

Obituaries

WILLIAM THOMAS STEARN (1911–2001)

Professor William Stearn, who died 9th May 2001 aged 90, made all taxonomists indebted to him for his studies in the history of botany and its publications and, in particular, for the four editions of his *Botanical Latin* (1966–1992) and his 176-page Introduction to the Ray Society's edition of Linnaeus' *Species plantarum* (1957). He also produced valuable monographic work, notably on *Epimedium*, *Paeonia* and *Allium* (of which he was a world expert), and floristic treatments of e.g. Jamaica and Nepal. His contributions to horticultural taxonomy and the study of the literature of horticulture were likewise both numerous and learned; and in this regard his drafting of the original *International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants* (1953) must be mentioned. Stearn's horticultural interests led him into a study of botanical illustration, of which he also became a noted expert, resulting in the publication, with Wilfred Blunt, of *The Art of Botanical Illustration* (1950). Stearn's revised and enlarged edition (1994) of this book confirmed it as the standard work on the subject.

William Stearn was born in Cambridge and, after a period as an assistant in a Cambridge bookshop (when he began studying in his spare time), he became an assistant in the R.H.S. Lindley Library at the age of 22. He had already, four years previously, published the first of his many botanical papers – on a fungal disease of *Campanula*. After service during the Second World War in the RAF Medical Corps (being a Quaker, he was unwilling to bear arms), he returned to the Lindley Library, where a major task was his completion of the fourth and last volume of *The RHS Dictionary of Gardening*. The flow of his publications continued unabated and eventually totalled 470 - books, papers and contributions to composite works.

In 1952 he moved to the British Museum (Natural History), where he joined the staff of the Botany Department. Here he was in charge of Section 3 of the General Herbarium (the last third of the Dicots in the Bentham & Hooker system) and worked officially on the long-established *Flora of Jamaica* and *An Enumeration of the Flowering Plants of Nepal*. Stearn nevertheless found time to complete (alone or in collaboration) articles and/or books on *Allium*, *Lilium*, *Paeonia* and *Anemone* and many other subjects, including the taxonomy of *Cannabis*. Despite this busy productive life, he always had time for fellow staff members – and others – who invoked his help. The answer to an apparently simple question often involved excursions in unexpected directions. My inquiry about the Latin for 'saddle', for instance, resulted in a lecturette on Roman cavalry. They used saddle cloths (*ephippium*, something placed on a horse, usually a saddle cloth), not saddles – which appeared much later and for which the word *sella* (seat, chair) was used.

William Stearn's retirement in 1976 did not have any apparent effect on the stream of works that issued from his pen. I use this word advisedly; all his careful, always unjoined writing was done with a fountain pen, much of it being typed by his wife, Ruth, who was a constant support to William in all his endeavours. Together they translated and edited Hellmut Baumann's *Greek Wild Flowers and Plant Lore in Ancient Greece* (1993), Greece and its flora having been subjects of long-standing interest to him. As a result of his experiences as a botanical courier on holiday cruises, he was concerned to bring to an end the practice of weed-killing the ancient sites in that country. He would have been gratified to learn that it has become much less common in recent years. After retirement he undertook the editorship of the *Annales Musei Goulandaris*, which he continued to edit until 1999, the year of publication of *John Lindley, 1799–1865*. This volume, celebrating the bicentenary of the birth of the famous botanist and secretary of the RHS, was edited by him; and his introductory biographical chapter was a major contribution to it. In his old age William returned to his first taxonomic love, the study of *Epimedium* (Berberidaceae), a revision of which was all but ready for press when he died.

Stearn's many honours included the CBE, the Gold Medal of the Linnean Society (he was the authority on Linnaeus, President of the Society, and its Botanical Curator for many years), the Victoria Medal of Honour of the R.H.S., the Asa Gray Award by the American Association of Plant Taxonomists and the Engler Medal of the International Association of Plant Taxonomists. In addition he received honorary degrees from the Universities of Leiden and Uppsala and was created Commander of the Star of the North by the Swedish Academy of Sciences for his work on Linnaeus.



