

## 2010 IAVS Honorary Membership John Rodwell

*By Joop Schaminée  
June 20, 2011*

Two years ago, the then newly installed IAVS Award Committee elected Professor John Rodwell as Honorary Member of the International Association for Vegetation Science. As such, he would be the 12th person given honorary membership and the first since 2005. The plan was to publicly recognize this honorable event at the IAVS 2010 meeting in Ensenada, but the ash cloud from Iceland threw a spanner in the works. Therefore, the celebration was postponed to the meeting this year in Lyon.



To honor John Rodwell it would be appropriate to give two laudations, one dealing with his scientific work on vegetation and one for his practical work on behalf of our International Association for Vegetation Science. This, however, would not be an easy task, as his scientific work always has been focused on application, whereas teaching and sharing of ideas seem to be second nature for John Rodwell, as will be demonstrated.

John Rodwell studied botany at Leeds University and obtained a PhD from Southampton University for his research on 'Relationships between vegetation and soils on the British carboniferous limestone' (1974). This study actually was a kind of kick-off for his magnum opus in vegetation science, as he was appointed in 1975 as the coordinator of the United Kingdom National Vegetation Classification. This 19-year government-funded project has become the first systematic and comprehensive survey of the vegetation types on that part of the British Isles. Rodwell founded and was appointed first Director of the Unit of Vegetation Science at Lancaster University, building from scratch a research, training and database-development group with a high international reputation, attracting many students and scientists to this small city in the north of the England.

Volume one of the five-volume British Plant Communities, edited by Rodwell, was published in 1991, and I do remember that during one of the speeches it was mentioned that at that time in Eastern Europe the iron curtain was demolished by thousands of people, whereas John Rodwell on its own was able to pull down the 'brown blanket' between Britain and the Continent. A year after this memorable symposium in Lancaster, in 1992, Rodwell was the founding member of the European Vegetation Survey (EVS), which - without any doubt - can be seen as the most successful Working Group of the IAVS.

In recent years, John Rodwell has been Secretary of the EVS and I am pretty sure that I shortnoone by stating that the success of this working group is largely a consequence of his contributions. In 1992, the annual EVS workshop was attended by some thirty people from just a couple of countries, whereas during the last few years more than two hundred people were welcomed, representing twenty-five or more countries from Europe and abroad. During this period, John Rodwell coordinated an EVS team to produce the first overview of European vegetation types, represented the UK in the European Vegetation Map project and in SynBioSys Europe, and with UK Darwin Initiative funding helped to establish a European Turboveg network. Without Rodwell, descriptive vegetation science would have been another story, not only in the United Kingdom but also in Eastern Europe.

But there is more. John Rodwell is not just a scientist but also a priest, a fascinating combination which especially on the British Isles seems to find fertile soil, remembering the works of 'father' J.J. Moore in Ireland. Botany as the *scientia amabilis* and religion as the *struggle in life*, I don't know which of these is the strongest driver for John Rodwell. His interest in art, in the relationship between nature and culture, in the psychology of the Second World War, in habitat restoration of post-industrial landscapes, and in themes like belonging and *Heimat* (as it is called in German) are undeniably all inspired by both, as probably is as well his huge sense of humor.

On behalf of the IAVS Award Committee, it is a great and personal pleasure for me to welcome John Rodwell as an Honorary Member of the International Association for Vegetation Science.