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JOYCE W. VICKERY
1908–1979

Joyce Winifred Vickery

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Looking back over nearly fifty years of acquaintance with this unassuming and reserved woman, one comes to recognize at every turn how early was the pattern established for her later life. For there were few among her friends at the end of her life who did not remember her for her strength and support, in one facet or another of their lives, from the earliest days of their association. Though just emerging into adulthood when she entered the University of Sydney in 1927, she already evinced the independence of thought and action which lay beneath a gentle and reticent demeanour. Never forward or self-seeking in the progress of her career, she was nevertheless zealous and resolute in achieving the goals which she set herself. In her particular situation it would have been easy to drift along on natural ability to some undemanding occupation, since private means removed all need for self support. But to Joyce Vickery this would have been reprehensible and quite inadmissible, and two resolves were made early, and maintained. In quite early childhood she had hotly declared to her family that she would never marry—she 'didn't want any man hanging on to *her* coat tails'—and though she saw the humour of that situation later on, she certainly stuck to her feminist guns throughout life! (To her, men could claim superiority only by proof of achievement, never by assuming the kingship of a man's world, and, especially in later years of Women's Liberation, women could claim equality only by proof of achievement!). Her other early resolve was to be self-supporting, and once embarked on her career she strove to live within her earned means, though always willing to put other capital to use for justifiable projects. She called it "lending her crowbar" to move other people's rocks—they got their job done, she got her crowbar back.

Much of this personality can be seen clearly in the two Australian generations of her family which preceded hers. It was the solid British instinct for progress by initiative which motivated her great-grandfather to seek a new life in Australia. Conditions in his birthplace, London, offered little opportunity for his young family, so 1833 saw them embarked upon the six months' sea voyage to Sydney, where their father recommenced his business in the leather trade. A son, Ebenezer, Joyce's grandfather, finished his education in 1843 (at 16) and gained experience in several enterprises before entering his father's business. An entry in "Australian Men of Mark, vol. 2, 1788-1888" describes Ebenezer Vickery as '. . . not rash in speech or act, never . . . gambling. (He) . . . added the habit of strict discipline and careful foresight; although a born speculator, he never speculated beyond his ability nor risked more than he could afford to lose. He found time for charitable and religious committees, assisting with money and active work . . . an upright merchant and liberal citizen'. This extract illustrates the standards set for the ensuing generations, including Joyce's immediate family, and though the development of independent thought meant for her the sloughing off of some of the ties which they imposed she never eschewed the ethics germane to those standards.

Her father, George B. Vickery, developed, it seems, very much in the pattern of his father; he showed the same self-discipline, the same independent initiatives, the same ethics. In particular, he developed an interest in the burgeoning science of the period. Self-taught, he established a procedure for himself which Joyce herself adopted: when she needed information on a subject new to her, she would search the bookshop shelves for the most authoritative textbook, and study that—grass roots sources were more to be trusted than those more derived. George Vickery's interest in science was more than superficial; he became an experienced "ecologist", an accomplished microscopist, and was elected to the Royal Society of New South Wales in a period when qualifications for election were demanding. His interest in grassland ecology developed from his father's delegation to him of responsibility for the pastoral properties in which he had invested, and this had direct implications for Joyce, as later developments showed. His capacities were manifested also in Joyce's two brothers, both of whom graduated in Engineering

(University of Sydney) though one found greater satisfaction later in the development of a rural property.

But this capacity in physical and mechanical skills could have derived also from their mother's side of the family. Joyce's maternal grandfather also had migrated to Australia, and of his family of five, all four sons were to become engineers. German by birth, Ottomar Rossbach arrived in Australia in 1850 and worked as an engineer in the equivalent of our Public Works Department. It is of particular interest in our present context, that one of his construction projects was the sandstone sea-wall around Farm Cove, in the Royal Botanic Gardens. His sons continued in similar work connected with Water Supply, Harbours and Rivers. Those of us who had experienced the weight of the substantial leather handbag which Joyce always carried, knew it was occasioned largely by the contents: it was "par for the course" to include, as well as essential papers and minimal cosmetic requirements, anything from oil can to basic plumbers' tools! If Joyce had been born male, it is a certainty that she too would have found her vocation in some aspect of engineering!

This, then, was Joyce Vickery's inheritance, with its principles of initiative, self-discipline and devotion to duty, in a comfortable environment of liberal means (and a sense of its obligations).

