

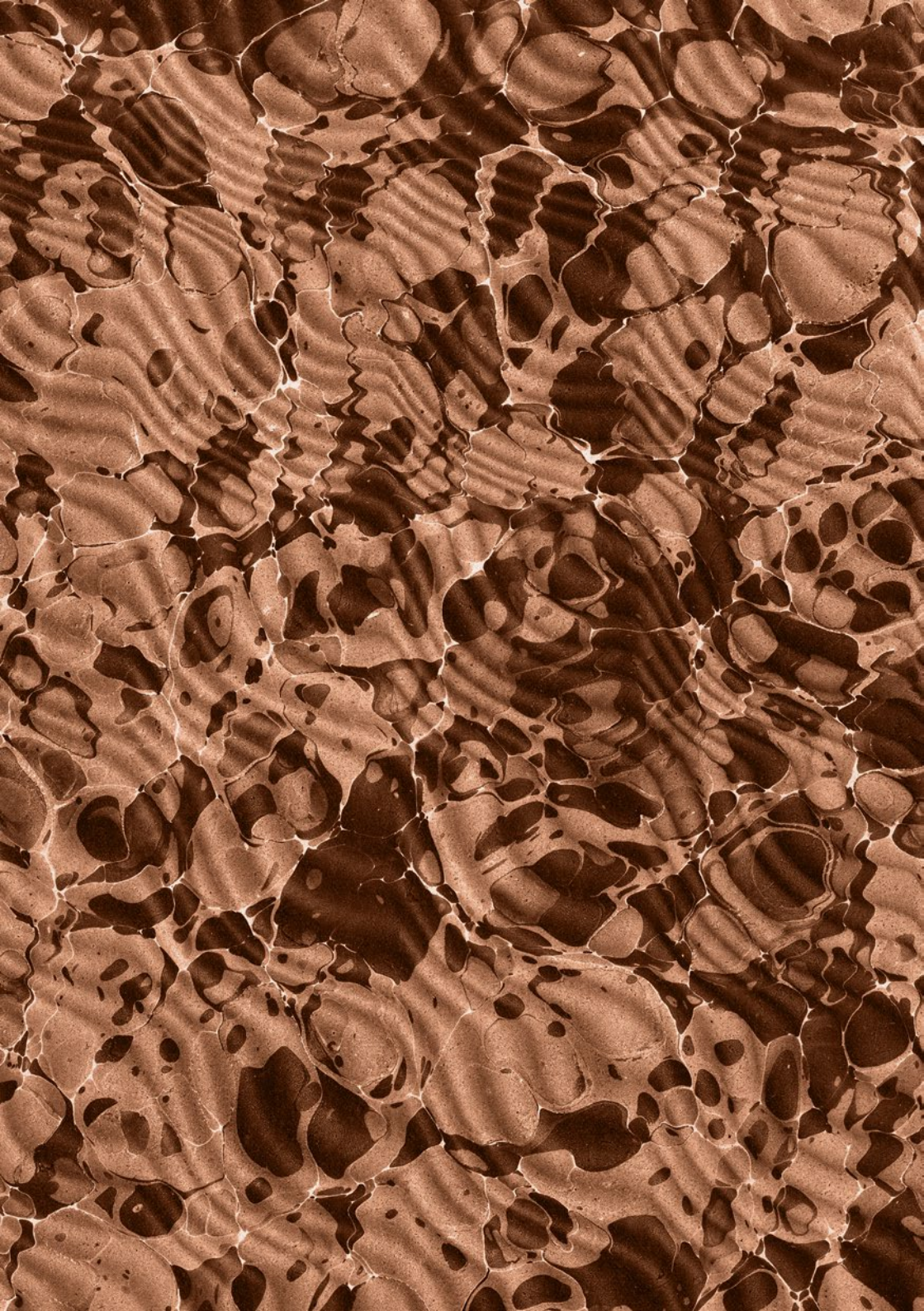
Obituary:

Bernard de Winter

(31 July 1924–8 May 2017)



Compiled by O.A. Leistner



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Bernard de Winter

(31 July 1924–8 May 2017)

Justum et tenacem propositi virum

(A man upright and tenacious of purpose)

A life, almost Old Testament-long, rich and multifaceted, touching several generations of students and lovers of plants, and of men, women and children in need of help; a man as seen through the eyes of his colleagues, acquaintances, family members and friends.

