

WALTER MEAGHER (1935–2010)



Walter Leo Meagher was born on 7 January 1935 in Philadelphia. He was educated at St Aloysius Academy, West Chester, Pennsylvania and went on to the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He gained his first degree in History (with distinction) and Biology in 1958 and subsequently taught at the University, combining history with neuro-physiology. He was awarded his MA in 1961 and in the same year joined the publishing house of Prentice Hall. Here he became associate editor in charge of subjects as diverse as music, philosophy, religion and drama. In 1964 he was named senior editor for the Trade Division.

This eclectic mix of the scholarly and the pragmatic characterised his life. By now he was married and subsequently had four children.

In 1966 he and two friends founded the scientific publishing house, Worth Publishers Inc with offices in New York. Among their notable publications were *Biology* (8 editions), *Biology of Plants* (7 editions), and *Invitation to Biology* (5 editions). In 1972 they also published Joseph Kerman's *Listen (to music)*. Diversity was central to Walter's life and after New York he lived in both New Jersey and California before coming to England. Further publications followed, including a series of Oxford guidebooks. The designer for these books was Wendy and in 1985 she and Walter married. Their son, Freddie, was born in 1988 in Somerton.

By now Walter had identified botany as his overwhelming interest. He returned with his family to the States and in the late 80s–early 90s attended summer schools back at the University of Michigan.

Two years in the West Indies followed but after that he and Wendy divided their time between Oxfordshire and San Miguel de Allende in Mexico, where one of Walter's most enduring legacies was established, the El Charco del Ingenio Botanical Garden, which he and his work had inspired. His subsequent book on the flora and fauna of this site, *Wild and Wonderful* (2008) exhibits the scholarship, enthusiasm and comprehensive vision that Deddington came to know so well.

During his time in Deddington Walter set about recording the wildlife of the area. Many of us happily joined in, checking plants, birds, butterflies and locations for his detailed booklets. In 2005 he published *Portrait of a River* tracing the route and surrounding wildlife of the River Swere. This resulted in the upper course of the Swere being named as a Target Conservation Area. He also wrote some 170 articles for a wide variety of publications including *Oxford Magazine*, *Audubon* and *Phytologia* and contributed to the *DN* and *Four Shires*. In all these enterprises Wendy was his close collaborator and designer. It was an ideal partnership.

Walter's death in July was a loss to many people in two continents. A tribute in the San Miguel newspaper, *Atención*, concluded with a farewell 'to this extraordinary man who has left such a void in our lives but also has inspired us'. Perhaps I may be allowed to end on a personal note and echo those sentiments. Knowing Walter was a pleasure, a privilege and an education.

Kristin Thompson