It was the family's misfortune to lose their mother when Joyce, youngest of the four children, was in her fourteenth year. But she, particularly, had inherited at least her share of rugged self-sufficiency and this came to her aid in the survival strategies which inevitably operate in such a situation. As the youngest sibling, she learnt from the experience of her elders; she recognized the potential of her position in a family headed by a serious, firm but always just and adequate provider, though one not always of the same persuasions as herself. One wonders, if, in this period, her father was not equally developing an awareness, tempered by amusement, of the potential of his younger daughter! While always holding her father in high and affectionate regard, Joyce turned often for guidance to her brother Otto, for his help in practical matters was effective, and his advice, if not favourable to her *desiderata*, could be disregarded without offence!

It was in her schooldays that Joyce's developing interests and enthusiasms first showed confluence with those of her father. The overseeing of his father's rural properties entailed a good deal of motor travel in both New South Wales and Queensland, and finding the experience enjoyable to them both, he often took Joyce with him, camping out where possible, and so she was an unusually early participant in what has become a favourite Australian pastime—the family camping holiday. Joyce learned much from her father's grassland experience, and she came to draw confidence and satisfaction from travel off the beaten track before she ever applied her experience to professional botany and ecology.

So, full of vigour (she was a more than adequate tennis player in her schooldays) and enthusiasm, Joyce Vickery, undergraduate, enrolled in Science I (1927) at the University of Sydney. In her major subjects, Edgeworth David was nearing the end of an inspiring leadership of the Geology Department, and in Botany the newly arrived, young and enthusiastic T. G. B. Osborn was embarking upon a programme of revitalization. His course was now dynamic, and the Botany and Zoology (W. J. Dakin) Schools had each at their head men with oratorical gifts, and we loved it! The scope of these subjects also was still restricted enough for a few gifted individuals to encompass sufficient of each to relate them intimately, and so to explain puzzling natural phenomena.

A Science Society was already in existence, but now a Biological Society was constituted, providing a forum for discussion of aspects of Botany and Zoology then occupying the minds of students. At lunch hour addresses much time and energy was expended, *inter alia*, in reaching a "conclusive definition of a species"

Taxonomy, or Systematics, like other aspects of the discipline, was just beginning to emerge as a living subject and this matter was important to us. But in the midst of all manner of carefully worded "definitions", Joyce found her answer in the much-quoted saying that a species is what a good systematist calls a species, and so it was to Joyce throughout her working life on botanical taxa and their hierarchies. Perhaps, as a result of this, she missed something in the upsurge of interest in speciation processes which took place as she finished her University studies, but her conservatism and rationality led her always to contemplate new enthusiasms for the solution of species definition with tolerance, even forbearance, while herself anticipating that *only* morphology would serve our purposes in the end!

The Biological Society was effective in the promotion of field work too, and Professor Osborn's Department was supplemented by the Society's Hut on Narrabeen Heights. This simple structure, erected by the students themselves on a gift of land, provided a permanent "camp" for the collection and identification of native plants (required work in senior years), as well as an informal meeting ground for male and female students, who had usually been rigidly segregated in city schools, in a society very different from today's. In this period Joyce, a senior student and (after graduation in 1931) Demonstrator and Research Student in the Botany Department, was much influenced by her colleague Lilian Fraser, her greatly admired senior by one year, and together they made an important contribution to the success of the Hut and to the practice of field work which grew out of such beginnings. The acquisition of a second-hand, 1926 Chevrolet tourer, in shared ownership, about 1931, set the stage for a long period of working-holiday ecological studies, collecting trips and photographic forays which occupied their annual leave and leisure periods for many years. Approved juniors were added to the party, or appropriate colleagues for specialist trips in later years, and many students or young graduates of the period will remember with lasting pleasure, working holidays in "Enoch Arden" (the Chev.), setting off with Joyce at the wheel of her trusty chariot, whether to Bulli Pass for the day, Barrington Tops for a week, or on an exploratory tour over the roads of coast and tablelands. We ourselves recognize that Joyce made much of it possible in those days of economic difficulty—for her university period was in the depths of The Depression—and still rejoice in our extreme good fortune to have seen so much of this country at that time. Roads were not then hazardous, delightful campsites awaited us at the end of each day, and pollution and exploitation had not yet begun to ravage the land. Joyce herself enjoyed it all enormously, and little signs of delight would sometimes allow it to be known, though she was not given to much demonstration. On the other hand, she shouldered full responsibility for the vehicle and its performance, and this weighed heavily upon her when her companions' frequently expressed wish to continue "just around the next corner" took her to the estimated limit of the car's or the party's capacity. Some alarm arose, during a trip to Barrington Tops, when an all-girl party was believed to be "lost in the snow"; ". . . *not* lost" said Joyce later "we knew exactly where we were . . .". She was once "led on" in the then very remote Mount Royal Ranges, so that fuel was exhausted many miles from any source of petrol. This time chance befriended the party, in the form of a young man teaching himself to drive, in absolute isolation, in a proud and ancient Dodge. He gave petrol, and in return, Joyce showed him how to set his car in motion, by releasing the handbrake! The results of several working visits to Barrington House on the Upper Williams River and thence to Barrington Tops, were later published in joint authorship with Lilian Fraser in three papers essentially on the ecology of the area. Having no precursors, or previous experience, with the rainforest species found there, identification of the many huge trees of the forest had to be done *de novo*, with confirmation later at the New South Wales National Herbarium. Collections made then, pressed and labelled round the fire at Barrington House, are now incorporated in that Herbarium.

