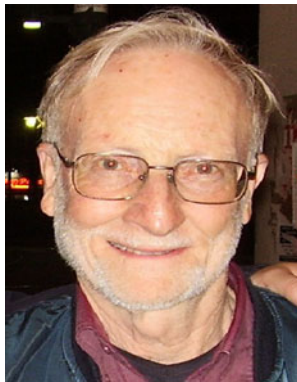


Obituary: Robert G. Milne (1934-2010)

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Robert G. (Bob) Milne, a distinguished plant virologist and electron microscopist died on September 5th 2010 in Torino (Italy). Bob was born in Tanga (Tanzania) from British parents and educated in the UK at Cambridge University (Bachelor degree) and London University (PhD). He initiated his postgraduate career in 1960 at the Botany School, University of Oxford from which, in 1964, he moved as a post-doc in electron microscopy to the Molecular Biology and Virus Laboratory, University of California, Berkeley. In 1966, Bob travelled back to Britain to work as a researcher in the Rothamsted Experimental Station (now Rothamsted Research), then (1971) at the MRC Clinical Research Centre, Notwhick Park. A year later, he joined the CNRS Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology, Strasbourg, France, where he held the position of Associate Professor until 1974. The arrival in the same year

in the CNR Institute of Plant Virology of Torino put an end to Bob's wandering. In Torino he settled happily and completed his career as Research Leader. Bob retired in 2001 but continued to work relentlessly until the very last day of his life. In 1990, Bob received a DSc degree from London University awarded "for original published work of a high standard which has given the candidate distinction in his field of study".

As mentioned, Bob was an accomplished plant virologist with a keen interest in virus taxonomy. From 1981 to 2005 he served in the Plant Virus Subcommittee of ICTV. In the 1980s there was a lively debate on whether the species concept was to be universally applied to viruses, regardless of the type of host, and on the feasibility of extending the classification based on family-genus-species to plant viruses. Bob took active part in this debate contributing several papers in which he expressed his ideas and suggestions. His long lasting association with ICTV was very fruitful. He coauthored the description of new genera and families (e.g. *Ophiovirus*, *Varicosavirus*, *Ourmiavirus*, *Mandarivirus*, *Flexiviridae*) and contributed to various ICTV Reports, including the 9th Report, which is now being finalized.

Bob was an excellent electron microscopist who was "able to see what others failed to see", as from a tribute of one of his overseas colleagues. As early as 1966, when the cytopathological studies of plant virus infections were in their infancy, he was among the first to investigate the relationship of Tobacco mosaic virus and some small polyhedral viruses with the cells of different hosts at the fine structure level. Bob's micrographs were usually of a very high, if not outstanding quality, like many of those published in the "Atlas of Plant Viruses", a book coauthored with R.I.B. Francki and T. Hatta. It is largely to

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Bob's credit the development of extremely simple and sensitive immunoelectron microscopy techniques (IEM and ISEM) that still enjoy a large popularity and are widely applied. His chapter on "Electron microscopy of *in vitro* preparations" in R.E.F. Matthews' volume "Diagnosis of Plant Virus Diseases" is a precious vademecum for electron microscopists.

The scientific interests of Bob Milne extended to subjects other than the above. In his long journey through plant virology he carried out significant research on tospoviruses, plant reoviruses, rhabdoviruses, closteroviruses, cryptic viruses, ophioviruses (including breakthrough with Citrus psorosis virus and Mirafiori lettuce virus), Indian citrus ringspot virus and Ourmia melon virus, type species of the novel genera *Mandarivirus* and *Ourmiavirus*, respectively.

Much of Bob's research was done in collaboration with colleagues from his Institute and from abroad. In his laboratory he hosted countless visitors (scientists and students) from Italy and a wide range of foreign countries, who came to learn EM techniques and with whom he often established fruitful collaborations. He also travelled extensively upon invitation of Italian and foreign Institutions.

Since the establishment (1997) of the Journal of Plant Pathology (JPP), Bob served in the Editorial Board as Associate Editor and continued a much appreciated editing of the manuscripts of non English-speaking authors after relinquishing this position in 2004.

Bob was a nice, enthusiastic and straight forward person, always willing to help colleagues and visitors to the best of his ability. He had an independent character and his criticism was sometimes sharp but, even after hot discussions, he was the first to stretch out his hand.

Bob loved music and gardening. He sang in a choir, the Corale Polifonica of Riva di Chieri (Torino), and was very fond of his collection of succulent plants that he grew with loving care in his country house. He used to bring proudly to the laboratory the plants that were blooming, to expose them at the Institute's entrance.

Bob will long be remembered for his scientific achievements, for the contribution to the advancement of plant virology, and to the scientific growth of his laboratory in Torino. He is survived by his wife and a son.