

PETER HADLAND DAVIS
BSc, PhD, DSc(Edin), FLS

Born in Weston-Super-Mare in 1918, Peter Davis was educated first at Nash House, Burnham-on-Sea, and subsequently at Bradfield College and Maiden Erleigh, Reading. In 1937 he was apprenticed to Ingwersen's Alpine Plant Nursery at East Grinstead and it was during that time that his early interest in plants was nurtured, eventually to become an all-consuming passion which he continued until his death on the 5th of March 1992. In 1938 he began botanising as an amateur in the Middle East, including Turkey, but his work was interrupted by the outbreak of the second world war in 1939. During the period from the beginning of hostilities until 1945 he served in the armed forces, eventually spending the last two years of his service on special duties in Cairo. On release from His Majesty Forces he came to the University of Edinburgh to study botany and graduated with a First Class Honours BSc in the summer of 1949. This was the beginning of a distinguished academic career spent wholly in the Botany Department, broken up by numerous collecting trips to various parts of the world. Appointed Lecturer in Botany in 1950 he began a programme of research which led him and his research team inexorably forward to the completion of the Flora of Turkey and the East Aegean Islands. However, between the initiation and completion of this major Flora lay much research and a colourful life. His PhD on the 'Taxonomy of Middle East flora' was awarded in 1952 and through the 1950s he travelled widely, collecting and exploring in Kurdistan, Russia, and various regions of the Middle East. In 1958 he was awarded the Cuthbert Peek Medal by the Royal Geographical Society for exploration in Kurdistan.

In 1961 he began in earnest the preparation of the *Flora of Turkey* having secured a grant from the Science Research Council. It is particularly significant that the SRC (subsequently SERC) supported this research until the completion of the Flora in 1985. Indeed, this work is one of the jewels in the crown of research supported by the Biological Sciences Committee representing as it does a major and distinguished piece of scholarship. Through the 1960s and 1970s he was promoted to Senior Lecturer, then Reader and, finally, to a Personal Chair in Plant Taxonomy.

His research and scholarship were widely recognised outside the University by the award of the Symposium Medal at the International Symposium on the Problems of Balkan Flora and Vegetation, the Certificate of Merit from the Turkish Minister of State for outstanding contributions in the field of science, Gold Medal of the Linnean Society, by his appointment as an Honorary Associate of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh and by his election to Fellowship of the Linnean Society and the Royal Society of Edinburgh (1955). In 1980 he was awarded a SERC Replacement Fellowship which enabled him to devote all of his time to research and the completion of the Flora. He was awarded the Royal Society of Edinburgh Neill Medal for 1985-87 in recognition of his distinguished contribution to plant taxonomy.

Many of us knew the man well, especially by the affectionate acronym "PD". We have our own vivid and personal memories of days shared with him - days good and days bad, days of laughter and days of effort and strain. Peter's life consisted of several important interdigitating parts, a little like a jigsaw puzzle. Few of us were familiar with all the pieces, and what is now written, must be inevitably partial, not comprehensive. However, we think that it will not be unrepresentative.

Peter was a challenging man. He was intriguing, amusing, optimistic, cheerful, witty and charming. He was a fountain of fascinating anecdotes, insights and ideas - culled from his travels, his research and his reading - for he was a deeply cultured man. He had phenomenal energy - both mental and physical - and formidable stamina, which contrasted with his delicate-looking physique. He had a power of sustained, concentrated perseverance and utter dedication that saw the *Flora of Turkey* through; this was a mighty undertaking, a massive work of 10 volumes which fully stretched his spirit and endurance. It took twenty years and in the end wore him out.

He had personal warmth too, and a vulnerability, which explains why so many diverse people were willing to help him, support him in his purposes, join in the work, contribute to his endeavours - even though he was sometimes demanding, sometimes insistent to the point of importunity, sometimes seeming indifferent or perhaps just blind, to the problems and urgent exigencies of others. His single-mindedness was occasionally maddening - yet it would usually be tempered by some unexpected, touching piece of ingenious generosity, or some unlooked-for act of courteous consideration.

His endeavours were sound, his purposes well-founded, and he showed very clearly and brilliantly that he had the skills and determination to achieve his goals. So people flocked to help him. He managed his army of helpers well. He was a superb editor, who knew when to cajole, when to chivy and when to thunder. He was a persuasive, resourceful politician, sensitive to nuance and opportunity in anything to do with his *magnum opus*, the *Flora of Turkey*. He rarely failed to recognise or deploy a potential ally, at home or abroad. He knew something of the levers of power, some of which, as all academics know, are found in unlikely places. In our experience he never underestimated the difficulty of the terrain he had to conquer, though occasionally he over-estimated the nature of the opposition - sometimes it did not actually exist. He was sometimes unreasonably suspicious, rushing boldly and volubly to the defence of some citadel that was not under attack wielding as his weapon a big stick, of which he had firmly grasped the wrong end. But sometimes his suspicions were justified. These are faults on the right side of course, but, perhaps because of his great knowledge of the history of the Middle East, he was sometimes misled into seeing a sinister arabesque of Byzantine complexity, when there was, in reality, only straightforward, supportive British trellis.

We will try to illustrate the man and his characteristics by referring to some of our own contacts with him.

Kit: I remember my first visit to Peter's amazingly beautiful home, with an interior absolutely crammed with treasures. The kettle singing on the stove; Muffy, a beautiful silver tabby, purring reassuringly on my knee, and Peter lifting and waving all kinds of precious mugs and jugs, pots and pans - explaining, demonstrating, weaving in and out, forwards, backwards, sideways - I could have stayed there spellbound for hours. I was introduced to the Gallé cat which apparently was Peter's most beloved object - he said it had a very *superior* smile.

