

## **The Bowen collection of Lichens at Reading Museum**

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Lichens are perhaps one of the more fascinating but little studied groups of organisms; an intimate symbiosis of fungus and alga, often found encrusting stones and bark; slow growing but tenacious and able to live in harsh and extreme conditions. The following note is intended to alert students to the existence of an important and locally significant collection of lichens, made by local botanist Humphrey Bowen, which is now held by Reading Museum Service.

Doctor Humphrey Bowen (1929-2001) was an Environmental chemist, becoming lecturer and then reader at the University of Reading (example publication - Bowen, 1963). An accomplished botanist, he was the author of the Flora of Berkshire (Bowen, 1968) and later publications on the Berkshire and other floras (Bowen, 1977). He worked on the Reading Museum Herbarium, particularly the Murray collection and donated a large collection of his lichens from Berkshire and Oxfordshire (Bowen, 1969; 1976; Notton, 2002) and also from Dorset (Bowen, 2000). Some of his other lichen specimens are in the Reading University Herbarium (anon, 2001a & b). He later moved to Dorset where he wrote the flora of Dorset (Bowen, 2000; review in Killick, 2001). He was also interested in entomology and conchology, being the joint discoverer, of the first British colony of the cricket *Mogoplistes squamiger*, in Dorset in 1949 (Bowen & Williamson, 1950), publishing on the butterflies of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire (Bowen, 1979) and on Molluscs around Reading (Bowen, 1975). He was a member of the Reading Natural History Society. For detailed obituaries see anon (2001a-c, 2002a) and Wilkins (2001).

The collection comprises approximately 1000 packets of lichens of all genera, collected by Humphrey during the 1960s-70s, in the years following the publication of the Flora of Berkshire (Bowen, 1968) and donated to the museum in the 1970s. The lichens are mainly from Berkshire and Oxfordshire, but also from Dorset and some localities further afield such as Shetland. A number of indicator species of ancient forest sites such as Windsor Forest are represented. All specimens are meticulously labelled with species identification, locality, grid reference, date and habitat. Some specimens have details of chemical tests carried out in order to confirm identifications. The whole collection is arranged alphabetically by genus and species for easy reference. Further information on selected species in the Thames Valley may be found in Bowen (1969) and details of ancient forest indicator species in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire may be found in Bowen (1976). More of Humphrey's lichens including non-British specimens are held at the Reading University Herbarium (anon, 2001a & b; <http://www.herbarium.reading.ac.uk/>).

The Bowen lichen collection at Reading Museum may be examined by appointment, please contact the curator for details.

## **References**

Anon (2001a) Humphrey Bowen : Professional chemist whose passion was for botany, and who documented the flora of both Berkshire and Dorset. The Times 28 August 2001, p. 15.

Anon (2001b) Humphrey Bowen : Chemist who also recorded the flora of two English counties. Daily Telegraph 5 Sept. 2001, p. 23.

Bowen, H. J. M. (1968) The Flora of Berkshire. Holywell Press, Oxford. Pp 1-389.

Bowen, H. J. M. (1969) Lichens in the Thames Valley. Reading Naturalist 22: 29-31.

Bowen, H. J. M. (1976) Indicators of old forest : The Presidential address to the Reading and District Natural History Society 16th October 1975. Reading Naturalist 29: 2-8.