

# Remembering Brian Stephens

## 1936 – 2022

ROSEMARY WINNALL



It was with great sadness that we learnt of Brian Stephens' death in June 2022 after a short illness. Brian had been a member of the Wyre Forest Study Group from its early days. His meticulous and painstaking working methods, indefatigable spirit, commitment and reliability enabled him to contribute in many ways.

Brian wrote up his early life in an article for the WFSG's annual Review in 2018 entitled 'Evolution of a Biologist'.

[http://wyreforest.net/wp-content/uploads/Historical\\_Articles/Evolution-of-a-Biologist-Copy.pdf](http://wyreforest.net/wp-content/uploads/Historical_Articles/Evolution-of-a-Biologist-Copy.pdf) He attended King Edward's School, Camp Hill, and after obtaining a Science Degree at Bangor University, he undertook research in ecology before starting his teaching career. Both he and his wife, Valerie, taught at King Edward's School, Stourbridge, moving to Bewdley in the 1960s where they brought up their two children in the house that Brian built himself in Merricks Lane. Brian later taught at Bromsgrove Teacher Training College until it closed and then moved to Shenstone College until his retirement.

He had a great interest in the Wyre Forest, its landscape, history and wildlife and served on the Formation Committee of the Wyre Forest Society when it began in 1974, becoming edi-

tor of their reports and journal 'The Woodcock'. In 1991 it was agreed that some of the Wyre Forest Society members would form a Research Group to share information about the studies being undertaken and exchange ideas about future projects. So, in 1991 The Wyre Forest Research Group was formed, later called the Wyre Forest Study Group. Brian was invited to join two years later and soon became a committee member bringing to the group his deep knowledge of history, land use, veteran trees, plants, orchards and fruit trees. Brian became Treasurer in 1997 and later our Records Officer and Librarian.

As a millennium project the Study Group started producing an annual printed REVIEW which Brian supported each year with articles such as: 'The Hurricane at Bewdley 1845', 'The Decline and Fall of the Mawley Oak', 'Dams and Dyeing', 'John Rae, Florist of Kinlet, 1605-1677', and 'Cherry Varieties in the 17th Century'. These, and others, can be found on our website [www.wyreforest.net](http://www.wyreforest.net).

Throughout 2004 the Wyre Forest Study Group undertook a detailed ORCHARD SURVEY at Bowcastle Farm (English Nature Research Report number 707, 2006). Brian made an assessment of the orchard fruit trees, meticulously labelling 260 trees, conducting an audit of the fruit tree varieties, and developing a scale of tree vitality. On one occasion he was at the top of ladder high up inside an old cherry tree, notebook in hand jotting down essential tree statistics when the herd of cattle came across to see what he was doing.



They surrounded the tree and one was having a good scratch on the ladder. But Brian, in his usual manner, was completely unfazed and carried on with what he was doing, his usual steadfast, unflappable, committed self.

Through the Bewdley Civic Society, in which Brian was Vice President and past President, he revived Bewdley's Cherry Fair which has become an annual event to celebrate the historical importance of cherry orchards locally and to encourage interest in fruit varieties. To help further this knowledge Brian recently obtained a grant for DNA analysis of the local cherry trees which was completed in 2020. The Civic Society have, in 2022, acknowledged Brian's contribution to the local community by planting 10 espaliered cherry trees in Jubilee Gardens and naming the wall the Stephens Cherry Wall.

A memorial service was held for Brian in St Anne's Church, Bewdley on 21st July 2022 at which his life was celebrated.

