

Nancy Tyson Burbidge (1912 – 1977)

Nancy Tyson Burbidge was born on 5 August 1912 at Cleckheaton, Yorkshire, England, the only daughter of William Burbidge, a clergyman, and his wife Mary Eleanor, née Simmonds. The family emigrated in 1913 when William was appointed to the Anglican parish at Katanning, Western Australia. Eleanor opened a primary school at the rectory and in 1922 founded the Katanning (Kobeelya) Church of England School. Nancy was educated there and at Bunbury High School and the University of Western Australia, completing her BSc in 1937. A prize of free passage to England enabled her to spend 18 months in 1939–40 working at the Kew herbarium, and while there she revised the Australian species of the grass genus *Enneapogon*. On her return to Perth she continued her study of Australian plants and completed her MSc.



Picris burbidgeae

Picris (an ancient Greek name for a bitter herb) is a genus, mainly of temperate regions, of about 45 species of annual to perennial herbs with milky sap, bristly stems and leaves, and yellow daisy-like flowers, commonly known as ox-tongue. In a 1994 revision of the genus in Australia, Holzappel described *Picris burbidgeae*. (Its earlier name *P. hieracioides* is now applied to a different European species.) Light-green lanceolate leaves, slightly reddish midribs and ribbed stems help distinguish it from the weedy exotic Asteraceae. Habitat loss and accidental eradication threaten its survival in New Zealand

In 1943 she became assistant agronomist at the Waite Agricultural Research Institute in Adelaide, working on native pasture species for arid and semi-arid South Australia. Appointed systematic botanist in the CSIRO's plant division at Canberra in 1946, she laid the foundations of the National Australian Herbarium. From 1948–1952, as secretary of the systematic botany committee of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, she edited *Australasian Herbarium News* until her secondment in 1953 to Kew, where she photographed and indexed type specimens of Australian plants and made microfilm copies of Robert Brown's notebooks for Australian herbaria.

After returning to Canberra in 1954 she published over 50 papers on phytogeography, ecology, botanical history and Australian plant genera, including *The Phytogeography of the Australian Region*, which contributed to the award of her DSc in 1961. Other works included *Plants of the Australian Capital Territory* (with Max Gray) and *Dictionary of Australian Plant Genera* (both in 1963), *Flora of the Australian Capital Territory* (1970, again with Max Gray) and studies of several plant groups, often illustrated with her own drawings. From 1973 to 1977 she directed the *Flora of Australia* series. She was awarded the 1971 Clarke Medal by the Royal Society of New South Wales, and in 1976 was made a member of the Order of Australia.

A founding member of the National Parks Association of the ACT and long-time member of the Australian Federation of University Women and the Pan-Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association, Miss Burbidge served in a number of positions and supported a range of causes. She died of carcinomatosis in Woden Valley Hospital on 4 March 1977.

Her contribution to botany is commemorated by an altar frontal depicting banksias and honey-eaters in St Michael's Anglican Church in Perth, by the Nancy T Burbidge memorial amphitheatre in the National Botanic Gardens, Canberra, and by the native ox-tongue *Picris burbidgeae*, found in eastern Australia and on Norfolk Island, the main island of Hawaii, and a few places in northern New Zealand.