



PERGAMON

Phytochemistry 61 (2002) 219–220

PHYTOCHEMISTRY

www.elsevier.com/locate/phytochem

Obituary



Jeffrey Barry Harborne (1928–2002)

The death of Jeffrey Harborne is a great loss to the scientific community and to his many friends worldwide. His knowledge of plants and their chemistry was both extensive and detailed and his research in his chosen field outstanding. His skills in writing, teaching and as an editor played a major role in advancing the science of phytochemistry for more than half a century. His ideas, presented in research papers, books, reviews and contributions to countless meetings and conferences, influenced generations of students, young and old, who will continue to explore the frontiers to which he first drew their attention.

In 1999, a symposium was held at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew to honour and thank him, on his retirement, for 32 years of service to this journal as Associate Editor, Executive Editor and finally as Editor-in Chief. The debt that we owe to him for carrying this important responsibility on our behalf for so many years is clear, yet the Editorship of *Phytochemistry* was only one of the many contributions that he made to the development of plant chemistry in all its aspects.

Educated at Wycliffe College and the University of Bristol, he gained his B.Sc. in Chemistry and, in 1953, his Ph.D. in Organic Chemistry under Professor Wilson Baker FRS. As a research student he published a number of papers (with W. Baker and W.D. Ollis) on the flavonoids; a group of compounds that were to interest

him all his life. An Eli Lilly Post Doctoral Research Fellowship then took him to the University of California at Los Angeles where he continued work on plant pigments with Professor T. Geissman.

He returned to England in 1955 as Biochemist at the John Innes Institute, Hertford where he studied the biochemistry of tuberous *Solanum* species in relation to genetics, disease resistance, taxonomy and physiology and the distribution of flavonoids in other plant genera. It was at the John Innes Institute that I first met Jeffrey. It was at a meeting of plant chemists and biochemists that he and Tony Swain had convened to discuss the possibility of founding what was to become the Phytochemical Society and later the Phytochemical Society of Europe, a Society that he was to serve in years to come as both Secretary and Chairman.

Eleven years later, he moved to the Botany Department of the University of Liverpool as Research Fellow, and then in 1968 to the Botany Department of the University of Reading where he remained, firstly as Research Fellow, then as Reader, Professor, Head of Department and in retirement Emeritus Professor.

Jeffrey's scientific output was remarkable for its quality, quantity and diversity. He published work relating to chemistry, biochemistry, botany, taxonomy, genetics and ecology. He was author or co-author of more than 270 research papers and reviews. He was

founder of the journal *Phytochemical Analysis*. He was author, editor or co-editor of 40 books. Of these one of the most influential may well prove to be *An Introduction to Ecological Biochemistry*. This pioneering textbook is now in its fourth edition and has been translated into Spanish, German, Russian and Japanese. It has, I believe, done more to stimulate interest in ecological biochemistry than any other single publication and I can vouch for its popularity with students in many parts of the world.

Jeffrey's achievements have been widely recognised. In 1966, his D.Sc. was conferred by the University of Bristol. He was at various times Visiting Professor in the Universities of Rio de Janeiro, California, Texas and Illinois. In 1985, he was awarded the Gold Medal in Botany by the Linnean Society of London. In 1986, he was the first recipient of the Silver Medal of the Phytochemical Society of Europe. In 1992, he received the unique joint award of the Phytochemical Societies of America and Europe for "outstanding lifelong contributions to the discipline of phytochemistry throughout the world". In 1993, he was awarded the Silver Medal of the International Society for Chemical Ecology

and the The Pergamon Phytochemistry Prize for creativity in plant biochemistry. In 1995, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society.

Honours were not restricted to the scientific field, however, and I recently learned that he had been given the unique title of Church Warden Emeritus of Christ Church Reading. I also learned that it was he who had successfully undertaken the task of raising funds for the restoration of that same church. Whatever he did, he did well.

I have written of Jeffrey Harborne, the distinguished and extraordinarily productive scientist but he was much more than that. Those of us who were privileged to know him will always remember what excellent company he was; we will remember his quiet good humour, his kindness and willingness to help. He was a gentleman in the truest sense of the word. We shall miss him.

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