After some five years of postgraduate work in the Botany School, during which she published early work on insectivorous plants, held presidency of the Biological Society, was elected to the Royal Society of New South Wales, and gained her M.Sc.

degree, Joyce achieved her ambition of full professional employment. Towards the end of 1936, the retiring Botanist and Curator of the National Herbarium, Edwin Cheel, was to be succeeded by promotion of R. H. Anderson, the first graduate incumbent, young and eager to effect some professional rejuvenation of this somewhat musty, if venerable, branch of the Department of Agriculture. Joyce's appointment in August 1936 was as Assistant Botanist, and even greater than personal satisfaction in her achievement, was gratification at having broken the sexist barrier for the first time in the Professional Division of that Department. She had also won a minor battle of standards, by refusing to accept the starting salary of £188 p.a. for a female officer (it was later settled, on the basis of qualifications, at £251 p.a.!).

The appointment of these two graduate officers was a happy conjunction for the Herbarium, Anderson's whimsical humour and commonsense attitudes making it possible for him to appreciate fully his new and energetic staff member, while Joyce for her part, encountering no sexist discrimination, responded as fully. Her position was indeed a novel one; as the first woman ever appointed a professional officer in a scientific capacity in the Public Service, she was determined to succeed, not only in her Botany, but in her personal relations as well, for there was still considerable opposition in the Service to the idea of professional female employees. It is impossible to separate Anderson's contributions from Joyce's to the Herbarium in those years when both worked hard for its improvement, but it is fair to surmise that often the idea was hers, the implementation his, for he took a confessed and impish delight in cutting red tape.

In this period, the Herbarium's function as the Botany Branch of the Department of Agriculture was primarily the identification of material submitted by agronomists, and those concerned with weeds legislation or with poisonous plants. Taxonomic research, after an early period of notable achievement, had over some years receded into a poor second place, no longer recognized as a basic prerequisite for the other services. To Joyce, as an inexperienced recruit, the routine work brought a daily challenge in providing accurate responses to enquiries, while there was time enough, and great freedom of choice, to develop initiatives in research.

The thoroughness and reliability of her own work came to set the standard for the gradually increasing staff, and for this reason one of Joyce's earliest innovations at the Herbarium takes on great significance. This was her application, after only about a year on the staff, for leave of absence in which she wished to experience a period of work at the Herbarium of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew—regarded as the source of all taxonomic wisdom (and Type specimens). With Anderson's support her application succeeded, but with minimal concessions from the Public Service Board; she was granted leave of absence for a year, salary for three months, and was bonded for three years after her return!

This year, most of it working at Kew, was of inestimable value in formulating future standards in Sydney, for Joyce shared her experience with other staff, and all those junior to her in later years will attest to her capacity as teacher, her sympathetic attitudes and generosity of effort. With the experience of work at Kew, among botanists of international repute with older traditions and much greater experience than obtained in Australia for many years afterwards, all that she transmitted here was soundly based and gave our staff a flying start in their professional careers.

On her return from Kew, Joyce found that Anderson's representations for improved Herbarium accommodation had received some recognition and that early plans had been drafted. She applied her overseas experience to achieving improved arrangements within the scope of those plans. This project, dear to Anderson's heart, has suffered many setbacks, but Joyce applied herself with great assiduity to the achievement of optimal internal detail when it again seemed a possibility under the next Director, H. K. C. Mair. It is sad that neither she nor Anderson is here to see, 43 years after its inception, the start of the new building.