His attitude was open and frank and a little conspiratorial. I was immediately put at ease. He smiled, he chuckled, he laughed silently, inviting one with a twinkle to share in the joke. Surprisingly we got on extremely well, extremely quickly.

We went to a Degas exhibition - I remember it was a very hot day and a very long queue. When it was our turn, the ticket collector took one look and said "Right, half-fee for the old-age pensioner and a half for the child". Peter was dreadfully indignant, he took great pride in his appearance and several times during the viewing, turned round and asked "I don't look like an old-age pensioner, do I?" "Of course not, PD", I murmured comfortingly. On the other hand, I was secretly amused that I could still travel half-fare on the Edinburgh buses.

Philip: Peter didn't know who or what I was when I arrived. He was not involved in my appointment as lecturer in the Department. I think he had been wondering what kind of a missile I was. I was at King's Buildings; he worked at the Royal Botanic Garden. I was told: "You'd better go down and see Davis". Down I went on a very cold day in mid-January 1967. He received me warmly, there were words of welcome, and many quite probing questions. He twinkled with goodwill and humour, putting me swiftly at ease. *He* smiled, he laughed his silent laugh. He twinkled and twinkled - and *I* was signed up for lots of work in the Diploma course, for three weeks of lectures and practicals in the third year, for demonstration duties in the second year and two weeks of hard graft in the fourth year. Oh yes, and I was to attend the Box Hill field course in July.

He took me to his home, the first of many visits to that Wonderland. His parties were full of the wise and beautiful. He told me jokes and gave me wine. By the time July came, I was nearly dropping from fatigue - and down we went to Box Hill, via London - National Gallery on the way there, Tate Gallery on the way back. Taxis everywhere. We eventually came to Juniper Hall, Dorking, where the students had miraculously arrived independently, and already had arranged an evening singsong.

After dinner Peter steered me away from the singsong - *not* his scene - and into the White Horse. Piles of beef sandwiches a mile high - and then another pile. Pints and quarts of Surrey beer. We were very late to bed, indeed we couldn't find it for a long time, or the bathroom, in that strange old building. Next morning we were bussed to a common. Very interesting, but Peter had somehow, without knowing it, given the bus driver permission to visit his sister in Hindhead. When it came on to rain we had a very long and weary walk home. At Christmas he came into my room and plonked a bottle of Glen Grant on my desk (105 degrees proof). "What's that for?" I said. "For being a good boy" he cried. And that's how it was.

He taught us swiftly about many things, without seeming to - about botany, art and the world of plant collecting. Because he knew, *we* want to know. The stories he told of his field trips: of hospitable churches on cliff tops in Turkey - only 200 feet of sheer climb to get into bed; of Berber murderers approaching his overnight camp in a menacing fashion with large hooked knives - their most recent victim lying dismembered in a shallow grave beneath Peter's drying plant presses; of giant Greek sopranos in Alexandrian hotels, approaching poor Peter in an even more menacing fashion; of strangely oblique, ambivalent conversations with the Archbishop of Athens, that turned out in the end, to have been about croquet. He was an energetic collector even on field courses; landowners often reported afterwards that they had been able to follow his spoor with ease.

Peter's non-botanical collections - of arts and oddities - mark him out as a person of immense natural style and taste - and humour. His pictures and pottery are well-known. He specialised in Wemyss-ware, a decorative Scottish pottery which has now become increasingly collectable.

Peter loved teaching - not undergraduates alone, but also postgraduates, of whom he guided a large, cosmopolitan assemblage to their PhDs. He worked hard for the place of taxonomy - indeed of botany itself - in undergraduate courses, and for research scholarships to train systematists.

His lectures were popular mainly because his own enthusiasm and knowledge were so apparent. He was not hampered by his speech impediment, indeed he recognised its potential for impact, charm and emphasis. He exploited that stammer for his own purposes - and why not? He was a natural actor and raconteur - this was a great asset when trying to fire up a student audience into a state of passion about anatropous ovules, intrapetiolar stipules, or the niceties of ecotypes, ecads, ecoclines and ecogenophenotopodemes.

Peter was unconventional, and a non-conformist in many respects. Yet he inspired genuine loyalty and deep respect from many people. All who knew him can justly *celebrate* his life though it is now past, and can collectively bear witness to its richness and worth. We remember and acknowledge a triumphant life with gratitude, for we had the good fortune to participate in it, and were nourished and enriched by it. We remember a man who wore himself out in the service of botany; a man who deserves the peace that latterly he did not know; a man who had no belief in any conventional afterlife, but whose earthly eloquent remarks about bishops and archbishops makes one think that he was at least a Presbyterian atheist, rather than an Episcopalian one.

Though Paradise was not for Peter, he is one of those who die and yet live - a flower that will not wither or fade. So where is his habitation?

Surely it is in the memories of those who knew and loved him. And surely also it is on Ararat and Olympus, and by the waters of the Mediterranean and Lake Van. And in the villages of Anatolia, North Africa and Palestine. Also in the dusty junk shops of Dunkeld. And surely, too, in Edinburgh, because

'Where we love is home -

-Home that our feet may leave,

but not our hearts'.

We remember Peter Davis with affection - our friend who was so eminent, so kindly, and so blithe.

K TAN
P SMITH
M M YEOMAN