

HENRY JAMES BERMAN F.R.E.S. 1935 – 2017

Henry Berman was born on 4th July 1935 in the borough of Finsbury within the sound of Bow Bells, so he was a true Cockney. He was evacuated during the war to Leicestershire with his mother. On his return to London he was educated at South Hackney Central School and Hackney Down sixth form college; doing his teacher training at Newman Park College. After completing his teacher training he moved to St Ives in 1957, with his late wife Joan, to take up the position of Biology Teacher at St Ivo School. Henry was interested in insects and formed the St. Ivo Entomology and Natural History Society (Entsoc). This was to become nationally and internationally famous. One of his contacts was the naturalist and author, the late Gerald Durrell, for whom he helped breed rare lizards in what became the school zoo.

Originally this “zoo” was in his laboratory and the tropical room was a very smelly cupboard, but when the school expanded purpose temperate and tropical rooms were built. Animals included a Cayman alligator a large snapping turtle, terrapins, boa constrictors, pythons, tarantulas, various small mammals, reptiles and insects.

Henry was a great believer in the abilities of his students and Entsoc was run by them on a team basis with the teams being for invertebrates, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Each team had a leader and an assistant leader and team members were responsible for the upkeep and welfare of their animals (even during school holidays). Students had to pass examinations to progress, and to be awarded the coveted Entsoc Badge, perhaps with a piece of coloured wool to denote the particular team. The insect group bred locusts for the anti-locust research centre. Many of his former students went on to work in scientific areas and many specialised in work with animals.

For many years Henry and Joan used to take the Society on expeditions at home and abroad, staying in Youth Hostels, collecting and cataloguing insects and small animals; these trips are remembered with great fondness by those who took part.

Henry and a few of his students who were members of Entsoc ran a Rothamsted trap in the school grounds from April until October 1965 and again over the same period during 1968. In 1969 it was run from May to November and in 1970 May to October contributing almost 1,500 records to the county database.

I remember him turning up annually at the Amateur Entomologist’s Exhibition in London in a coach full of his students and part of their ‘zoo’, a trip he did annually until he retired. After his retirement in the late 1990s he continued to attend the exhibition with posters and displays of Bees and Wasps where I use to meet him and have a chat.

His involvement with the HFFS most probably began in 1958 when St Ivo School joined this Society. It is quite likely that Henry was the instigator in getting the school to join. In the 1961 annual report he had a letter published, dated February 1962, with reference to the ‘Huntingdonshire County Collection of Insects’, where he hopes to be able to replace the damaged specimens held in the Norris Museum, St Ives, with a collection of insects found in the county. He does state in the letter that he will not deal with Lepidoptera.

I have not been able to find any information about this collection nor have I been able to locate any further reference to it.

In 1963 he took up the position of Amphibia and Reptilia Referee (now known as Recorder) for this Society, a position he held until 1971. His membership of this Society lapsed a couple of times during the coming years, with him re-joining after a few years. He re-joined once again in 1998 and in 2005 he became the Society's Hymenoptera Recorder a position he held until 2015. During this time Henry contributed many articles to the annual report on Bumble Bees and Social Wasps, occasionally including a note or two about other members of this family.

Henry died in Hinchingbrooke Hospital on 27th December 2017.

We offer our sincere condolences to his family.

I offer my thanks to David Chambers and Linda Phillips (Henry's daughter) for their help with writing this obituary.

Barry Dickerson
January 2018

