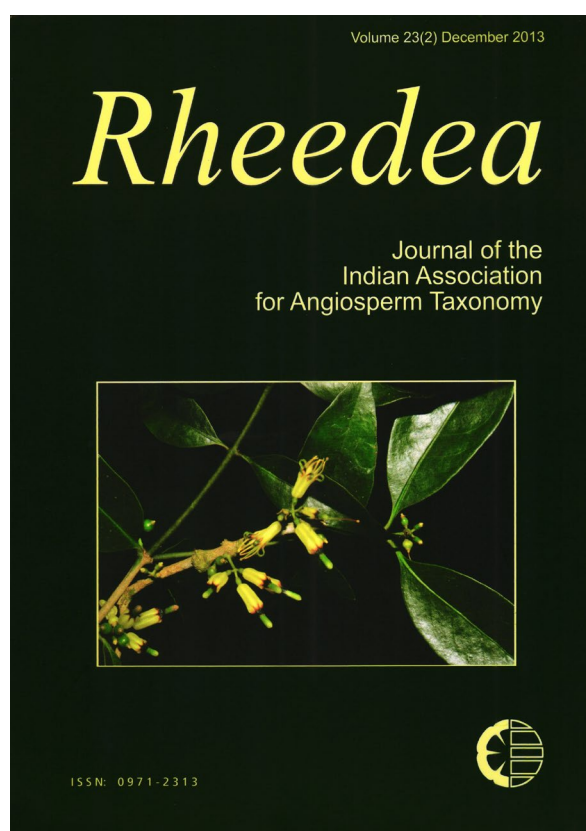




## Obituary: Richard Kenneth Brummitt (1937-2013)

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How to cite:

**Gandhi N. K. 2013.** Obituary: Richard Kenneth Brummitt (1937-2013). *Rheedeia* 23(2): 135-136.

<https://dx.doi.org/10.22244/rheedeia.2013.23.02.10>

*Published in print:* 31.12.2013

*Published Online:* 31.12.2013



## Obituary

Richard Kenneth Brummitt (1937-2013)



On 18<sup>th</sup> September 2013, the botanical world lost an incredibly knowledgeable eminent botanist. Dr. Brummitt, popularly known as Dick or Dick Brummitt among his colleagues and friends, lost his battle with lung cancer. He was unwell for several years. Regarding Dick's death due to lung cancer, it is poignant especially when it is a well-known fact that Dick did not smoke. I heard that for the last year or so, no further treatment was available to Dick and that he never made a fuss about it.

**Family:** Dick was born in Liverpool and his parents were John Malcolm Brummitt and Jessie Brummitt (nee Hunter); he was the youngest of three children, with a brother (deceased) and a sister. In 1968, Dick married his wife Hilary and they had two sons and a daughter. Hilary passed away in 1988, and Dick remained a widower for the rest of his life.

**Education:** His entire education was at Liverpool. He attended the Holt School and completed his

high school education in 1955 (?); he received his B.Sc. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Liverpool, in 1958 and 1963, respectively. His Ph.D. program was under the guidance of Prof. Vernon Heywood, and his Thesis titled "A Taxonomic revision of the genus *Calystegia*."

**Career:** Dick's distinguished academic career lasted about five decades. His entire employment career was at the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew. Immediately after receiving his Ph.D. degree in 1963, he was employed by the Ministry of Overseas Development to work on the Flora Zambesiaca. After completing the project, he became a permanent Kew staff in 1968. He officially retired in 1999, but continued coming into the Herbarium to work up until one or two weeks before his death!

**Nomenclature:** In the late Fall of 1989, I went to the Botanical Garden of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. In my nomenclatural work, I encountered a few problems in citing authorships for several plant names. In this regard, in 1992, I communicated with my nomenclature Guru Dr. Dan H. Nicolson of the Smithsonian Institution. He informed me that Dr. Brummitt had submitted several proposals on authorship citations to the 1993 Tokyo International Botanical Congress and sent me a copy of Dick's proposals. After reading the proposals, I felt that they answered most of my questions. Fortunately, the Tokyo Congress seems to have accepted all of Dick's proposals.

