

LAWRENCE MERVYN SPALTON B.Pharm. F.B.I.M. (1920–2011)

Laurie Spalton died in April 2011, at the advanced age of 90. He came from a family of pharmacists, and in his turn carried on the tradition with spectacular success. Awarded an open national scholarship to Nottingham University, he graduated as Bachelor of Pharmacy. Later he studied management and marketing at Loughborough University. During his working life he held various executive positions both here and abroad, and achieved international recognition for his ability in organising developments in pharmacy. In 1966 he was awarded an Honorary Fellowship with distinction by the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain for his work in promoting advances in industrial pharmacy.

One of his achievements in the post-war period was to initiate research into finding a modern analgesic as an alternative to aspirin. His success in this field resulted in the discovery of Paracetamol.

Laurie had married his wife Juliette in 1940, and they had two sons, Peter and Michael. After retirement in 1979 he came to live in Devon, in a flat overlooking the sea at Budleigh Salterton. But Laurie was a man with inexhaustible energy, and he now turned his attention to natural history, soon joining the Devon Wildlife Trust, and helping in the newly created reserve at the nearby Otter Estuary. He was fascinated by the local wild flowers, and determined to get to know their names. To this end he attended various BSBI courses in the identification of difficult groups, particularly grasses.

It was about this time that I first met him, at a field meeting of the Trust, and I was immediately struck by this enthusiastic amateur, who was anxious to name every plant he saw. He soon joined the Botanical Section of the Devonshire Association, where a small group of us were active in bringing the knowledge of the county's flora up-to-date. This coincided with the intensive recording that was being done all over the country for the proposed *New Atlas of*

the British & Irish Flora, and Laurie and I decided to work together, covering South Devon, v.c.3. Very soon he was voted in as chairman of the Botanical Section, and not long afterwards was also asked to take on the BSBI recordership for v.c.3.

On one occasion we were looking at a grassy slope by a road in the Torquay area, and Laurie recorded *Bromus commutatus*; I pointed out that the grass couldn't be that species; in spite of the long pedicels it was clearly related to *B. hordeaceus*, because of the papery lemmas, and that I had seen this taxon before in Cornwall. Further, that I had sent a specimen at that time to Dr Hubbard, and he had been unable to put a name to it. It was probably an unnamed taxon.

This was a challenge to someone of Laurie's intellect, and he at once took on the task of finding out more about it. This involved examining the *Bromus* folders in 23 major herbaria – a total of 1789 specimens; and a prolonged visit to 10 km squares all over Britain, establishing that the grass was present in 60 vice-counties. In addition he made contact with specialists here and abroad, and grew many specimens in pots around the house. After consultations with taxonomists, he decided that the plant was definitely related to *B. hordeaceus*, and decided to publish it as subsp. *longipedicellatus*. This was in 2001.

These efforts transformed a talented amateur into a critical botanist – now in his eighties! But he was not content with this achievement, and soon ventured into a study of all the Bromo-grasses, including the recently described *B. pseudosecalinus*, one of the rarest and most difficult of all Bromes.

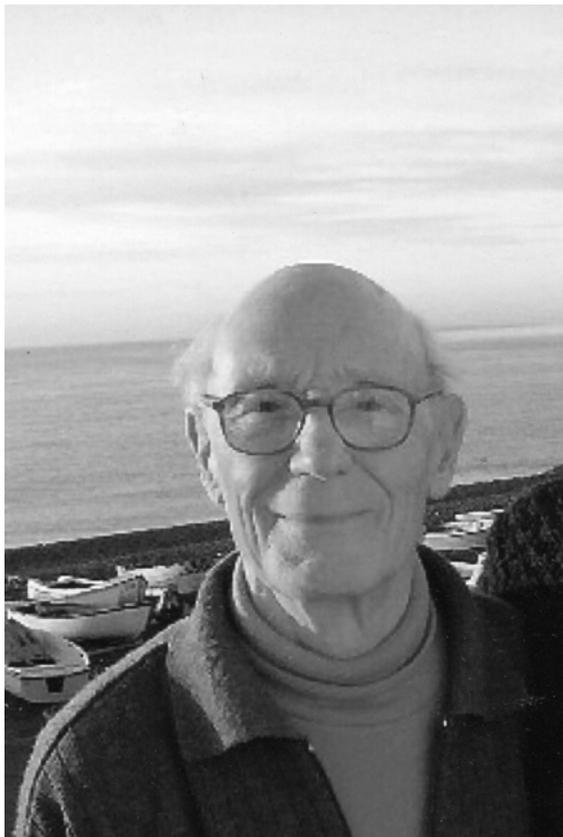
Laurie once said to me that he regretted coming to botany so late in life, a sentiment I echo, for had he lived, I am sure that more interesting work would have followed. He was a remarkable man, and a great loss to botany.

My thanks are due to Peter and Michael Spalton for details of their father's earlier life.

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LEN MARGETTS



Laurie Spalton c. 2005. Photo © Melanie Spalton