After accommodation, the next major facility to attract her attention at the Herbarium was its library. She had learnt the value of adequate literature sources at Kew, and the lack of organization at Sydney was unbelievable. So, armed with a Dewey System manual and the impressed but willing labour of a junior colleague, she tackled the classification and re-arrangement of the bookcases and their contents. Even then a required volume could be traced only by way of this system, since indexing had long been neglected, and this deficiency was not redressed for several years.

Joyce was imbued, from the time of her appointment, with a strong sense of injustice at the discrimination practised against women in the matter of rates of pay, and it was not long before she began to play her part in seeking to end that discrimination. Submissions to the Public Service Board for equal pay were summarily rejected, but she returned to the fray with an appeal, supported by legal counsel, against the rejection. Counsel advised that there was not much hope of success, but governments paid lip-service to the principle, and her attempt bore fruit before (though not long before) the end of her career.

A few years after her appointment, Australia was embroiled in World War II, though the Herbarium staff suffered a reduction of only one as a result. Wartime conditions were not difficult for us, with slight variation in our work—such as the compilation of information on edible or poisonous native plants for special units of the Services. Joyce herself enrolled in, and persuaded other women to join, the National Emergency Services Ambulance Drivers, and extended this by setting up a branch depot at her home at Cheltenham. Not only was the usual First Aid training given, but a sound course in motor mechanics made it theoretically possible for the potential drivers to effect light repairs when on the job. There were some lighter sides to this occupation, but Joyce's attitude was, of course, serious and responsible. She also organized the recording, and despatch to safekeeping, of large numbers of Types and other specimens of special importance in the Herbarium. But the Sydney Botanic Gardens and Herbarium, apart from being close to the action when Japanese submarines made a brief attack on the nearby Garden Island Naval Base, were not seriously threatened and had suffered little change when the war ended.

It was perhaps fortunate that an early start had been made on another project undertaken by Anderson with Joyce's co-operation, and that it had already been established before the war began. This was a specialist publication adapted to the needs of taxonomic botanists. The existing Departmental production, the *Agricultural Gazette*, was unsuited for the purpose both in its character and its readership, so with Joyce as Editor, "Contributions from the New South Wales National Herbarium" first appeared in July 1939. Most of the other States, as well as the Commonwealth's Herbarium *Australiense*, have now followed this lead and have their own corresponding journals to provide for the considerable upsurge in taxonomic publication, after its decline in the earliest days of this century.

Later there followed the start on a new *Flora of New South Wales*, of which the first parts were issued as a "Flora Series" of the Contributions, for reasons of financial expediency. The first issue was an important one. The Rev. H. M. R. Rupp, a retired clergyman, had long devoted his leisure, and years of honorary work at the Herbarium, to the collection and study of native orchids. He had a completed manuscript ready for publication on *Orchidaceae* of New South Wales before the *Flora Series* had been approved, and this was an opportunity not to be missed. So with contributions from private citizens and members of the *Orchid Society of New South Wales*, Joyce anonymously financed publication of "The *Orchids of New South Wales*" in a format which could later serve as a first part of the new *State Flora*.

Joyce rendered great service in this phase of our publications, both in the physical work of editing, and by sharing her gift for lucid expression with those whose work she edited. She went about this work with studied diplomacy, sometimes feeling it necessary almost to rewrite another's work (if the deficiency was only in composition),

yet did this without offending. She sought criticism of her own writing from colleagues and soon formulated a plan for taxonomic publication which she then used consistently, because it satisfied all her requirements. For this reason she was inclined to be impatient with suggested improvements in format and expression in later years, but after retirement she firmly abstained from any part in decision-making, and never pressed her views. Her consistent presentation of thorough research, based on careful observations and the assumption that "if there is a difference it will show", built up for her an excellent reputation by world standards, because essentially it is practical. Her revision of the genus *Poa* in Australia, a group widely known as a taxonomic headache, brought letters of acclaim from overseas as well as Australian colleagues—those who understood that difficult groups inevitably require a degree of esoteric distinction between their constituents which only long study can detect and great persistence of effort can express. This skill in apt expression has often found an outlet in lighter vein: she once expostulated at the over-effusive gratitude (for some minor kindness) of a younger colleague, who persisted that "politeness is said to grease the wheels of civilisation." The prompt retort was "Yes, but there's such a thing as slopping the oil around". One wonders sometimes at this easy turn of phrase, for Joyce had no literary pretensions and in adult life read almost nothing beyond "whodunits" and a few popular science/romance series, but the authors she preferred, and whose titles she sought to exhaustion, were those with a certain elegance of expression.

