OBITUARIES

ROBIN ANDREW
1909 - 1999

Robin Andrew died in Cambridge in September 1999 at the age of 90. Many who started or were involved in pollen analysis and its development in the period 1950-1990 will remember with gratitude her willingness to advise on problems of pollen identification, and it is in recognition of this contribution that a short account of her life and achievements is given.

Robin came to Cambridge in 1947, having served in the War as an ambulance driver, based largely at Reading. Before the War she was an almoner at the American Hospital in Paris, having lived in France for some years. Here she met an assortment of patients, including Russian exiled nobility, from whom she treasured many gifts. When the Germans arrived in 1940, the hospital staff evidently took some time to recognise the problems, but on the 10th of June she left Paris in a large Buick, joining a stream of refugees moving southwards, though optimistically hoping to be back in Paris in a few weeks. Eventually she arrived in Bordeaux and left on one of the last evacuation ships, in the company of King Zog of Albania and his retinue. Robin wrote an entertaining and vivid account of this journey, which has been accepted into the archives of the Imperial War Museum.

On arrival in Cambridge in 1947 Robin answered an advertisement in the local evening paper for a part-time technical assistant for Dr Godwin in the Botany School of the University. She was successful in obtaining the place, the duties of which were to count pollen for Dr Godwin and to build up a pollen reference collection. This was rather small when she arrived, under ten type slides she once told me.

At that time two developing fields of research demanded much better expertise in pollen identification, Iversen's 'landnam' and late-glacial investigations. Though Robin had no formal training in botany, she had a remarkable eye for microscopic detail (which combination gave her an independence of judgement), and this enabled her, under the guidance of Harry Godwin, to improve greatly the standards of pollen identification in the '50s. This was acknowledged in the 1950 paper on late-glacial deposits in Cornwall - "Robin Andrew.... responsible for a good deal of the pollen counting, ... especially for the identification and recording of pollen of late-Glacial herbaceous plants" (Conolly *et al.*, 1950). This contribution is readily seen in the greatly improved detail of British pollen diagrams published in the '50s and later.

These developments were only possible because of the ready availability of well-identified herbarium sheets in the University's Herbarium in the Botany School, a use never envisaged when such herbaria were built up, so illustrating the point that developments in science are often based on knowledge accumulated for other purposes. The importance of the support of a well-documented herbarium is seen in Robin's account of the pollen of British species of *Tilia*, where observations were based on sheets from many named localities (Andrew, 1971).

The result of Robin's work over the years was the Cambridge pollen reference collection, described by her in the Godwin Festschrift (Andrew, 1970). In 1980 Robin produced a Practical Pollen File of the British Flora, which listed the characters of size and pattern of pollen grains of plants of the British Flora. The major classes in this account were based on aperture (furrows, pores). This was a facsimile reproduction of the file she had built up over many years. The introduction noted that "Facsimile reproduction has been adopted to in order to retain the informal nature of the original file and to the same end informal and often untechnical terms are used ...". Such terms as these weren't exactly what the protagonists of various classifications of pollen morphology and structure (e.g. Erdtman, Faegri and Iversen, etc.) had in mind when they put forward their systems. But their informal nature was certainly appreciated by those who used the file in conjunction with the type slides, even if it was subject to criticism by others. The file was revised and published by the Quaternary Research Association in 1984 (Andrew, 1984), and has been of help to many people. It is perhaps the most complete record of the pollen and spores of a national flora and is a remarkable achievement, resulting from a life-time's careful study.

Robin Andrew continued her work, still part-time, long past retirement age. Over many years she greatly assisted and encouraged many student and staff members of the Subdepartment of Quaternary Research and a much wider field of researchers. Such assistance was always given in a quiet and modest fashion, though it must be admitted that she may have appeared rather forbidding to younger enquirers. In no small way did she contribute in her own way an essential discipline to the development of Quaternary palaeoecology.

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