

DALTON ROWELL GLENDINNING (1931–2017)

Dalton Glendinning was a botanist specialising in plant breeding, latterly at Pentlandfield, outside Edinburgh, where he was at the forefront of developing the Pentland series of potato cultivars.

Born in Newcastle upon Tyne on 21st January 1931, and spending his early years in Durham, Dalton studied botany at Durham University. His postgraduate studies on *Polygala* (milkworts) involved both Durham University and the University of Neuchâtel, in Switzerland. Dalton joined the BSBI in 1953 and was *Polygala* referee for many years. His thesis on *Polygala* was never submitted as he was called for national service in 1956. To satisfy his service requirements he took a post as a plant breeder at the Cocoa Research Unit, in Ghana, West Africa, breeding new varieties of cocoa. He was very excited by this opportunity and breeding crops became his life's work. His wife and family of four spent their early years in Ghana, staying on after Dalton's national service was completed.

There is a letter I understand to be in the Archives at the John Hutton Institute which makes very interesting reading about his research during this period. I quote a short section, almost word for word:

'It is believed that, during the last ice age, rain forest was restricted to the valleys of the Andes; what is now rain forest stretching from mountains to coast was then dry savannah land. But in the down-stream spread of the forest, self-incompatible cocoa would be at a disadvantage; to set seed it requires that cross-compatible cocoa is growing close by, which would rarely be the case. Only self-compatible cocoa reached the shore. The Portuguese took this cocoa to islands in the Gulf of Guinea, whence it got into West Africa and became a major export crop. But a disease of cocoa known as witches-broom was causing trouble in Trinidad and a man called Pound was sent up the Amazon to look for resistant stocks; he got some from 3 different localities. They were self-incompatible. Then during the war, such cocoa was introduced to the Gold

Coast (Ghana) by a man called Posmette, with the help of the American air force flying between Trinidad and the Gold Coast. This cocoa greatly out-performed the cocoa already in the Gold Coast, e.g. cropping at 3 yrs instead of 6, and giving higher yields. It was this sort of cocoa and crosses between it and pre-existing stocks that I (Dalton) was working with.'

Dalton's first post in Britain was with the Welsh Plant Breeding Institute, near Aberystwyth, where he worked on various varieties of clover.

In 1967, Dalton moved to Edinburgh. Here he found his calling, breeding potatoes at the Scottish Plant Breeding Station at Pentlandfield, where he was in charge of the collection. If you have enjoyed eating Pentland Javelin or Pentland Crown potatoes, you have Dalton to thank. Dalton worked at Pentlandfield for 20 years, rising to the level of Principal Scientific Officer, and leaving his legacy in the kitchens and gardens of potato lovers everywhere.

In 1999, Dalton and his wife, Anne, moved to Comrie where I met him for the first time. I was happy to take Dalton to the Perthshire Society for Natural Sciences Botanical Section meetings and to BSBI Scottish Annual Meetings while he was able. He was great company. Because of the spell the family spent in the tropics, Dalton's house was a very colourful one, full of parakeets, cockatiels and parrots. Anne was an artist, who latterly specialised in stained glass, and her bright artworks decorated their rooms.

Dalton died on 9th August 2017. He was a very keen botanist and an unassuming gentleman, whose dedication to plant breeding leaves a lasting legacy.

I am indebted to Dalton's family for providing me with information about his botanical career, and giving me access to the letter quoted above.

Dot Dahl