'For a taxonomist and a plant collector it is relatively easy to leave at least some footprints on the sands of time. It becomes a matter of the impact, depth, width and density of those spoors.' Thus begins the commemorative album presented to Bernard on the occasion of his retirement on 31 July 1989. That document, written and compiled by Denise Fourie and Michael Wells, with inputs by Donald Killick and Otto Leistner, forms the historical backbone to this epic.

Contemplations on immortality also led to the choice of the following words of Horace, in his *Odes*, on the memorial plaque of Robert Allen Dyer, a predecessor of Bernard, in the Pretoria National Botanical Garden: *non omnis moriar* – I shall not wholly die.

'Describe Bernard in a word or two', was the suggestion to his former colleagues who contributed to this brief glimpse of his life. 'A gentleman, a true gentleman', was the overwhelming response. If you divided that word in two, you would still be on the mark: he was as even-tempered a man as you are ever likely to meet; a man of high integrity, selfless in his actions, always courteous, compassionate and understanding, acting quietly but firmly.

Bernard was born on the 31st of July 1924 in Pretoria. His parents had emigrated from the Netherlands, and traces of his Dutch heritage have remained part of his mettle and his grain. His father was one of the numerous teachers recruited overseas to bolster education in the Transvaal, which had suffered from the wars in the early part of the century. *Een schoolmeester in merg en been* – such was his father: a short, vivacious, friendly man with sparkling eyes, always ready for a joke, even a practical one, followed by a good laugh. When, at some stage in his eighties he asked Bernard for a job, he was given the task at the then National Botanical Institute to compile a card index to diatoms.

His mother: *een huisvrouw*, as you would see them in Dutch towns meticulously scrubbing the sidewalk in front of their home – strict, just and totally motivated. Also of solid Dutch stock, she lived well into her nineties.

Bernard grew up in Pretoria and as a boy enjoyed the freedom of the veld that was still to be found in the immediate surroundings of the town. Where can you find *Lithops lesliei* in Pretoria today except in a garden, hopefully legally acquired? In those days that was no great feat for him. Family friendships with other Dutch immigrants such as the Van Schaiks and the De Bruyns were to have an important bearing on his life.

He attended the Afrikaanse Hoër Seunskool in the capital where one of his teachers was O.P.M. Prozesky who was also to become well known for his advancement of the knowledge and the love of nature. After matriculating in 1941 he took up studies at the University of Pretoria with the aim of becoming a teacher. Major subjects of the B.Sc. degree awarded to him in 1945 were Botany and Zoology. A year later he attained his Senior Teacher's Diploma (HOD) at the Teachers' Training College. He continued his studies at the same university and received his M.Sc. for a thesis entitled, 'A study of certain South African Gramineae: *Mosdenia*, *Potamophila* and *Pseudobromus*'. The interest in grasses was to remain with him, and the family Poaceae was to become his main field of research. His grass studies under Prof. H.G.W.J. Schweickerd, culminated in the D.Sc. thesis on the Stipeae and Aristideae, which was for many years, the bible for students of the genera *Stipagrostis*

Aristida and *Sartidia*, his newly created genus. It was completed in 1962 and later published under the title 'The South African Stipeae and Aristideae (Gramineae) (An Anatomical, Cytological and Taxonomic Study)' in *Bothalia* 8,3: i, ii, 202–404 (1965).

After a short period of teaching at his old school, he joined the Botanical Research Institute, then known as the Division of Botany and Plant Pathology, in April 1947. Robert Allen Dyer (Figure 1), chief of the division at the time, placed him in charge of the grass collection. The proud starting salary was £325 per year, somewhat less than £1 per day. Apart from attention given to the research and curation of the grasses, he undertook numerous collecting trips in the Transvaal.

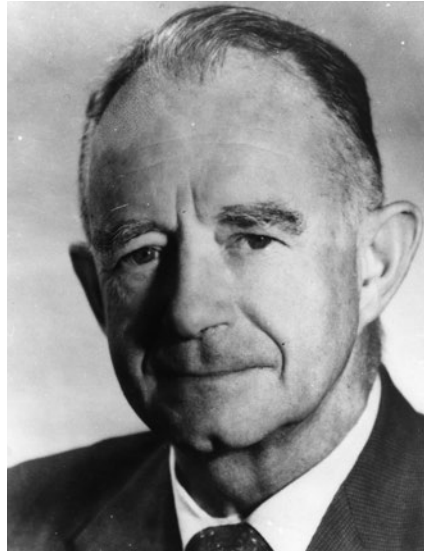


Figure 1. Robert Allen Dyer, chief, later director, of the Botanical Research Institute, 1944–1963.