I joined the Harvard University Herbaria in August 1995. At that time, the Gray Herbarium Card Index (GCI) and Index Kewensis (IK) were independently published. The GCI data were made freely available online, whereas the IK data were available either in print or on a CD-ROM.

Besides the GCI work, I was also interested in an independent project to produce a checklist of the vascular plants of India. I met Dick in 1997 during his visit to Harvard University. I asked him whether he could do me the favor of extracting

plants names applicable to the Indian flora from the IK's CD-ROM and Dick responded that it was a possibility. But I did not pursue my request.

At the 1975 Leningrad International Botanical Congress, Dick took over as the Secretary of the Committee for *Spermatophyta* (since 2005, called Nomenclature Committee for Vascular Plants) from the late Dr. Rogers McVaugh (1909-2009). In 1998, I communicated to Dick about my interest in joining the Committee. He wholeheartedly invited me to join. At the 1999 St. Louis Botanical Congress, he asked the session to expand the membership of the Committee from nine to fifteen to include several new members (including me), and his request was approved.

Dick served as the Secretary of the Committee for *Spermatophyta* for 36 years (until the 2011 Melbourne Botanical Congress (not attended by Dick)). The secretaryship is time-consuming requiring a thorough analysis of the submitted proposals on rejection and conservation of seed plant names (since 2005, vascular plant names), collecting relevant literature, communicating with the relevant group specialists for their input, and providing appropriate suggestions and literature to the members of the Committee. During his tenure, Dick worked tirelessly with enthusiasm and efficiency. Because of his health situation, he decided to step down as the Secretary, but continued as a member of the Committee.

Prior to the 2005 Vienna Botanical Congress, determining the type species of the genus *Acacia* was an "international nomenclatural problem", and in this regard, Dick received many letters asking him to favor an Australian species over an African species or vice versa. Based on the concept of least disturbance to the then existing *Acacia* nomenclature, Dick and the majority of the Committee members took an objective view and voted to typify *Acacia* with an Australian species, and the Vienna Congress session approved the

Committee's decision, which was subsequently confirmed at the 2011 Melbourne Congress.

**Research & Publications:** Dick focused his taxonomic research on *Acanthaceae* and *Convolvulaceae*. He authored and coauthored >200 plant names at the rank of genus (5), species (99) and infraspecies (ca. 100).

Dick authored or coauthored three widely used books, all published in 1992, viz., *Authors of plant names* (coauthor: C. E. Powell) [plant name author abbreviations]; 2) *Vascular plant families and genera*; and 3) *World geographical scheme for recording plant distributions* (coauthor: S. Hollis; ed. 2, 2001). The data from the preceding three books are used in the International Plant Name Index. Even those, who do not know him personally, use his plant name author abbreviations.

**Eponymy:** *Alchemilla brummittii* K.M. Purohit & Panigrahi (1991); *Calystegia brummittii* P.P.A. Ferreira & Sim.-Bianch. (2013); *Cyphia brummittii* Thulin (1983); and *Tephrosia brummittii* Schrire (1987).

In my communications, many botanists (viz., Wendy Applequist (MO), David Boufford (GH), Alastair Culham (RNG), Charles Davis (A, AMES, ECON, F, GH, NEBC), Barbara Ertter (UC), Vernon Heywood (RNG), Hiroyoshi Ohashi (TUS), P. Lakshminarasimhan (CAL), John McNeill (E), Alice Nicolson (ex-US), Arun Pandey (DUH), M. Sanjappa (CAL), Netra Pal Singh (ex-BSI), John Wiersema (BARC), and Emily Wood (A, AMES, ECON, F, GH, NEBC)) expressed their sadness at the loss of Dick. He is survived by his sons Neil and Patrick, and daughter Lindsay.

**Kanchi N. Gandhi**  
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