copy only' communication. These functions are now carried out by a committee of eight people!

Having joined the BSBI in 1971, Margaret also joined the Botanical Society of Edinburgh (now the Botanical Society of Scotland) and for many years acted as Local Secretary for their annual Inverness lecture which was (and still is) held in conjunction with the Inverness Botany Group.

The production of *A Map Flora of Mainland Inverness-shire* (Hadley, 1985) was a joint project between these two societies (BSBI and BSE). This book was the culmination of many years' work by the then Vice-County Recorders for East and West Inverness-shire and many other botanists. The fieldwork was carried out between 1970 and 1975, before Margaret was appointed v.c. recorder, but she receives an acknowledgement for her contribution, as do many other members of both societies. The book consists of distribution maps of all the plants found across

this huge area of Scotland on a 5×5km (quadrant) basis, and represents a milestone in our knowledge of Highland botany.

In taking on the Recordship for East Inverness-shire (except Nairnshire) in 1979, she succeeded Miss E.R.T. Conacher. On the death of the redoubtable Mary McCallum Webster, author of the *Flora of Moray, Nairn and East Inverness-shire*, in 1985 she added Nairnshire ('v.c.96b') as well, so that she then covered the whole of v.c.96. This is the largest vice-county in Britain, and includes extensive areas of mountainous and otherwise inaccessible terrain, from the head of Glen Affric to the summit of Cairngorm, and from Fort Augustus to Nairn. Margaret kept meticulous records of plant distribution, on individual cards for each outing by herself, by the Botany Group on their regular field trips, and by visiting botanists. These were then collated according to 10-km squares for inclusion in the *New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora* (2002). She also surveyed tetrads for the BSBI Monitoring Scheme (1987–88) and the repeat Local Change survey (2003–04) during this period.

Margaret was active in several other environmental groups locally. She co-ordinated a survey of *Leucanthemum vulgare* (Ox-eye Daisy) for Highland Biological Recording Group in 1995 (Barron, 1996), and served on the Committees of the local Scottish Wildlife Trust members' group and Inverness Field Club for several years. She was also involved in the Highland Biodiversity Project management group, and for a short time in the early 1990s was a member of the Forestry Commission's Inverness, Ross and Cromarty Environmental Advisory Panel. With more than a passing interest in birds, Margaret was also a member of the local Scottish Ornithologists' Club and RSPB groups.

In the late 1970s Inverness was expanding rapidly, and the farm at Charleston was a prime target for

development. Most of it was sold to the Council for use as a cemetery, and Margaret and Hugh retired to 'The Granary', a barn conversion on the opposite side of the River Ness, where they spent the next 40 years.

All who knew her will remember Margaret not only for her unparalleled knowledge of local plants and their distribution, but for her enthusiasm in communicating her love of the subject to those less knowledgeable, and for her infinite patience in responding to beginners' questions. She leaves a legacy of hundreds of meticulously completed recording cards, now in the custody of the BSBI, and numerous hand-written notes on index cards and small pieces of paper, replying to queries, which those of us who received them will treasure. Unfortunately, in later years, after two hip replacement operations, declining mobility gradually curtailed her activities and she was less able to participate in field trips and meetings. It is fitting that she is now laid to rest in the very cemetery which used to be part of Charleston Farm.

Inverness Field Club has instituted a 'Margaret Barron Memorial Lecture' and Margaret's assemblage of Highland botany books has been deposited in Inverness Reference Library as a special collection.

I am grateful to Hugh Barron and Andy Amphlett for help in writing this obituary.

References

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