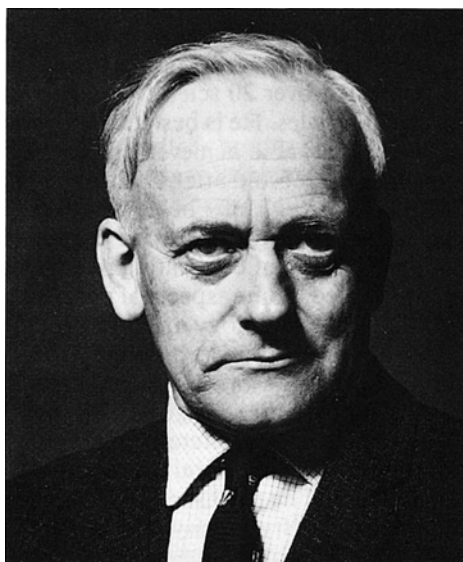


ASSOCIATION NEWS

Obituary William Glynn Burton (1916–1989)

William Glynn Burton was born in Reeth, Swaledale, Yorkshire, England, in 1916, the son of a rural schoolmaster. He spent most of his school, and, later, university holidays on an uncle's farm and these early contacts with practical farming undoubtedly influenced and motivated much of his research career. He graduated from the University of Leeds with a First Class Honours in Botany and obtained a grant to investigate plant water relationships. However, he soon left Leeds when he was awarded what was then among the most valuable British scholarships for aspiring biologists, a Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries Research Scholarship, tenable at Cambridge; only four were awarded each year and our founder-member and long-serving Vice-President, the late Dr A. R. Wilson, had been an earlier



recipient. At Cambridge, in the Botany School, Burton continued his research into plant water relationships and in later years he would say that such critical faculties as he possessed resulted from the influence of G. E. Briggs, his supervisor.

The outbreak of war in 1939 interrupted the tenure of his research scholarship. Burton could not join the armed services because his scientific qualifications resulted in his being placed in a reserved category. Research on plant water relations did not seem relevant in war-time so he relinquished his scholarship and joined first, the staff of the National Institute of Agricultural Botany, Cambridge as officer in charge of potato investigations, and then the staff of the Low Temperature Station for Research in Biochemistry and Biophysics.

After the war, Burton did not resume his studies for a research degree, but embarked upon what became his life's work, the study of the post-harvest physiology of the potato and which eventually led to his doctorate, a D.Sc. from the University of Leeds awarded on the basis of his published research. In 1949 Burton was transferred from Cambridge to the Ditton Laboratory in Kent. He stayed there until 1968 when he moved to the recently opened Food Research Institute, Norwich where he later became Deputy Director and Head of the Plant Physiology and Biochemistry Division.

His first involvement in what was to become the European Association for Potato Research was in 1953 at the Second Informal Conference on Potatoes, Sutton Bonington, and he was one of the original members of the Association when it was formally constituted in 1957. When separate subject sections were formed in 1960 he was elected Chairman of the Physiology Section and so remained until 1966, when he was elected

to the Council. In 1969 he became President of the Association and he organized the successful Fifth Triennial Conference in Norwich in 1972 when he succeeded the late Dr A. R. Wilson as Vice-President, an office he held until 1978. From 1968 to 1980 he was one of the Editors of *Potato Research* and his valuable work helped the Journal to achieve high international status. In recognition of his many, valuable contributions to the Association the Council, in 1978, appointed Burton an Honorary Member of the Association, an honour which gave him much pleasure.

Burton published, alone or in collaboration with others, 17 papers in *Potato Research* and prepared 5 survey papers for various Triennial Conferences. In addition, he published over 20 scientific papers on potato in other journals as well as several technical articles. He is best known for his book 'The potato', first published in 1948, a truly remarkable achievement for someone aged only 32 years. A second edition appeared in 1966 and after 1982, when he left the Board of Trustees of the International Potato Center in Lima, being Chairman of the Program Committee of the Board, he thoroughly revised it for a 3rd edition. This came out just before his death, and he had the pleasure of celebrating its publication with some friends in his house not long before he died. Some aspects of potato physiology also appeared in another book, 'The Post-harvest Physiology of Food Crops' published in 1982, a testament to the breadth and depth of Burton's knowledge of physiology. There is no doubt that his many publications have made an outstanding contribution to our knowledge of the yield, nutritive value, quality, and storage of the potato crop.

Burton had many interests apart from science. As a young, and not so young, man he took pleasure in several sports; he was a good photographer and a painter not without merit; and he published in 1968 an English version of the Persian quatrains, 'One hundred and Fifty Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám'. At one time, he was President of the Maidstone Antiquarian Society, Chairman of the Committee of Management of the East Malling Research Station, and for many years a Churchwarden in the Diocese of Rochester, first in the Parish of St. Peter-ad-Vincula, Ditton, and later in that of St. James the Great at East Malling where he had lived since 1956 in a beautiful restored farmhouse.

In 1942 Burton married Marie Rosenberg, an Austrian botanist resident in England, who nearly always accompanied him to our Conferences and on his travels in connection with the International Potato Center. She died in 1982. They had one daughter, Agneta, who also became a professional botanist.

Professor S. R. Elsdon, in his address of appreciation at the Church before the funeral, said that Burton was a man of great quality. Those of us fortunate enough to have worked with him on the Council or as Editors and, doubtless his many other colleagues and friends around the world, will always remember Burton for his clear thinking and writing, his sharp power of observation, his ready, dry humour and, above all, for his warm feelings for his friends.

When we attended his funeral on 14th July at the Church of St. James the Great, the place where on the previous Sunday he had an attack just before evensong, my wife and I did so with the feeling that we represented not only the Association but all his 'potato friends' world-wide as we did when we extended our deepest sympathy to his daughter, Dr Agneta Burton, who was a great support to him, especially after the death of his wife, Mariella Burton, in 1982.

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