

CONDRY, WILLIAM MORETON (1918-1998), naturalist, conservationist and writer

Name: William Moreton Condry
Date of birth: 1918
Date of death: 1998
Spouse: Doreen Sylvia Penelope Condry (née Bailey)
Parent: Elizabeth Agnes Condry (née Moreton)
Parent: William Joseph Condry
Gender: Male
Occupation: naturalist, conservationist and writer
Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Nature and Agriculture
Authors: Christopher Fuller, Arthur Chater

William Condry, or Bill as he was often known, was born in Birmingham on 1st March 1918 to Joseph Condry, a gem setter, and his wife Agnes, who were Clarionites, pacifists and active members of the Independent Labour Party. He had a brother, Dennis, and a sister Kathleen (who died at the age of 104).

Condry studied at Birmingham University where he gained a BA in French, Latin and History in 1939 and a Diploma in Education in 1940. During the war years he was a conscientious objector and worked in forestry in Herefordshire. In 1945 he obtained a BA (Hons) in French at London University, followed in 1951 by a MA in French at the University of Wales, which also awarded him an honorary MSc in 1980. He was an extra-mural lecturer for the University from 1949 to 1959. Remarkably, his immense knowledge of natural history was self-taught and largely unconnected to his academic training.

After the war Condry married Penny in April 1946 in the Nantmor valley in Snowdonia. They had no children. They went on to live in Ceredigion at Bwlch-gwair (above Ponterwyd) and Tal-y-bont, then in Meirionnydd at Glygyrog-ddu (high on the hills between Aberdyfi and Pennal). Eventually they returned to Ceredigion at Felin-y-cwm (in Cwm Einion above Furnace) and finally Ynys Edwin on the Dyfi estuary. Ynys Edwin was originally part of the Ynys-hir Estate owned by Hubert Mappin (of the famed jewellers Mappin & Webb). After Mappin's death in 1966, Condry encouraged his widow Patricia to sell most of the land to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) to become a nature reserve, thus bringing about Mappin's wishes. Condry became the reserve's first warden from 1969 until 1982.

Condry was a part-time teacher at the former Lapley Grange School, Furnace from 1949 to 1959. From 1947 to 1956 he was the Mid Wales Nature Warden for the then West Wales Field Society and from 1950 to 1954 he edited the Society's *Field Notes* which, in 1955, became *Nature in Wales*, again first edited by Condry with two others. For 42 years he was much involved with the Society and its successor bodies, the West Wales Naturalists' Trust and the Wildlife Trust - West Wales, being a member of the Ceredigion Conservation Committee of both bodies until 1991. He was also President of the North Wales Naturalists' Trust. In 1953 he was one of the founders of the Bardsey Bird & Field Observatory and became its Honorary Secretary for 8 years, then its President and finally Honorary Life President in 1990. In 1949 he was one of the founders of the Kite Committee (formed to protect the then rare red kite in Wales), and in 1965 he was awarded the RSPB's Silver Medal for services to bird protection in Wales.

After finishing his teaching career, Condry devoted all his time to natural history, conservation and writing. In a tribute to him in 1998, *The Daily Telegraph* described him as one of the finest British writers on natural history in the twentieth century. Condry wrote 14 major books, including two in the prestigious *Collins New Naturalist Series*, namely *The Snowdonia National Park* (1966) and *The Natural History of Wales* (1981), which are probably his two most substantial works. Other publications about Wales were *Exploring Wales* (1970), *Snowdonia* (1987), *Wales, the National Trust* (1991) and *Welsh Country Essays* (1996). *Wildflower Safari, the Life of Mary Richards* (1998) is the biography of the Meirionnydd botanist who became one of Kew's greatest plant collectors in tropical Africa. Condry wrote an autobiography, *Wildlife - My Life*, published in 1995. He was an accomplished wildlife photographer and many of his books contain his own illustrations. In addition to his books, he wrote numerous articles for publications like *Country Life* and *The Countryman*, made many broadcasts and was much in demand as a lecturer. A remarkable achievement was his contribution of a fortnightly Country Diary to *The Guardian* for 41 years (1957-98), his last one appearing on the day he died. Condry was widely regarded as one of the finest British country diarists, and a selection of his contributions, *Welsh Country Diary*, was published in 1993 by Gomer Press.

Condry's best work evokes the natural world with great vividness and was based on personal experience and scientific understanding. Sometimes it was accompanied by wry comment, but he was always the objective observer and never used nature to reflect or enhance his own feelings. His writings led readers to visualise, understand and respect the natural world in a way that had incalculable benefits for the study of natural history and for conservation. His topographical and historical writings about Wales encouraged a similar sympathy and understanding. His exemplar in writing as well as in life was Henry David Thoreau, about whom he wrote his first book, *Thoreau* (1954). Condry was a man of personal charm, modesty and humour, unobtrusively persuasive where matters of principle or conservation were concerned, and for many he came to be regarded as a touchstone in his attitude to the natural world.

William Condry died from kidney failure in Morriston Hospital, Swansea on 30 May 1998, aged 80, and was cremated in Aberystwyth on 8 June and his ashes scattered on one of his favourite mountains, Cadair Idris. Most years he would visit this mountain in early spring to see his much-loved purple saxifrage in flower.

Authors

Christopher Fuller

Arthur Chater

Sources

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Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [William Moreton Condry](#)

Additional Links

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