Prof. W. T. Stearn, 1991. Photograph reproduced by kind permission of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

William Stearn had been a member of the B.S.B.I. since 1954. He was co-opted on to the Maps Committee in 1955 to help with the preparations for the original edition of the Atlas (1962), became a full member the following year, and continued as a committee member until 1968, the year after it changed into the Records Committee. For 40 years he was the B.S.B.I. Referee for *Allium*; with his world-wide experience of the genus, he will be very difficult to replace. His great knowledge of Botanical Latin was put at the Society's disposal when he gave the principal lecture at the meeting on this subject in Reading in February 1995. William was often to be seen at B.S.B.I. conferences; and he was always as ready to share his encyclopaedic knowledge with amateurs as with his professional colleagues. In so many ways he will be very much missed.

Much of the above information and more can be found in the extensive obituaries that appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* (10. v. 2001), *The Times* (11. v. 2001), *The Independent* (15. v. 2001), *The Guardian* (6. vi 2001, by Max Walters) and *The Garden* (July 2001). I am indebted to Mary Briggs for additional details.

N. K. B. ROBSON

BRIAN BROOKES
(1936–2000)

Brian Brookes, a BSBI member for 40 years, died at the early age of 64 in December 2000. After Beckenham and Penge Grammar School (where he was a pupil of Frank Brightman; like him he became a beekeeper as well as a botanist), Brian gained his botany degree and education diploma at King's College, London. He taught at Sloane Grammar School and before that at Forest Hill, London's famous Comprehensive School (he said, in later years, that no-one could claim that they were a real teacher unless they had regularly taken the Friday afternoon class of non-readers!).

With the late David Stanbury, Brian took his students on field courses to, amongst other places, the island of Handa off the coast of Sutherland and to Slapton Ley Field Centre. In 1965 he became Assistant Warden at Slapton; he was recommended for the post with the words "this man will identify all your plants for you - by the cotyledons - and he's waterproof!". He and I together wrote the paper on the flora of what is now the Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve. Brian was an excellent, enthusiastic and thorough field botanist and a most pleasant companion in the field; his good humour never flagged even as, for many weekends in succession, we fought our way through thicket and reedswamp in order to record every corner in detail. The Higher Ley was, in those days, so impenetrable that we were forced to explore it in a boat, using a very specialised rowing technique devised and operated by Brian, where the oars, instead of pulling on the water, were worked against the aerial stems of the dense *Phragmites* stands.

In 1967 he became Warden at Kindrogan Field Centre, where many B.S.B.I. members will remember him for his patient and inspirational teaching.

After 18 years at Kindrogan he ran field courses privately and developed a consultancy service, working principally on his own and almost exclusively in the Scottish Highlands.

Ten years ago, he and Joan bought the farm of Borelick, 54 acres of some of the poorest farmland in Highland Perthshire. The object was to provide a practical demonstration to show that it is possible to increase productivity through farming and forestry whilst, at the same time increasing the biodiversity of the wildlife. This led them to the need for hardy livestock and so to a special interest in Luing cattle. He thus had a first hand understanding of hill farming, woodland management and forestry and consequently was able to bridge the gap between biological science and practical management. This combination made him stand out amongst environmental consultants in the UK and led to the high regard in which he was held. He did a prodigious amount of habitat survey work, vegetation mapping and report writing.

Brian advised government agencies, serving on regional advisory committees of the Forestry Commission, and did much work for Scottish Natural Heritage. In these last years he surveyed some of the most remote areas of the Highlands, often living under canvas, miles from the nearest road. He gave advice to a great number of Scottish estates; in the last five years of his life he made five major vegetation surveys every year - 10,000 hectares per year, spent knee deep in the wettest of wet places in Britain. These were mostly full N.V.C. surveys, often in preparation for natural regeneration schemes and environmental assessments for woodland management. Always his interest was in the long-term view and he had no time for "quick buck" economic land uses or for merely sentimental preservation; his concern was for the whole ecosystem, not just a golden eagle.

Despite his heavy workload, he gave enormous amounts of his time to non-governmental agencies - including the Scottish Wildlife Trust since its inception 30 years ago. He served on many S.W.T. committees and management groups, in particular its Reserves Committee (he had become responsible for the Loch of the Lowes reserve before the ospreys arrived; he then had to cope with the consequences of their presence). More recently, he had chaired a S.W.T. committee looking at grazing management; he was able to provide advice on potential woodland schemes and their likely effect on hill grazing regimes.