In 1948 he submitted a paper on *Pseudobromus*, one of the grass genera that he had worked on for his M.Sc., to the *Journal of South African Botany*. In reply, the editor informed him that he could publish the article only if either the author or his employer was prepared to pay a publication subsidy. Money was obviously scarce even then. This also becomes evident when one finds that the duplicates of letters of the day were typed on the back of older duplicates.

In a letter dated 14 April 1950, Dr Dyer announced to the Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, that a Mr B. de Winter had been selected as the next liaison officer. He wrote as follows: 'Mr de Winter, a product of the Pretoria University is one of the most promising young botanists in the Union today and is specializing on the grass flora of the Union. Mr C.E. Hubbard, a recognized authority on grasses, who has already remarked favourably on the promise of Mr de Winter, has stated that he is ready to assist him in any way possible.'

On 27 October 1950 Bernard set sail for England on the good ship *Athlone Castle* and arrived in Southampton on 10 November. The cost of the journey, less government rebate, amounted to the stately sum of £68.17. At Kew Bernard worked very fruitfully on grasses under C.E. Hubbard, probably the leading world authority on the group at the time.

The information and experience gathered, enabled Bernard later to rearrange and update the grass collection of the National Herbarium. To his chagrin it fell to Lucy Chippindall to present much of this information to the world in her classical *A guide to the identification of grasses in South Africa* published in 1955. Bernard's only obvious contribution to this work was his treatment of *Eragrostis*, the biggest grass genus in the southern African flora. His account of this difficult group was well received and the preparation of his treatment was perhaps the beginning of his love affair with this genus that lasted all his life. During the years at Kew he also worked on dicot groups, especially in families such as Ebenaceae and Sapindaceae. Much time was also spent on researching type material and literature of Convolvulaceae and Cucurbitaceae, which were later written up by Prof. A.D.J. Meeuse who was working at the time under contract at the National Herbarium. During holidays Bernard toured Britain, mainly per motorcycle, often in the company of Peter Taylor, one of his colleagues at Kew. This brings to mind the occasion on which a set of tramlines and oncoming traffic schemed against him and grounded him rather vehemently, and the good Samaritan (of female gender) who took him home to a cup of tea, which remained forever undrunk because of the premature homecoming of the husband. He also took the opportunity to visit other herbaria and botanical institutions in Britain and on the Continent and paid visits to relatives in the Netherlands.

On 11 March 1954 he left England on his return journey to Pretoria via Cape Town. About this time the Division was beginning to give thought to a comprehensive work on the flora of southern Africa and it was clear that the plants of South West Africa (Namibia) were too poorly known. The task of increasing the botanical collections and knowledge of that region was entrusted to Bernard. He set out on his first major collecting tour to that country about a year after his return from England. He visited areas from the Etosha Pan in the north to Walvis Bay

in the west, Gobabis in the east and the Karas Mountains in the south. Between November 1955 and March 1956 he again visited South West Africa, collecting in the Okavango region and in Ovamboland. During a part of this tour he was accompanied by H.-J. Wiss, an amateur botanist from Windhoek, and later by Wessel Marais who had joined the Division in 1952.

From March to May 1957 he undertook a third extended collecting tour to the territory concentrating mainly on the Kaokoveld, the northwest corner of South West Africa (Figures 2–7). He was accompanied by Otto Leistner who had been employed by the Division in February 1956. Two trusty Herero assistants contributed greatly to the success of the tour: Abner and Andreas (Figure 8). The former has gone down in botanical history for being the first collector indigenous to the region who, on his own initiative, collected herbarium



Figure 2. Etendeka (Karoo) Mountains near Orupembe; the vegetation dominated by *Stipagrostis* species with their feathery white awns, and *Commiphora* shrubs, especially *C. krauseliana* with finely feathery yellowish leaves.



Figure 3. Bernard on a hill at Kamanjab. *Commiphora crenatoserrata* in the foreground.





Figure 4. Bernard with our two *bakkies* in front of the gate through the *Rooi Lyn*, the border of the Kaokoveld.



