



## John Packham Obituary, April 2015

Professor John Richard Packham MSc PhD FLS was born in Brighton on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1930 and died in Bridgnorth, Shropshire after a short illness, on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

A graduate of Bristol University, in 1956 he became head of Biology at Alcester Grammar School, and also married his wife Mary. In 1965 he became Lecturer in Ecology in what is now the University of Wolverhampton. He spent the rest of his working life at Wolverhampton, taking a leading part in the development of Ecology as a subject and the transitions of Wolverhampton initially to a Polytechnic and later to a University, before retiring as Professor of Ecology in 1994. He continued to work and publish as an emeritus professor until as recently as 2007.

In 1976, whilst teaching at Wolverhampton, John successfully completed his PhD, which was supervised by Arthur Willis of Sheffield University. Concerned with the ecology of the woodland herbs *Oxalis acetosella* and *Lamium galeobdolon*, his thesis included experimental physiology as well as ecology. It resulted in the accumulation of a substantial body of quadrat data in woodlands and uplands which led to the publication of Biological Floras of both species and contributed to the UK National Vegetation Classification. He also used Mark Hill's computer program 'Indicator Species Analysis' which later became TWINSPAN and retained life-long academic links with Mark. He made contributions on other woodland studies, such as woodland field layer restoration with Eleanor Cohn and 23 years of monitoring seed production in *Fagus sylvatica* across the UK with Geoff Hilton. In 1975 Charles Sinker asked him to become executive editor of a proposed Flora of Shropshire which he carried through to successful publication in 1985 as the *Ecological Flora of the Shropshire Region*.

John was widely interested in woodlands and forestry. He led the University Woodland Research group for many years and was a founder member of the Continuous Cover Forestry Group. In 1982, working in collaboration with David Harding and later with other members of staff at Wolverhampton he produced the Contemporary Biology textbook *The Ecology of Woodland Processes*, which ran into two editions and was re-edited in collaboration with Peter Thomas of Keele University as the *Ecology of Woodlands and Forests* as recently as 2007. He served on the editorial board of the Arboricultural Journal and undertook research and collaboration with the University of Uppsala in Sweden.

John had a profound influence on all he worked with. A colleague wrote "he was meticulous and thorough, in the manner of a true academic". A former student wrote "everything he said, from informal conversation to giving formal guidance or writing for publication, was informed by careful consideration and the weighing of available evidence." His friendship, guidance and wide knowledge will be very much missed.