He was a fine teacher and his enthusiasm inspired professionals and amateurs alike. His special skills were recognised when he was made an M.B.E. for his work at Kindrogan.

He wrote the British Naturalists' Association *Guide to Mountains and Moorlands* which contains a splendidly clear statement of his practical philosophies, illustrated with the most telling photographs, many his own - all just one more demonstration of his skill as a communicator.

A few weeks before the final return of his illness, his two small grandsons had stayed at Borelick; Brian would have been gratified that, on being told of his grandfather's death, the response of the six year old Daniel was great disappointment and annoyance that never again could his grandfather take him to find the small beasties in the Borelick Burn.

At Brian's Memorial Meeting, in the snows of Amulree, Perthshire, last February, a letter from Miroslav was read out. Miroslav, from the former Yugoslavia and in Britain with his diplomat father, had been a pupil at Sloane; he wrote to say how much, amid the horrors that had befallen his country, he had been sustained by contemplating the world of nature to which, as a schoolboy, he had been so ably introduced by Brian Brookes, his former schoolmaster.

Brian's ashes were scattered on Handa, the island whose vegetation he had mapped and monitored over 30 years; not inappropriately, there was such a wind blowing that perhaps some part of him got even as far as Iceland.

AILSA BURNS

(taken, except for the first three and the last three paragraphs, from the obituary by Don Aldridge).

DEREK ARTHUR WELLS

(1930–2001)

Derek Wells died from cancer on 9 June 2001. He was born at Marlingford on the River Yare a few miles west of Norwich where an early interest in natural history was inspired by his teacher at the village school, Mrs Elizabeth Morgan, and by the local poacher. He was the first boy from the school ever to go to Norwich Grammar School. After National Service in Germany he went to King's College, Newcastle and graduated in Agriculture in 1954.

His first post was in the Grassland Division of the East of Scotland College of Agriculture in Edinburgh where he quickly developed an interest in grasses and skills in their identification: he was renowned for his ability to name species from their leaves in hay. During his time in Edinburgh he was an active member of the Natural History Society and became President in 1960. In 1966 he moved to Monks Wood Experimental Station of the then Nature Conservancy, near Huntingdon, to join the Conservation Research Section, led by Dr Eric Duffey and later renamed the Lowland Grassland Section. Here he worked alongside that other grassland Wells - Terry from whom he was humorously separated by Lynne Farrell in *BSBI News* (1981) as 'Wet Wells' (*Wells palustris*) 'found almost exclusively in wet meadows or neutral grasslands, therefore the wearing of wellingtons often a distinguishing characteristic' whereas Terry was 'Dry Wells' (*Wells campestris*) 'found on dry chalk grassland slopes'. After the Nature Conservancy was split up in 1973 Derek left Monks Wood to join Dr Derek Ratcliffe in the Chief Scientist's Team of the new Nature Conservancy Council as specialist adviser on grasslands, heaths and agriculture, first in Huntingdon and then, from 1984, in Peterborough. Before he retired as Senior Grassland Ecologist in 1990 he had added vascular plants to his responsibilities.

Derek had more the look and voice of a farmer than of a scientist and his ability to talk to farmers in their own language earned the trust of many who would otherwise have been suspicious of 'a man from the Ministry': his patience and understanding were vital attributes leading to the securing of sites such as Parsonage Down and North Meadow, Cricklade in Wiltshire as National Nature Reserves.

Derek Wells joined the B.S.B.I. in 1962. He was co-opted to the Records Committee in 1981 and elected a full member the following year. In 1981 he was appointed as B.S.B.I. Plant Recording Scheme organiser to liaise between plant recorders and the Biological Records Centre at Monks Wood and quickly set about preparing new procedures for assembling and storing records. He became more widely known to V.C. Recorders when he organised a conference for them in the Norfolk College of Agriculture in 1983. Here he introduced the scheme to survey the species with 3 or fewer records in each vice-county as an indication of the most threatened and rapidly declining species across Britain. A year later he became chairman of a sub-committee to draw up plans for a new recording project which resulted in the launch of the Monitoring Scheme on 1 January 1987. He was chairman of the Monitoring Scheme Steering Committee (with special

responsibility for liaison with the Nature Conservancy Council) which saw the project to its conclusion with the publication of the Monitoring Scheme Report (Rich & Woodruff 1990). Thereafter, until he retired from the Records Committee in 1992, Derek played a significant part in the organisation of Recorders' Conferences and in stimulating Recorders and other members to contribute to various recording projects.