Figure 5. Bernard with our International ploughing through mud.



Figure 6. Bernard next to the Ford, our tent, a full plant press and two cardboard boxes used to store dry specimens and live snakes.



Figure 7. Four-star dining in the Kaokoveld, De Winter and Leistner.



Figure 8. Sanitatas waterhole with Abner, Bernard and Andreas.



specimens after the tour, and had them sent to the Windhoek Herbarium by Ben van Zyl, then native commissioner of the region. Andreas, who would be addressed exclusively in German, provided his rustic culinary expertise and a knowledge of the veld, which were later also to profit Prof. Hermann Merxmüller on his tours of exploration. Andreas, with his butler-like manner, lent a sense of occasion to the most mundane of meals. Among the more than 800 numbers collected on the tour were more than 30 new species and a new grass genus, later named *Kaokochloa* De Winter. Two of the new species were named in his honour: *Kirkia dewinteri* Merxm. & Heine and *Aloe dewinteri* Giess.

The Kaokoveld was then, much more than now, a wild, largely uninhabited country, rich in natural beauty and in wildlife, which provided not only sustenance, but also the occasional scare, such as finding lion spoor in the morning between the camp beds standing less than 2 m apart, or during the night at the waterhole at Kaoko Otavi when the elephants were on the point of marching through the tent – but for a merciful Providence – when his co-collector had the temerity to not even awaken at the sound of what could so easily have been the last trumpet.

From April 1958 he was seconded to the staff of the Director of Agriculture of South West Africa for a year to help establish a herbarium and a botanical information centre. Shortly before leaving for Windhoek and while still negotiating service conditions, he received a reassuring telegram from Windhoek, which is in some way reminiscent of J.F. Kennedy's famous utterance: *Ich bin ein Berliner*. The telegram read: *U sal beskou word as 'n Suidwester*. During that year he had the opportunity to collect widely in the territory, sometimes in the company of Willy Giess who was on the permanent staff of the S.W.A. Herbarium in Windhoek. At this time he also met Prof. Hermann Merxmüller of the Botanische Staatssammlung, Munich, who was embarking on the enormous project of writing his *Prodromus einer Flora von Südwestafrika*, which he and his team were to complete in the course of only six years. Plants collected by Bernard constituted a most important contribution to this handbook, which is still the most comprehensive reference work on the flora of the region. The meeting with Merxmüller led to a close friendship, which ended only in 1988 with Merxmüller's death.

On 25 April 1959 he married Mayda, born Henderson on 3 February 1928. Her grandfather was the Mayor of (the then) Mafeking during the Anglo-Boer War. Her father was in the rag trade, owner of a large department store in Kimberley selling a range of textiles and haberdashery, an important item in the days when needlework was much more than a hobby. Her mother was a born Hulett, the well-known KwaZulu-Natal family. Mayda could be Bernard's harshest critic regarding petty day-to-day matters, but she was his greatest supporter when it came to the completion of his D.Sc.-thesis, and she co-authored several of his later publications.

Mayda was endowed with a razor-sharp wit and a phenomenal memory so useful when your neighbour comes to you with the withered remains of a plant and asks: what is this? Or when your cellphone will not cooperate. On the home front she led the way into the computer age.

She worked at the Botanical Research Institute for many years where she was responsible for the identification of plants of numerous plant families, including problem groups such as the Asteraceae. Thanks to her pronounced ability to recognise and define characteristic features of plants, and her extraordinary memory, she was a very effective identifier and describer of plants. She excelled in the identification of live as well as herbarium specimens, but she was not a field person and did not collect many specimens. But, as true love knows no bounds, she accompanied Bernard on a tour to the wildest wilds of Botswana with tents as the most luxurious accommodation. Comment on return: never again!

She described 18 species new to science, three in Asclepiadaceae, the rest in Asteraceae, especially in *Helichrysum*. Mayda was the senior author of *Common weeds in South Africa* (1966), and of *Declared weeds and alien invader plants in South Africa* (1987), a contributor to *Sixty-six Transvaal trees* (1966) and co-author of *Threatened plants of southern Africa* (1980). Mayda died on 3 February 2015. For much of her life she was actively involved in humanitarian work, either in the framework of Rotarian projects or on behalf of her church, St Wilfred's Anglican Church, Pretoria.

