

## CLIVE JERMY – A TRIBUTE ON THE OCCASION OF HIS 80<sup>th</sup> BIRTHDAY, 3<sup>rd</sup> JULY 2012

When I first joined the BPS the two main players were Jimmy Dyce and... Clive Jermy. Jimmy took care of the horticultural side of things as well as field recording and Clive was the scientist and the motor behind the Society's development into the more technical world.

Clive joined the Society in 1959 following his appointment as the bright young thing to replace A.H.G. Alston as head of the Fern section at the Natural History Museum in London. The Society was in reasonable heart at the time but several senior members had passed on and it needed an invigorating boost. Clive provided that change by immediately taking over editorship of the *British Fern Gazette*. In the process he changed it out of all recognition. Vague narrative accounts soon disappeared to be replaced by scientific technical articles. This change raised the profile of the journal in the world of international pteridology. As a result we had a strong surge in our membership. There was of course a down side. Initially several members complained about the shift in emphasis, with at least one senior member resigning in disgust. Jimmy Dyce came to the rescue, correcting any imbalance by launching the *Newsletter*, prompting the senior member to rejoin. The *Newsletter* was later replaced by the *Bulletin* and *Pteridologist* we see today.

As the *British Fern Gazette* grew under Clive's editorship so the Society flourished – the differing interests running through the membership could only add to the Society's strength. Through Clive's ever-expanding list of contacts worldwide our Society was able to successfully organise several international symposia. Big names from all over the world were happy to come if Clive invited them.

All the time Clive was developing the *British Fern Gazette* he was also building his department at the Museum. Assisted by Jim Crabbe he collected a small elite staff of budding pteridologists, including the obligatory pretty girl, or two! He must have been busy, yet when young keen members like me pestered him with queries they always received a prompt reply. The replies were little more than notes on scraps of paper but



Clive Jermy next to a fine specimen of *Osmunda regalis*, Cors Fochno, July 2009

he always supplied the information required. He always signed off – “In haste, Clive”. He was obviously busy! Clive was great at getting everyone involved. In modern terminology he would probably be a ‘facilitator’. On one occasion he asked me to check a record in Cornwall. He’d been sent a frond in the post with the added note – is this *Trichomanes*? I’m pretty sure the sender knew perfectly well it was, but Clive suggested it would be useful if I confirmed the record. This I duly did in December 1968. I was happy and so was Clive!

Typically generous, two or three years later Clive invited my wife and me to stay with him and his wife Alma at Otford. It enabled us to join in an Ashdown Forest meeting of the Society. A couple of years later we were able to return the gesture by having Clive and Alma, with their young children, Stuart and Nerida, and Jimmy Dyce join us for ten days in the French Alps, where I was working for the summer. To have Jimmy and Clive in such an environment was terrific. All that knowledge, keenness to explore... and dare I say... fun to be with!

Very sadly Alma died far too young, but before anyone knew it Clive had married again. His new wife, Valerie, was a very long standing friend of Clive and Alma. Valerie lived in Herefordshire not far from me. Can you imagine my surprise to one day literally bump into Clive in a street in Leominster, Herefordshire? I had no idea he was in the area. Leominster is a long way from Otford in Kent! I had never lived near Clive so it was almost too good to be true to have him as a near neighbour. Meetings were no longer confined to weeks or weekends away. We had meals at each other’s houses and sampled the meals at a whole range of local pubs. There was a rule however, Valerie allowed talk about ferns until the meal arrived – after that the subject was banned – not always terribly successfully!

Quite recently Clive organised a *Dryopteris affinis* day in his village hall at Staunton-on-Arrow. Ken Trewren was the key speaker. Clive’s connections with the Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI) came into play here. Several local vice-county recorders attended, adding significantly to the value of the meeting.



Clive Jermy (left) and Arthur Chater *Isoetes* hunting, Cwmsymlog, July 2009

Throughout the years I have known him, Clive has always had strong connections with the BSBI, why he was never elected their President is a constant source of amazement to me. Outside the world of ferns he was principal author of *British sedges* as a BSBI Handbook (1968); this was followed in 1982 and 2007 by considerably enlarged and updated editions. There were times when I wondered just how Clive could allow himself to be distracted by, to me, such an uninteresting group of plants!

Clive was of course one of the more prestigious Presidents of the BPS. During his tenure of the presidency the thorny issue of the Society name surfaced. This was one of the very few times I disagreed with him. He wanted change. I'm personally happy to say a ballot of all members was held with a large majority voting to keep the status quo. We did not fall out over it.

In July 2009 I was able to drive Clive over to stay with his friend, Arthur Chater, in Aberystwyth so he could join us on a weekend meeting centred on Machynlleth organised by Barry Thomas. Clive was up to his old tricks here! He strolled off into the icy waters of a mountain lake looking for *Isoetes*, admittedly wearing waders. Age was obviously having an effect – many years before I'd witnessed him venturing barefoot into a mountain lake in central France on the same quest!

Over the years Clive published very widely on ferns and lycophytes. It would be inappropriate for me to attempt a full bibliography, but notable publications include: *The phylogeny and classification of the ferns*, with Jim Crabbe and Barry Thomas. 1973.

*Atlas of ferns of the British Isles*, with H. Arnold, Lynne Farrell and Franklyn Perring. 1978.

*The genus Selaginella in tropical South America*, with A.H.G. Alston and Josephine Rankin. 1981.

*Cytotaxonomic studies of the ferns of Trinidad*, with Trevor Walker. 1985.

*A world of ferns*, with Josephine Camus and Barry Thomas. 1991.

*The illustrated field guide to ferns and allied plants of the British Isles*, with Josephine Camus. 1991. (Reprinted and expanded in German in 1998.)

Very, very sadly Clive suffered a stroke late in 2009, leaving him semi-paralysed down the left hand side of his body, with his speech seriously impaired. Initially he was cared for in a hospital near Brecon, South Wales. At this time during a joint visit with Patrick Acock, Patrick and I started discussing equisetums. Clive was awake but not obviously interested in our conversation. I asked Patrick what the base chromosome number was for the genus. Patrick dithered, and before he could give an answer Clive shot out "108"! He was, of course, correct. Appearances are misleading. Despite the awful damage caused by the stroke Clive was very much on the ball.

Before long Valerie had the Staunton-on-Arrow cottage adapted to accommodate an invalid and Clive was back home, albeit with a live-in carer. I cannot overstate my admiration for Valerie during this period. She paid attention to Clive's every need with kindness and patience. Like everyone else I was devastated when I learned that she had passed away in her sleep. Life can be cruel. Clive's stay in Herefordshire therefore came to an abrupt end. He was moved north, initially to a care home near Oswestry and finally just north of Wrexham where he is quite close to his son Stuart. His daughter, Nerida, lives and works in Australia but frequently comes over to visit. There will be quite a gathering of family and friends at Stuart's home on the 14<sup>th</sup> July to celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday (on 3<sup>rd</sup> July) of one of the world's great pteridologists.

Martin Rickard