In 1990 he became joint Recorder (with Gigi Crompton) for v.c. 29 Cambridgeshire, a position he kept and relished until his death. He set up the Cambridgeshire Flora Group to collect records by parishes as well as by tetrads. During his final illness he sent some 90,000 records for v.c. 29 to the Biological Records Centre for *Atlas 2000*.

Another major task he undertook was to finalise the definitive list of species in his v.c. for the B.S.B.I. Database (Leicester).

Derek was an excellent teacher, especially in the field, and during his retirement he was an inspiring leader in the Botany Group of the Cambridge University of the Third Age helping to organise some wonderful excursions for them to other parts of Britain.

He was an infrequent author, but with colleagues at Monks Wood he wrote *Grassland Ecology and Wildlife Management* (Duffey *et al.* 1974) and he later collaborated with Noel King to write an article on 'The Flora of Neutral Grasslands in Wiltshire' in *Supplement to the Flora of Wiltshire* (Stearn 1975) which recognised six types of neutral grassland in the county - amongst them the frillatory meadows on the Gloucestershire border which they described as: 'together with the *Carex humilis* chalk grasslands of south west Wiltshire, ... the twin botanical glories of the county'. He was also a major contributor to the section on lowland grassland in *A Nature Conservation Review* (Ratcliffe 1977) for which most of the surveying was done in collaboration with Karen Buckley, Lynne Farrell and Terry Wells. He made a number of contributions to symposium volumes and conference reports notably a paper on 'The protection of British rare plants on nature reserves' in *The Biological Aspects of Rare Plant Conservation* (Synge 1985). For nearly 30 years he made an annual pilgrimage to Bratoft Meadow, Lincolnshire where he joined Barrie Wilkinson to count the number of flowering spikes of green-winged orchid, *Orchis morio*. Results from the first 23 years were published in a paper of which he was one of the joint authors (Silvertown *et al.*).

Botanical friends who saw him only when he was 'in the field' may be surprised to learn of his other enthusiasms: he was passionate about the 'Canaries' (Norwich City Football Club), music, history, whist and table tennis. For many years he taught the young of St Ives to play the latter and even took teams to compete in St Ives' twin town in Germany.

I am most grateful to Mary Briggs, Gigi Crompton, Philip Oswald, Bridget Smith Terry Wells and Barrie Wilkinson for their invaluable help in preparing this tribute to my former friend and colleague at Monks Wood. We all remember him with gratitude and affection.

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F. .H. PERRING

EDWARD BENEDICT BANGERTER
(1911–2001)

Those who have been members of the B.S.B.I. for more than three decades will remember Ted Bangerter (also known to his many botanical friends as 'Bang'), and be aware of the outstanding service he gave to the Society over many years. This is because the post-retirement section of his long life was spent in the Antipodes, and British botany's loss was literally New Zealand's botanical gain.

He was born in London, in a family which had come from Switzerland a few generations earlier. He was educated at Holloway School, where he matriculated at the early age of fourteen and subsequently gained a scholarship to Cambridge. However, he had by then formed a lasting attachment to Queenie which exceeded his commitment to education and, despite the very strong opposition of his parents, they soon married. In those days husbands were expected to have some visible means of financial support for their wives, so further education, leading to a career as a doctor that his parents had planned, was precluded. Accordingly, he joined the staff of the Natural History Museum (then British Museum (Natural History)) in 1931, as an assistant in the British Herbarium of the Botany Department under the legendary A. J. Wilmott whose knowledge of the British flora was only equalled (at least in departmental mythology) by his king-sized personality. Bangerter used to tell colourful stories about Wilmott's taxonomic confrontations with other botanists – in particular his 'discussions' with Wolley-Dod (author of the flora of *Sussex* and a *Rosa* specialist) must have sounded like *Jurassic Park*! Learning his curatorial job was enlivened by a trip to the Outer Hebrides with his colleague Jim Crabbe from the Fern Section, to assist Wilmott and Maybud Campbell (another larger than life sized character, who as a notable amateur was also a devoted supporter of the Society). What a trip that must have been! As for all botanists of that vintage, the Second World War interrupted his career through service in the army, most of which was spent in India as a cryptographer in the Intelligence Corps. This was reflected in later life by his devotion to cryptic crossword puzzles, and colleagues will remember that he was never quite at ease if he had not completed the Telegraph puzzle before starting work in the morning.