In 1959 Bernard became Officer in Charge of the Botanical Survey Section as successor to Dr Robert Story who had emigrated to Australia.

During 1960 Bernard undertook two major tours, one to southwestern Botswana with Prof. Hiram Wild, then of Salisbury (now Harare, Zimbabwe), and one to Britain and the Continent. His long association with *Excerpta Botanica*, the excerpt journal published by the Berlin Herbarium, began at this time when he was asked to be correspondent to cover the southern African literature. In 1979 he was elected to the editorial board, a group of eminent botanists, a position he held till his retirement.

His bent for organisation and administration became evident early on, as had his excellent knowledge of the official languages, and in 1963 the department chose him as a member of the Taaltoetskomitee, which had the mandate to promote the knowledge of the official languages in the public sector. At the beginning of the year the call of South West Africa became too strong and he went back to that beloved country for a collecting tour of two months. At the end of the tour, which had centred largely on the Namib, his collecting numbers had reached 8 228. While revelling in the wilds, his alma mater awarded him his D.Sc., *cum laude in absentia*. The year 1963 also marked the historical appearance of the first volume of the *Flora of southern Africa*, volume 26, to which he contributed the Ebenaceae.

Bernard and Mayda were intimately involved in the designing and construction of their home, which was completed in 1962. It was situated on a large sloping property in a well-designed, neatly kept garden. Some of the trees in it were tall and sturdy enough to be chosen by hadeda ibises as nesting sites. One of these nests was sited exactly above the approach road to the house. From the patio on the sun-side of the house, wide lawns swept down to the pool and beyond to the stone wall, capped by electric fencing, along Rodericks Road. The garden was large, varied and productive enough to provide material for the plant stalls that Bernard and Mayda maintained at charity markets.

During 1964 he attended the International Botanical Congress in Edinburgh and undertook a study tour of British and Continental herbaria. His D.Sc. thesis was published in *Bothalia* 8: 201–404 in

1965. Numerous favourable comments were received on this *magnum opus*, including the following remarks by Richard A. Howard, Director of the Arnold Arboretum:

'I extend my congratulations to you on a very fine paper. This will certainly be added to a list of about half a dozen papers I require my advanced students in plant taxonomy to examine in detail.'

*H*is first semipopular publication on trees was a chapter on the species growing in the National Zoological Garden in Pretoria. This was published for the first time in 1956 in the guide booklet to that establishment. Research work on Ebenaceae and other woody families had also brought him in close contact with trees. It was, however, in 1966 that he became widely known as a tree expert. During that year he produced *Sixty-six Transvaal trees* together with Mayda and Donald Killick. The work was issued on the occasion of the Republic Festival 1966, with the support of the Transvaal Administration. Published in both English and Afrikaans, richly illustrated with mostly black and white photos and distribution maps and selling for R3.00 (hard cover), the publication proved to be most popular. The National List of Trees, compiled by Bernard, was published in this work for the first time. It comprised scientific names and synonyms of some 736 indigenous tree species arranged and numbered in the sequence of the Engler system as used in the National Herbarium. An alphabetical list of all names was also provided. The work sold out rapidly and led to the publication of a small pocket book, *Die Nasionale Boomlys/The National List of Trees*, co-authored by J. Vahrmeijer and published by Van Schaik, Pretoria. This booklet, which retailed for 75c, greatly stimulated public interest in trees and resulted in the large-scale numbering of trees in nature reserves and other conservation areas. A second edition appeared in 1978 and a third in 1987. In collaboration with Mayda and with Donald Killick, he also published a booklet entitled *Know your trees – a selection of South African trees*, illustrated in colour and published by the Reader's Digest Association in 1973, the year of Our Green Heritage.

After serving on the council of the organisation for many years, he became president of Section B of S₂A₃, the South African Association for

the Advancement of Science, in 1967, and he held the position of president during the congress that took place in Lourenço Marques (Maputo) from 1 to 6 July 1968. In the late sixties he became deeply involved in *SESA*, the *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa*, and wrote 33 contributions for this work, dealing mostly with woody plants.

Several former colleagues of Bernard have sketched memories of him and of their work and experiences at the institute. Their contributions are included in the text in historical sequence.

