

Obituary  
Helena L. G. de Bruyn  
1885–1972

Helena L. G. de Bruyn, honorary member of the Netherlands Society of Plant Pathology, died on 22 March 1972, at the age of 86.

After graduating in biology at Leiden University, Miss de Bruyn spent a period in England and then worked for a few years at the 'Rijks Herbarium' in Leiden. In 1919, she joined Professor Quanjér's Laboratory of Mycology and Potato Research (now Laboratory of Phytopathology) of the Agricultural University at Wageningen. She became an outstanding plant pathologist, at a time when woman scientists were still rare. She set herself high standards, working with skill and care, and writing papers that are still pertinent.

Her early work was on a disease of lilac caused by *Phytophthora syringae*, which was then a threat. She demonstrated that the pathogen survived in the soil, and compared its mode of overwintering with that of *P. infestans*, which grew on several types



Miss de Bruyn being presented with a copy of the commemorative issue of the Netherlands Journal of Plant Pathology by Prof. Dr J. P. H. van der Want, Chairman of the Editorial Board, at 75 anniversary of the Netherlands Society of Plant Pathology, 11 April 1966.

of sterilized soil and sometimes formed oospores. At that time, de Bary held the view that *P. infestans* was introduced into the field on seed potatoes, while others considered that the pathogen survived in soil. Miss de Bruyn contested de Bary's theory but he was later proved right.

Her further studies concerned pea marsh spot, caused by manganese deficiency, and potato common scab. It was shown that a single isolate of *Actinomyces scabies* could cause different types of scab on different potato varieties and further that strains of scab could be distinguished on the host, thus indicating the importance of physiologic specialization of pathogens. When it became evident that crops could not effectively be bred for resistance without help from plant pathologists, Miss de Bruyn turned again to *Phytophthora infestans*. She developed a test for tuber susceptibility under defined laboratory conditions. Later she studied pathogenic differentiation in *P. infestans* and demonstrated its adaptability. Changes in pathogenicity could be brought about by passage through certain host varieties. These changes were sometimes reversible; for instance, as pathogenicity to tomato increased, it decreased in some potato varieties.

Miss de Bruyn did much to organize the library at the Laboratory, which later became the base for the combined library of the Wageningen Centre of Plant Pathology and Entomology.

After her retirement in 1950, Miss de Bruyn still remained active. She was an editor of *Tijdschrift over Planteziekten* (Netherlands Journal of Plant Pathology) from 1946 to 1962, and a member and later chairman of the Society's Committee on Dutch Names of Plant Diseases (1937–1964). For many years she abstracted Dutch literature on plant diseases and pests for Biological Abstracts.

In 1949 her work was recognized by a royal honour and in 1965 by election as honorary member of the Society.

A. J. P. Oort