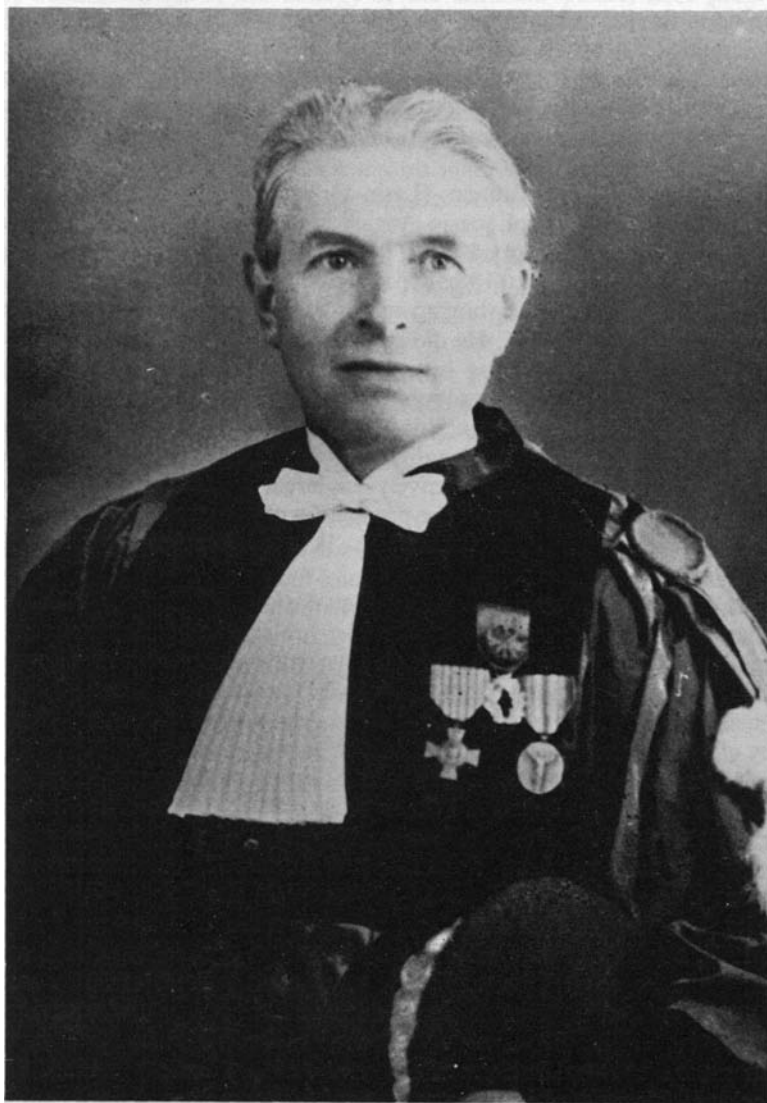


OBITUARY

HENRY NICOLLON DES ABBAYES

1898–1974



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With the death of Professor H. des Abbayes, who died in Rennes on 21 May 1974, the British Lichen Society lost one of its most respected Honorary Members, and French Botany one of its best specialists in lichens.

An affable and modest scientist, a man of truth and considerable culture, he was born on 15 July 1898 in Vihiers (Maine et Loire). However, he grew up in Vendée and studied in the Richelieu College in Luçon from which time he developed both a deep Catholic faith which continued all his life and a great affection for Vendée. He developed both a great attraction to natural Sciences and a classical education. An excellent Latin scholar, he always deplored the abandonment of Latin as the international scientific language and was, in his leisure, an appreciated translator of Virgil and Horace.

After receiving his baccalaureat (Latin-Greek-Philosophy) in 1915 he was enrolled at the Faculté Catholique in Angers where he started studies in natural sciences. His studies were stopped in 1917, however, when he was drafted and sent to the front where he fought (13th R.A.C.). Demobilized in 1920, the post-war economic circumstances forced him to take a commercial post and he became a wine salesman from 1924-1931. He did not abandon his other studies but profited from travels and leisure enabling him to collect plants in Western France. He published his first lichenological papers dealing with the flora of Vendée at this time. In 1925 he married Miss Agnès de Villiers and in 1926, after the birth of the first of their twelve children (six daughters and six sons in perfect alternance), he settled in Saint-Brieuc. He then actively explored Western Brittany, gathering observations which he later used in the production of his first doctoral thesis. After moving to Rennes in 1930, he obtained his 'licence d'enseignement en Sciences naturelles' at that University.

His first post at the University was that of an Assistant in Zoology, which caused him to become interested in this science and he published several notes on Armorican Lepidopterans and Batrachians. He also started work on what later became his second doctoral thesis entitled 'Contributions à l'étude des voies uro-génitales des tritons mâles'. In 1933, he obtained the post of Assistant of Botany, which marked the start of his university career in this field.