Joyce's work on grasses had begun seriously before the arrival of 1950 and continued throughout that decade, culminating in her D.Sc. degree in 1959, and progressing for the rest of her life. In the course of her work she visited other Herbaria in America and Europe, as well as revisiting Kew, always returning with information of value. With her natural tact, her developing diplomacy, and conviction of the rightness of her premises, she would not easily be distracted from her purpose. This, combined with her lucidity made her a formidable opponent in debate, for she rarely "lost her cool". Her studied contributions to the principle of Nature Conservation (when she saw it as a just cause, and before politics intervened), were valuable for these reasons, when she lent her support to it in relation to the then Kosciusko State Park, the Elouera Bushland Reserve and the Muogamarra Sanctuary. On behalf of the Kosciusko State Park she spoke authoritatively through letters in the press, and later compiled an excellent report, with copious photographs, at her own expense. For Elouera she served as a trustee and made a valuable gift of additional land to the Bushland Reserve, while her committee work and tactful handling of some difficult situations were of great help to the Muogamarra Sanctuary. Much of this was sandwiched in to her everyday work in the 'sixties, but here the highlight of the decade for Joyce was undoubtedly the recognition she received as a result of the "Bradley Case" in which her presentation of evidence (based on forensic work by the Herbarium botanists) led to the conviction of a murderer from plant fragments associated with his dwelling. She was always eager to share credit for this achievement with her co-workers, but there is no doubt that she was greatly pleased by this Royal recognition of her work, as well as of botanists' work, for she was strongly monarchist and conservative in her convictions. As she wished, the certificate and medal of the M.B.E. award have now been offered to and accepted by the Herbarium. In the 'sixties, Joyce was the recipient also of the Clarke Medal, presented by the Royal Society of New South Wales for her many contributions to science, and this too has now come to the Herbarium.

With the retirement of R. H. Anderson in 1964, Joyce's *de facto* position as leader of the Herbarium team was formalised and she became Senior Botanist to H. K. C. Mair. She had preferred not to occupy this position previously, disliking administrative duties, but now she accepted it in modified form, so that she had botanical work and research programmes in her charge, while all administrative work was the function of the Director. Four years later she retired, not to leisure but to attempt completion of still current research on Poaceae. She was given accommodation and facilities for this at the Herbarium, and a few years later (1973) recognition

of her work took the form of appointment as Honorary Research Fellow, renewed annually for the remaining six years of her life. Her research had culminated in a Flora treatment (Part I) of the family in 1961, and Part II was to follow in 1975; her last expressed goal, a revision of the genus *Stipa*, remains disappointingly, in unfinished MS., although initial steps towards completion of the work appear in this volume.

But retirement, even at the leisurely pace of an Honorary Research Fellow, was not to mean idleness—nor would she have wished it so. After the Second World War, the Linnean Society of New South Wales, of which Joyce had been a member since student days, had been facing problems of survival in a changing financial climate, and now its chief executive officer, Honorary Secretary W. R. Browne, was ill. Joyce responded to his appeal for relief and was elected Joint Honorary Secretary with him in 1969. She was relieved of this work after a short time, by the appointment of a professional secretary, but soon found a challenge to her early family training in the Society's need for a treasurer, becoming Honorary Treasurer in 1971. She went to great lengths to find ways of improving the investment income of the Society, now seriously disadvantaged by the provisions of its Founder's will. In conjunction with the Secretary, considerable liberalization of arrangements was achieved, but problems arose from the impact of the contemporaneous Redevelopment Plan for The Rocks area of Sydney. There the Society shared ownership of a valuable building, Science House. This property attracted substantial compensation for replacement by a new and diversified Science Centre, but now owing to an economic recession, there was anxiety as to the viability of this large investment, and objections to the plan. As usual, Joyce had studied her subject deeply, and was absolutely convinced not only that the carefully considered policies she had advised would succeed in time, but that the Societies had a moral obligation to pursue the object for which they had accepted somewhat specific government funding. Then her final illness overtook her, and her last days of effective consciousness were full of concern for this project. To Joyce the Science Centre, brought to successful realization and financial viability, would have been a significant contribution to Science in Australia. Perhaps in it she saw the same kind of material success, a building of value and usefulness to the community, as achieved by members of her family before her.

She has left not only a most significant contribution to Australian taxonomic botany, but a standard of consistency, excellence and integrity which will always be esteemed in the records of this institution, and among her many colleagues here and in other places.

Alma T. Lee

Publications of Joyce W. Vickery

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