

FOREWORD

This issue of Telopea is dedicated to the memory of Dr Joyce Winifred Vickery, M.B.E., who died on 29th May, 1979, after a short illness. Mrs Alma Lee, a colleague and friend since undergraduate days, writes warmly and informatively of Dr Vickery's life and work. It is left for me to express the widely felt appreciation of this fine woman and notable botanist, and the sense of loss experienced by Australian botanists, particularly by her colleagues at the National Herbarium of New South Wales.

Joyce Vickery came to this institution in its dark days, at the end of the Great Depression of the 1930's, when the Herbarium and the Sydney Botanic Gardens had languished for more than a decade after the retirement of J. H. Maiden. Immediately, she began to raise scientific standards through her own studies and by her influence on others, but soon the Second World War intervened. In the post-war period the Chief Botanist and Curator, R. H. Anderson, had Joyce as his strong right arm, encouraging him to resume the painfully slow process of building a research institution that paid some attention to what had happened in botany over the preceding 20 years, and what was happening currently.

New staff members with relevant though varied scientific backgrounds were appointed. They had to learn how taxonomy was actually done from Joyce Vickery or from others whom she had trained—certainly in those days they received no useful education in the subject at Australian universities.

A precise and methodical worker in alpha-taxonomy, Joyce, in her lifelong studies of the grasses, concentrated on discrimination of species, provision of full and accurate descriptions, and construction of practical keys. She did not develop any deep interest in theory or in new technical approaches. Generic concepts were of less interest to her, and suprageneric relationships she largely left to others. She was a close observer of variation, and was conscious of population characteristics in the field. This is evident especially in her work on subalpine and alpine species of *Poa*. Her conservative approach did not prevent her, especially in the 1940's and 50's, from encouraging colleagues who had interests in theoretical taxonomy. All her associates acknowledged Joyce as a patient and reliable guide on matters of nomenclature and clarity of expression, and they owed much to her as a dispenser of wisdom in personal relations.

At a time when conservation of natural communities and landscapes received little sympathy from governments, the media, or the populace, Joyce lent her efforts to this cause, especially at Kosciusko and in the bushlands near Sydney. Though quietly done, her work was effective both through direct involvement and by stimulating a scientific approach to the principles of conservation.

The scope of Joyce Vickery's solid contribution to Australian grass systematics is evident from the bibliography on page 8. After retirement, appointment as an Honorary Research Fellow recognized her past and continuing research. During these years she completed a second substantial part of the Poaceae (Gramineae) for the Flora of New South Wales and, until her last illness took away her strength, she worked steadily on the revision of *Stipa* in Australia. Her manuscript descriptions and notes on this genus are being worked up for publication by Dr Surrey Jacobs, aided by Ms Joy Everett.

In the years following her retirement, Joyce Vickery withdrew almost entirely from the life of the Herbarium as a whole, preferring to remain in the Annexe across the lawns of the Upper Garden, into which the Herbarium and some of its workers were compelled to spill over by lack of space for growth.

The less restrained atmosphere, new styles and topics of conversation, and perhaps some of the different technical and theoretical approaches to investigation were, I believe, not to her taste. Nor were the changes associated with modernization of the Herbarium publications, or the decision not to maintain the Flora of New South Wales program in its original form. Nevertheless, she was always ready to extend the benefit of her experience to those who sought it.

Sadly, Joyce did not live to see construction begin on the new Herbarium building. She had laboured mightily to assist the architects with planning for the earlier project in the 1960's and, although the plan finally adopted differed greatly, a number of its features grew out of the earlier concept. Feeling, it seems, that the Herbarium as an institution had passed into a new phase, she did not display great interest in the new plans, but concentrated her still remarkable energies on a very different project, the development and promotion of the Sydney Science Centre. Those of us who did not share her conviction of the scientific value of that troubled enterprise regretted finding themselves in opposition, on that point, to one whom they sincerely respected as a person and a scientist.

Joyce Vickery's lasting contribution to science was firstly to provide stimulus and guidance in the renaissance of botanical taxonomy in New South Wales, and indeed in Australia, and equally to resolve and clarify with great skill the systematics of many groups of Australian grasses. For those things, and for her understanding and her integrity, we honour her in this issue.

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