Wilmott died in 1950 and was replaced at the Museum by Dr Alexander Melderis whose substantial frame belied his most kindly and benign personality. However, coming to this country from Latvia via Sweden, after a career very cruelly disrupted by the war in eastern Europe, Melderis had initially much to learn about Britain, its flora and the English language. At this time Bangerter played a crucial role in maintaining the continuity of the department's activities. He joined the Society two years before I first met him in 1951, when I was a museum vacation student and, like many others, had reason to be grateful for his fatherly support and extensive knowledge of the collections. When a year later I joined the Museum staff, his welcome and support eased my early days in the Botany Department. He was by now deeply involved in the work of both the B.S.B.I. and the London Natural History Society, in association with great amateurs of the time like Ted Lousley, John Dony and Duggie Kent. With the Botanical Section of the L.N.H.S., he was closely concerned with the comprehensive survey of Frensham Ponds. His service to that society was recognised by his election to council in 1953, as Chairman of the Botany Section in 1955 and as President in 1959. I understand that an L.N.H.S. obituary will appear in due course. His central position in the Museum enabled him to play an informal but valuable liaison role that oiled the working of both societies. He acted as B.S.B.I. postmaster, redirecting the mail sent to the Society's official address at the Museum to the appropriate officers. At that time a vast quantity of the Society's back numbers of publications was stored at the top of the Museum's East Tower, and many of his lunch hours were spent dealing with orders and posting the resultant packages. His formal involvement as an officer of the Society included four terms on Council and service on the Meetings, Publications, Development & Rules and Records Committees. He undertook the onerous duty of Hon. General Secretary 1964–67, at a time of change in the Society from the long term sterling service of Ted Lousley and John Dony to an evolving situation that has led to the Society as we know it today.

He had by then reached a position of some seniority in the somewhat stratified departmental hierarchy. The Keeper of the time had managed to justify an additional staff post of Senior Experimental Officer, to act as a general co-ordinator of the department, its central office and staff. Bangerter was successful in applying for this job, for which he was in many ways particularly well

fitted, not least because his equitable and warm personality ensured that he was respected and trusted by all members of the staff, from the youngest and most junior, to his most senior colleagues. Unfortunately, the job description demanded his removal from the British Section and resulted in his place of work being located in the General Herbarium, where he had relatively little interest in, and only passing knowledge of, the totality of the world's flowering plant flora. Of course he maintained a fatherly interest in the British Section, but the circumstances inevitably meant some diminution of the department's impetus and involvement with the British flora, while leaving him somewhat at a loose end. Happily an opportunity was presented through the initiation of the department's five-year Mull project, in which a detailed field study of all plant groups was made, and which resulted in the publication of *The Island of Mull, a survey of its flora and environment*, Ed. A. C. Jermy and J. A. Crabbe in 1978. He seized the chance this project offered and was closely involved in many aspects of the work. It is a special pleasure to recall his collaboration with me in the collation of all the field, herbarium and literature records for the flowering plants and ferns, and the writing of the published account, together with chapters on the history of botanizing in the area and plant distributional patterns.

He was by then nearing the age for retirement, and his colleagues were aware that his interest and concern for British plants was only exceeded by his role as a family man – with his wife, three sons and a daughter, augmented by numerous babies that his wife fostered over the years. Meanwhile two sons had emigrated with their own families to seek fresh opportunities in New Zealand and, after retirement, he and his wife decided to visit them on the other side of the world. They went by sea armed with an open six-month return ticket, but once there, the many attractions of New Zealand and the presence of half their family made them decide to emigrate permanently. The two remaining families in England were charged with packing up and dispatching their belongings. This was a sad blow to his many friends in the Museum, the B.S.B.I. and the L.N.H.S., and there is no doubt that had he remained in Britain, we should be further indebted for many other botanical services. However, once settled in New Zealand, he rapidly established himself in the new botanical milieu and was soon appointed as an associate of the Auckland Museum. The New Zealand flora is remarkable for the number of alien plants which have become established, and we understand that his expertise and familiarity with European weeds and aliens was particularly welcome. He only made short return visits to this country, but he maintained a correspondence with some of his old botanical friends and colleagues, which clearly showed his continuing interest in British botany and that he looked forward to the arrival of the Society's publications and news of old friends.

