

ANDREW JOHN CHARLES GRIERSON

(24 iv 1929–11 ix 1990)

Andrew Grierson was an Edinburgh man through and through. He was educated at George Watson's Boys College and the University of Edinburgh, graduating in Botany in 1951, and his entire botanical career was spent at the Royal Botanic Garden, which he entered as a Scientific Officer immediately after leaving university. After the stagnation of the war years, the Royal Botanic Garden was undergoing a period of growth and development in its scientific work. Sir William Wright Smith held the joint posts of Regius Professor of Botany and Regius Keeper and, under his leadership, several new members of staff were appointed during the early 1950s. In addition to A.J.C.G., B.L. Burtt, P.S. Green, D.M. Henderson and I.C.H. were appointed on the 'Government side', i.e. to the Scientific Civil Service, to work in the antiquated herbarium and laboratory; on the University side, P.H. Davis was a recent appointee as a lecturer and close colleague. In many ways it was this background, of building for the future and close links with University colleagues, that was to set the pattern for Andrew's work for many years to come.

At that time, the herbarium collections were in a bad state and distributed among seven separate locations within the Garden, with the library separate again. Working conditions were certainly very far from ideal. Basic curation of the collections was of paramount importance and Andrew played an important role in this communal activity; taxonomic research inevitably had to take a somewhat secondary position. But for the two youngest Scientific Officers (A.J.C.G. and I.C.H.), the next two years were to be spent not curating plants in the Old Herbarium (now called the Caledonian Hall), but on National Service, mostly abroad. They both went off, on the same troop train, to start basic army training in December 1951. The following year, Andrew was commissioned in the Royal Artillery and, among other postings, had a spell in the Aden Protectorate. He made good use of the opportunity to see a very different kind of flora and, in decidedly less than ideal conditions, collected plants both in the vicinity of Aden and, more importantly, in the inhospitable Hadramaut. His ability to make good, well-documented, herbarium specimens stemmed from this experience.

The transition from a varied and active military life to a more placid and sedentary lifestyle was not easy and it took some time before Andrew settled and was able to establish a satisfying blend of curatorial and research work. Both B.L. Burtt and P.H. Davis encouraged him to develop an interest in the family Compositae and during the next 20 years or so Andrew steadily built up an enormous knowledge of this vast family. His publications on Compositae were substantial but only reflect a fraction of his knowledge: any unknown Composite, wild or cultivated, unfailingly went to him and, just as unfailingly, was named. It is a continuing tribute to him that we still miss his expertise today. Give him an unknown plant, Composite or otherwise, and Andrew would beaver away, meticulously making neat dissections and complementary sketches, until he found the answer. Among his major contributions to our knowledge of the Compositae, mention must be made of his involvement in Volume 5 of the *Flora of Turkey*, published in 1975 and running to almost 900 pages. In the Introduction, Peter Davis wrote of Andrew: ' . . . not only has he revised numerous genera, but he has been our mentor and guide through the family labyrinth; he has adjudicated on generic limits and terminology,

and been largely responsible for the construction of the dichotomous key to the genera'. Andrew also had considerable experience of the family in the field. In 1969 he spent five months in Ceylon studying and collecting Compositae. He found this, his first real tropical collecting trip, enormously stimulating and often expressed his desire to return there. This trip led to his substantial account (some 60 genera) published in the first volume of the *Revised handbook to the Flora of Ceylon* (1980). In addition to his taxonomic work, Andrew was much involved in many different facets of the work of the Garden. His day-to-day herbarium duties included the curation of the Carpological Collection and answering varied enquiries about seeds and fruits — from tropical drift seeds from the west coast of Ireland, to the identification of seeds in a parrot's cage. In addition to such duties he taught, for many years, the elementary botany class for the Garden's horticultural Diploma course; he was also for a considerable period closely involved in the work of the library, together with the librarian M.V. Mathew. In 1964 he was secretary of the Publications Committee for the Tenth International Botanical Congress.

In 1975 an unexpected opportunity transformed Andrew's career. The Overseas Development Administration (ODA) approached the Royal Botanic Garden, bearing a request from the Royal Government of Bhutan that British botanists be enlisted to catalogue the extensive collections made in Bhutan by earlier botanists, especially Cooper, Ludlow and Sherriff. In 1975 Bhutan was just emerging from centuries of self-imposed isolation and the British Government was keen to improve contacts and develop an Aid Programme. The then Regius Keeper, D.M. Henderson, enlisted Andrew as organizer and editor, and soon after D.G.L. was contracted to ODA as his assistant. Andrew immediately set about reorganizing Cooper's herbarium, most of which had languished in a store unlabelled and unmounted for decades, and soon realized that here was an important resource containing many tropical taxa not found by other collectors in Bhutan.

Almost immediately came a wonderful invitation: to visit Bhutan, then virtually inaccessible to botanists and an opportunity not to be missed. This trip, in September 1975, lasted only three weeks but set the project on course and led to two major expeditions for Andrew in 1979 and 1982. Initially the plan was to produce an 'Annotated Checklist' but by 1978 it was realized that a synoptic flora would be a much more useful product, to which the Bhutanese readily agreed. At the same time the scope was widened to include plants occurring in the better-known districts of Sikkim and Darjeeling immediately to the west of Bhutan.

Andrew felt very strongly that the subtropical and temperate forests of Bhutan should receive most attention, due to neglect by previous botanists and also because of the loss of these vegetation types elsewhere in the Himalaya. These explorations were gratifyingly fruitful and yielded many important and unexpected finds: a *Cycas*, the new *Pinus bhutanica* and a scattering of new species in a wide range of families. Species with Malesian affinities such as *Tetrameles nudiflora* (Datisceae), scarcely known before in the Himalaya, were found to be common in the foothills.

Andrew's contribution to this exploration was enormous and after a long day in the field he would never rush the 'homework' — he could never resist the temptation to dissect and attempt to name an unfamiliar genus. He believed passionately in collecting 'everything' from annuals to trees and took great delight in raiding gardens for off-beat cultivated plants. He also delighted in collecting 'difficult' plants and would never pass an *Opuntia* or a viciously spiny rattan

without a battle. His pipe was a constant companion and in the 1982 monsoon trip the incessant rain forced him to learn the art of smoking it upside-down!

Back in Edinburgh he revised numerous families for the *Flora of Bhutan*, of which three parts were published before his death. In addition he tackled many difficult families for later volumes, including the Compositae. He recognized fully the importance of the historical Himalayan collections at Kew and the British Museum and made many study-visits to London.

In 1987 Andrew suffered a substantial heart attack and never regained full health. However, his regular daily routine continued and he worked on doggedly, rarely complaining, until shortly before his sadly premature death.

I. C. Hedge & D. G. Long

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