



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 a much longer walk to get to the correct bus stop in order to save him 1d off the fare, a significant amount in those times.

The outbreak of war in 1939 saw a huge change to his life with a move to North Wales with his mother for safety, a fortuitous decision as their house in Purley was bombed twice in one week, the first bomb knocking out Derek’s bedroom and the second demolishing the entire house! Derek’s education continued at Barmouth County School. Living on a farm near the sea

embedded a life-long love for that part of Wales. It was at Barmouth that his great interest in chemistry developed, and at 16 years of age he returned to Purley and an understaffed school with no chemistry teacher where the boys taught themselves – with good results!

Aeroplanes were his hobby and his life was at this time taken up with the ATC and a determination to fly. Living close to Croydon airport he spent a great deal of time watching aircraft and recording flights. However, his determination to join the RAF was thwarted, since scientists were needed at home and Derek reluctantly began a science degree course at Kings College London with a 6-month deferment from call up. Due to the change in schools, his higher education certificate was incomplete (no maths) so accordingly he was entered into an Intermediate BSc degree course. On passing this course, Derek moved to the Regent Street Polytechnic to take a full degree, but with ‘call-up’ limits it had to be a General Science degree rather than the Chemistry Special he had wanted.

At the same time he was offered a laboratory job next door doing 'war work' on Rolls Royce engines. Having qualified with his BSc, he found that he was not going to be called up as his job was classified as a 'reserved' occupation, i.e. you had to remain there! After an explosion (not Derek's fault!), the firm had to relocate to Sydenham, and Derek helped to turn a small mansion into a laboratory where he remained until the company sold out to Monsanto, based in Ruabon, 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 *Plagiochila 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.

Howard Matcham

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