In 1934 he received the title of Docteur des Sciences, with honourable mention, in Paris, for the thesis 'La végétation lichénique du Massif Armoricaïn: étude chorologique et écologique'. In 1940 he became laureate of the 'Institut' (Academy of Sciences) and a correspondant of the National Natural History Museum in 1945. He became a 'Maître de Conférences' of Botany in the Science College of the University in Rennes in 1947 and then Professor in 1952. During this time, from 1938 to 1958, he was in charge of Botany in the School of Medicine and Pharmacy. In 1968, when he retired, he was made an Honorary Professor. His scientific work was recognized with other decorations including the 'Ordre national du mérite' and the 'Légion d'honneur'. With the late Dr W. Watson he became one of the first two HonoraryMembers of the British Lichen Society in 1959.

As a scientist Henry des Abbayes was first and foremost a lichenologist publishing some 75 notes or articles on lichens. He began by studying the lichenological flora of western France: first, Vendée, Maine et Loire, Loire Atlantique; and secondly, the western and eastern part of the Armorican Massive. He later extended his research to other French counties (Pyrénées Orientales and Auvergne), Spain, and, as soon as 1938, to overseas territories (West Indies, Africa, Madagascar). He first

studied foreign collections sent to him but later visited the Ivory Coast, Guinea and Madagascar (1947, 1951, 1954, 1956). To complement his publications he distributed three exsiccata (*see below*).

Floristic studies did not demand all of his attention and he tried to make more precise our knowledge of the ecology of the different species, their geographical distribution, and their location according to the peculiarities of the site (armorican sea-shores, *Fagus*-stage at the Mont Dore, barks of different nature) as can be seen in his thesis. The view of the lichen vegetation in the Armorican Massive presented, though not based on phytosociological methods, proves to be very accurate.

Henry des Abbayes was also a systematist and described a number of new species. He paid particular attention to *Cladonia*, his main work on this being his revision of subgenus *Cladina* in 1939. He also prepared his very valuable *Précis de Lichénologie* (1952) whose style is deliberately concise, clear and unpretentious. The drawings in this text were mostly original and have been often reproduced. He was also the author of lichens in the *Précis de Biologie végétale* (1962).

Henry des Abbayes was in contact with many foreign scientists and had a rich library and herbarium which he left to one of us (L. M.) who had been his student and assistant. His knowledge of the armorican lichens often led him to be called upon as a guide in Brittany to his foreign friends. He organized scientific lichenological forays in 1954 after the 8th International Botanical Congress and in 1970 when (with L. M.) he organized a Brittany field meeting for the British Lichen Society.

Moreover, we must remember that H. des Abbayes was not only an eminent lichenologist but researched into the vascular plant flora and vegetation both in Brittany, of which he was a well-known specialist, as well as in other countries. After he retired in 1968 he devoted his time to the production of a six volume *Flora of the Armorican Massive*, only the first volume, entitled *Flore vasculaire du Massif Armoricain* has so far been published and is a book of great interest and value. This was to be followed by a study of the phytogeography and vegetation of the region (with the collaboration of his friend, the Chanoine Corillion from Angers) and by a lichen flora for which he had gathered a great deal of data. It is hoped that it will be possible to publish this lichen flora in the near future.

Such was the scientist, but those who knew him will recall the robust profile of a man accustomed to long walks across fields and heaths. They will not forget either his face, smiling and frank, or his kind welcome. They will remember the cheerful companion, a lover of good wine and good cheer who guided them through a country of which he was fond. He could not dissociate the study of the flora and vegetation from an approach to the hidden balance between landscapes, monuments and men. Sound common sense and kindness always tempered the vivacity of his talks.

Now, we should both like to record our gratitude to a Master who patiently introduced us to lichenology and placed at our disposal his great knowledge, rich library and collections. He wanted his students to become interested in various fields of lichenology: phytosociology and systematics as well as cytology and physiology. He encouraged them to visit foreign laboratories and to meet other scientists, introducing one of us (M.-A. L.-G.) to Professor Chadefaud with whom she later worked. Thus H. des Abbayes was both a great scientist and a true-minded man whose work will long be familiar to lichenologists dealing with Armorican,

French or African floras. He was also a man of great culture, deeply implanted in his country and his faith. To the memory of him we shall stay devoted. Let his wife and his children find here the expression of his colleagues' faithful sympathy.

Lichenological publications of H. des Abbayes

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EXSICCATA

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M.-A. Letrouit-Galinou and L. Massé