

Donald Cameron Carmichael

A few words delivered at the Meconopsis Group meeting

by George Watt

As many of you will know, Cameron died on the 7th October after a long illness.

Cameron was known to most of us here as a horticulturalist and plantsman. He was born on the 27th of December, 1939, first staged a vase of carnations at the age of 9 and by his mid teens was a member of 5 gardening societies.

His education was in schools in the Port Glasgow and Greenock areas. It was interrupted a couple of times by pneumonia and TB but at the end of it all, his headmaster suggested a career in banking. Those of you who knew Cameron well will understand that he felt disinclined to spend his life counting other people's money and by this time had met Alex Mair, a Glasgow worthy of the time, much involved in gardening matters, who suggested to Cameron, a career in horticulture.

Cameron did his first practical training at what is now the Erskine Hospital. At that time the garden there covered a wide range, including peaches and nectarines to exhibition onions and sweet peas and was run by a very competent chap, one John Watt, who provided further inspiration. At that time the West of Scotland Agricultural College at Auchincruive probably provided the best horticultural training in Scotland and it was to there that Cameron went next, in due course to earn the well respected Scottish Diploma in Horticulture.

His first job was as a Technical Assistant with Edinburgh Parks Department during which time his remit ranged from playing fields to the maintenance of the floral clock and to garden design. The next move was to Ipswich as Playing Field Officer. According to Cameron, "They had every type of soil under the sun down there!" He was also lecturing at local colleges and at sport turf conferences.

After Ipswich he returned north to become the Depute Director of Parks for Kirkcaldy. Here he was involved in a wide range of projects from raising delphiniums - a reason why he first joined the NCCPG - to the production of rhubarb from cuttings under mist. At this time he also had a part share in a private nursery.

I remember sitting by his hospital bed as he said with a satisfied smile that that was the most exciting part of his career - "There was plenty of money around!"

Cameron's final professional position was that of the Depute Director of Leisure and Recreation with Hamilton Parks Department where he turned round what had been a highly inefficient setup. He retired in 1990 due to health issues.

In 1988 Cameron designed and was heavily involved in the creation of Glasgow and West's prize-winning garden at the Glasgow Garden Festival. He recruited a good team and acquired plants from a variety of sources and friends, Peter Cox included. He also had his hand in the creation of a Butterfly House and several other projects.

At around this time and for about 5 years, Cameron was part of a Saturday Radio Scotland programme answering listeners' queries. When asked by the host, Magnus Magnusson, as to what his favourite subject would be Cameron replied, "Answering those questions which the rest of you can't!"

But he had indeed a wide range of knowledge beyond the sphere of plants - from Koi carp to Beethoven, from photography to antiques, from auctions to DIY, the latter which he did on a grand scale, considerably expanding his home in Carmunnock .

Over 30 years ago Cameron did not choose the property for the usual domestic reasons but because it was a south facing site of some acreage in which he could develop his garden. Those of you who have been there, or seen it on television, know what a superb garden it became with an incredible species richness and quality. His planting of *Trillium kurabayashii* almost rivals that of RBGE!

Cameron was also very generous with his plants. Sue and I have a fairly large garden, most of the plants carrying a source code. We have a lot of ARDF from that roguish dealer by Inverness and CHRI for Ian Christie but we also have a considerable number labelled CC.

Cameron was about to have a heart valve replaced and in case he didn't make it, he gave some of his most precious plants to suitable friends. We were most pleased when he survived, only to come and ask for some of his lilies back!

His first love was Rhododendrons and he was a member of that society for many years. He was a long standing member of his local gardening club; a member of the SRGC, many of whose members he held in considerable respect; a strong supporter of his local branch of Plant Heritage; a member of the RHS Lily Group for which he had written several articles and he had been on many RHS committees, latterly being the Scottish coordinator for the collections of the NCCPG. He also had a great knowledge of all sorts of people involved in horticulture throughout Britain.

The genus *Meconopsis* ran a close second to *Rhododendron*. Mervyn Kessell was a friend and sometime colleague of Cameron and so when the Meconopsis Group was set up it was probably inevitable that that Cameron with his knowledge and cultivation skills would be a key player. I am also reliably informed by an insider, that he acted as a buffer within the committee, curbing excesses and generally keeping a steady ship. Perhaps not a role one would expect from a man who loved to stir things! I suspect that safe man at the helm is now John Mitchell!

Cameron was first and foremost a plantsman. He could tell you of Baron von Schlippenbach and of Père Armand David, of which lilies required lime and of the best conditions for *Tropaeolum polyphyllum*, of the famous nurseries of the Veitch family and that *Pinus ponderosa* was introduced in 1826.

He had a superb library but one of his happiest times was spent in Lord Strathcona's library on Colonsay helping him identify rhododendrons - Cameron's first love. Another of his happiest reminiscences was of walking around his own garden, in intimate conversation with that other plantsman, Roy Lancaster.

Cameron was never politically correct and loved being deliberately controversial while at the same time having a great sense of humour. He was generous to friends, to a wide range of gardening societies and was held in great affection by all those closest to him.

Many of us here today, will feel the loss of not being able to lift the 'phone and delve into that huge wealth of knowledge.