Richard Piers Trehane 1950–2011

In the untimely death of Piers Trehane the world of horticultural plant nomenclature has lost one of its keenest champions. Many of us have also lost a valued friend and colleague. Piers could in some ways seem an enigma; immensely able and industrious, a generous, compassionate and thoughtful individual, but one whose peaks of extraordinary activity were interspersed with periods of unproductiveness that must have seemed baffling to those who were not aware of the severe depression and ill health that lay behind this inconsistency. He has left us a significant legacy in his influence over the form and content of the Cultivated Plant Code, in the practice of cultivar name registration (especially as regards the genus Quercus) and perhaps more subtly in the network of contacts he built up, encouraging the sometimes very disparate elements now engaged with horticultural plant taxonomy and nomenclature to be aware of each other and to liaise more effectively, be they botanists, gardeners, nurserymen, trademark lawyers or those involved with Plant Breeders’ Rights.

Piers was born and brought up on the family estate at Hampreston Manor, in a small village near Wimborne in Dorset, and he lived most of his life in this corner of the county. He had horticultural training at Wye College, where he became heavily involved in student politics (and head of the Student Union), but did not finish his degree course there. For several years subsequent to leaving Wye, he ran Yocketts Nursery, a small business set up for him by his father, which dealt in hardy herbaceous, ground-cover and alpine plants. But Piers’s forte was never to be running a business and he came to wider attention in 1989 when he published Index Hortensis. This was a pioneering work, listing in alphabetical order of genus the names of plants from 2,800 nursery catalogues from all over northern Europe in the period 1984–1987. In its scope it reflected the range of plants he had been involved with in the nursery and although a woody plant equivalent was reported to be in preparation this never materialised. Index Hortensis aimed to provide gardeners and nurserymen with a simple way to look up the correct name for a plant that was in cultivation,
taking into account up-to-date thought on its botanical classification and with due attention paid to the spelling and formation of the name, as required by the Codes of Nomenclature. This book was remarkable for the inclusion of raisers and dates of origin for many cultivars, and provided details of current monographs, as well as links to National Collections, International Cultivar Registration Authorities and relevant specialist societies. Looking outside the world of UK horticulture and linking botany and horticulture were to remain characteristic of Piers’s approach in this field.

Piers’s knowledge and enthusiasm for horticultural nomenclature soon saw him drawn into various Committees and Commissions. From early on in its existence he was a member of the Plant Finder Nomenclature Advisory Group (now the RHS Advisory Committee on Nomenclature and Taxonomy), serving on this body from 1994 until 2004. His encyclopaedic knowledge of who was working on which group of plants around the world was of enormous value to the Committee. He was also appointed to the International Commission for the Nomenclature of Cultivated Plants (the body which formulates the Cultivated Plant Code), where his influence was most keenly felt in the 1995 edition, which he published himself under his Quarterjack Publishing imprint. This was in many ways revolutionary in its style, ordering and content, compared to the previous 1980 edition and although very much a team effort it was Piers who went away (in the role he liked to style as “rapporteur”) and put into effect all our decisions, producing many drafts and spending much time and effort on the many ancillary lists, guides and the glossary which were new features of this edition. In putting forward some of the changes adopted in this Code, Piers was much influenced by the proposals then under discussion for a BioCode to cover the nomenclature of all organisms: the use of the terms “accepted name” and “established name” stem from this source. This was the first Cultivated Plant Code to expand the concept of cultivar Groups and to start dealing more seriously with trade designations and other issues increasing in significance in the real world of horticulture. There also was a more critical look at all the rules, adding more where required, getting rid of as many as we could and trying to make them all as clear as possible where practical experience had shown this was necessary. In all this
Piers played a key role, not least in the effort made to expand the examples given in most Articles, but also in liaising with many other bodies to ensure, as far as possible, that the provisions did not clash with those working with horticultural plant nomenclature. Piers also played a vital role in the Commission discussions and the subsequent editing of the following (seventh) edition of the Code, although this appeared rather later than expected, in 2004, following one of the lacunae in his personal life that frustrated many of us at the time, but must have been even more difficult for him.

One of the catalysts for the changes in the 1995 Code was the work of the Horticultural Taxonomy Group (HORTAX), of which Piers was a founder member. For some years he produced a newsletter for the Group, Hortax News, that provided a source of information and the opportunity for discussions on issues of horticultural nomenclature. It was characteristic of Piers that at the same time as HORTAX was deeply involved with producing its Code proposals, he was in close touch with a group in Holland at the Vaste Keurings Commissie, who were engaged in a similar process. The two groups did not always see eye to eye about the way forward and at times Piers was viewed with some suspicion as having a foot in both camps, although ultimately this was to everyone’s advantage in gaining an understanding of the opposing points of view. Perhaps one can see now that it underlined Piers’s inclination to promote dialogue and an exchange of information in the hope that it would lead to better understanding and best practice.

There are relatively few horticulturists who have had the distinction of serving on the editorial committees for both the Cultivated and the Botanical Codes, but in addition to his long stint on the Cultivated Plant Code Commission, Piers also served on the editorial committee for the 2000 Botanical Code – no mean achievement for someone who was largely self-taught in this area and who for most of his time was not formally supported by any institution.

For several years Piers was employed by the RHS as the International Conifer Registrar and during that period also served on the RHS Conifer Registration Advisory Panel (1995–2003, acting as secretary
to the Panel 1997–2003). As Registrar Piers did much good work to promote conifer registration (especially in liaison with the American Conifer Society), produced a rather radical new application form and played a key role in the International Conifer Conference held at Wye College in 1999. Tragically, most of the data he gathered during this period, in preparation for further parts of the International Register, were lost in a computer crash, setting back the Conifer Register by many years as a result. The Society also benefited from his advice on its Library Committee, on which he served from 1990–2006, acting as its vice-chairman 1994–1997.

The registration of cultivar names was something to which Piers was keenly committed. He was for many years a member of the ISHS Commission for Nomenclature and Cultivar Registration, the body responsible for appointing and monitoring the work of International Cultivar Registration Authorities (ICRAs), and its Chairman for the years 2001–2003. It was an interest he returned to in the last few years of his life when he became the Registrar for the International Oak Society (ICRA for the genus *Quercus*); he was assiduous in his promotion of registration within this group and in preparing an exemplary online Register.

It was a keen disappointment to Piers that his efforts to forge a successful International Society for those concerned with cultivated plant taxonomy did not meet with lasting success. An International Association of Cultivated Plant Taxonomy did eventually get off the ground in 2007, but has now been disbanded as it proved to be impossible to get enough individuals together with the time to support it and further its aims. We needed someone like Piers to drive us on.

In the last two years Piers had taken on a new lease of life as an elected town councillor in Wimborne. He had clearly thrown himself into the role with energy and commitment, reflected in the very large congregation present for his funeral in Wimborne Minster. It is understood that, had a sudden and massive heart attack not claimed his life, he was tipped to be invited to become mayor of the town in 2011. It is clear that for many there will be an empty corner in his local
pub in Wimborne, the White Hart, where Piers could usually be found of an evening. He was a generous and kind individual, with huge amounts of consideration for others. He married twice and had a son by each wife; they all survive him. His eldest son (James Trehane) is currently serving in the army as a member of the Mercian Regiment.

Piers did not always have an easy personal life and some aspects of this did impinge upon his work, but we all appreciated his hard work, his knowledge and the way he shared it.

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Alan Leslie