The B.S.B.I. formally indicated its appreciation of his services and contributions by electing him an Honorary Member in 1968, but to many senior citizens of the Society, the remembrance of his warm and generous personality, and the welcome that he gave to visitors in the department will remain the most significant memorial of his life in British botany.

I am grateful to Mr John Bangerter (eldest son) for information on his earlier days, to Keith Hyatt for the L.N.H.S. connections and to many Museum and B.S.B.I. friends for other recollections.

JOHN F. M. CANNON

Report

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 5 MAY, 2001

The Annual General Meeting of the Society was held in the rooms of the Linnean Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London at noon. The President, Dr G. Halliday took the chair in the presence of 74 members.

Apologies for absence were read out and the minutes of the 2000 Annual General Meeting, published in *Watsonia* 23: 465–467 were approved as a correct record and signed by the President.

REPORT OF COUNCIL

This had been circulated to members and the President went through it commenting on the achievements of the Society during the past year, noting with especial pleasure that the enormous Atlas 2000 project was now in its closing stages and that publication was expected in spring 2002. He expressed his and the Society's great gratitude to all who had contributed. The Honorary Treasurer presented the financial part of the report; summary accounts had been circulated to all members and full sets of accounts had been available on request by post and were now available at the meeting. He stated that the new format of the accounts was in accordance with the requirements of the Charity Commissioners. He reported that the Society's accounts were in good order and that we had worked within our means; he urged that as many members as possible make use of the Gift Aid scheme which allows the Society to recover tax paid on subscriptions. The Membership Secretary reported that again this year there had been a slight decrease in membership. The Annual Report of the Council was adopted unanimously.

BSBI STRATEGY 2000

The President proposed that the Society adopt the Strategy as approved by Council and his proposal was carried by the acclamation of the meeting.

ELECTION OF PRESIDENT-ELECT

Mr R. D. Pryce was nominated by Council; his election was unanimous. Mr Pryce thanked the meeting for electing him and stated that he intended to serve the Society as President for 3 years.

ELECTION OF VICE-PRESIDENT

Dr A. J. Richards was nominated by Council.. His election was unanimous.

ELECTION OF HONORARY GENERAL SECRETARY

Miss A. Burns was nominated by Council; her election was unanimous. She was warmly thanked by the President for her work during the preceding year when she was Acting Honorary General Secretary

RE-ELECTION OF HONORARY TREASURER

Mr M. E. Braithwaite, nominated by Council, was re-elected unanimously. He was warmly thanked by the President for all his good work on behalf of the Society.

RE-APPOINTMENT OF EDITORS, INDEXERS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF COMMITTEES

The President, after warmly thanking the Editors, Indexers and Representatives of Committees for all their hard work, proposed their re-appointment; this was accepted unanimously.

ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

In accordance with Rule 12, nominations had been received for Mr I. R. Bonner and Mr N. S. de Sausmarez. Profiles had been circulated and would be published. The election of these new Council Members was accepted unanimously.

ELECTION OF HONORARY MEMBERS

The President stated that the nominations for Honorary Membership this year were for Mr D. A. Pearman and Dr C. D. Preston; this was in recognition of their most outstanding contribution to the Society in the production of Atlas 2000. The President said that he intended to break with tradition and himself sponsor Mr Pearman; Mr A. O. Chater was the sponsor for Dr Preston. The sponsors' appreciations were given at the meeting and will be published in BSBI News. Both proposals for Honorary Membership were accepted with acclamation.

RE-ELECTION OF HONORARY INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

The President expressed the Society's gratitude to Mr J. H. Coats, CA, for his exemplary examination of the Society's accounts. His re-election was accepted unanimously.

There was no other business and the meeting closed at 12.45 p.m.

AILSA BURNS
HONORARY GENERAL SECRETARY