Marinus Werger, retired professor, University of Utrecht, remembers:

Elke en ik waren nog piepjong en nog maar kort getrouwd toen we op vrijdag 13 december 1968 voor het eerst op Jan Smuts aankwamen. We kenden niemand in Zuid-Afrika, zelfs niemand in een straal van 9 000 km om ons heen.

Maar iemand van de ecologie-afdeling van het Botanical Research Institute haalde ons af en bracht ons naar 'Hoofkantoor' aan de voet van 'die Uniegeboue' om kennis te maken met de staf, waarbij Bernard de Winter, toen onderdirecteur, ons meteen voor het diner diezelfde avond bij hem thuis uitnodigde. Bernard was toen zoals hij later altijd bleek te zijn: hartelijk, belangstellend en toegankelijk. Hij verstond, vanwege zijn achtergrond, heel goed Nederlands en hij kende vrij veel Nederlandse woorden. Die bouwde hij in het begin vaardig in zijn Zuid-Afrikaanse zinnen in, ook bij die eerste ontmoeting, om ons op ons gemak te stellen, zoveel mogelijk thuis te laten voelen.

Het was mijn eerste reguliere baan na mijn afstuderen aan de Universiteit van Utrecht (M.Sc.): een contract van 3 jaar met de mogelijkheid van verlenging tot 5 jaar. In die tijd hebben we Bernard en zijn elegante vrouw Mayda goed leren kennen, door zijn optreden als een van mijn bazen, en ook door de vele keren dat hij en Mayda ons uitnodigden om bij hen in hun mooie huis en fraaie tuin Kerst of een andere feestdag te komen vieren, ook al op 25 december 1968, onze eerste Afrikaanse Kerst.

We hebben vijf hele goede en interessante contractjaren aan het BRI doorgebracht. Al voor ons vertrek kwam er een volgende Utrechtse vegetatiekundige, Frank van der Meulen, met zijn vrouw Ida, naar het BRI, en ook zij hebben hun 5-jarig contract met genoeg voltooid.

Bernard en Mayda waren wijs, ruimhartig en van onbaatzuchtige vriendelijkheid, voor ons en voor vele anderen. We zijn hen veel dank verschuldigd en zullen hen met gevoelens van sterke vriendschap en genegenheid blijven herinneren.

Bernard was the main driving force behind the establishment of the plant anatomy laboratory at the BRI in Pretoria in 1969. Roger Ellis was appointed to lead the laboratory and he recalls that Bernard's doctoral thesis on the Aristideae had convinced him of the relevance of leaf anatomy in grass systematics and that he very firmly and logically insisted that the plant anatomy project should concentrate on grasses. In hindsight this turned out to have been a brilliant decision – the anatomy of grasses offered so many opportunities, which were not just limited to taxonomy and phylogeny, but also made meaningful contributions to grass physiology and photosynthesis, ecology, herbivore grazing and digestion, and archaeology.

Some significant findings of this project reveal how wide the scope of the project became. *Alloteropsis semialata*, after 43 years, still remains the only known plant species to include both C₃ and C₄ genotypes, and active research on the species still continues at the University of Sheffield. The discovery of tannin-like substances in many African grasses is the first report of tannins in the grass family and has serious implications for the understanding of herbivory. The interfire strategies of Cape Fynbos grasses indicate that grasses are very long-lived and can remain alive for up to 40 years. This ability is not restricted to surviving long interfire periods, but also protracted droughts and even being submerged for up to 30 years.

Roger points out that these examples bear testimony to Bernard's insight. And he adds that Bernard maintained an active interest in the

grass anatomy study throughout the 30 years of its existence. Bernard's leadership and influence is still evident in many modern studies that owe their existence to his vision.

*A*s Bernard and Mayda could not have children of their own they adopted Elinor in 1969 when she was about one year old. There she stood sturdily on her feet clutching the dress of her new mother. Elinor was an inquisitive little person seemingly half anticipating the answer to her many questions: 'cause Mom?' she would ask, rather than 'why Mom?'

Bernard was a dedicated, loving father and a great admirer of Theodor Seuss Geisel better known as Dr Seuss. Said the Cat in the Hat: 'Why do you sit there like that? I know it is wet, And the sun is not sunny, But we can have Lots of good fun that is funny!' 'Do pineapples grow on pine trees or on apple trees?' Elinor will surely remember many of Seuss' quips and cracks. Today she is a mother of two.

*M*ike Rutherford worked as an ecologist for the South West African Administration. He recalls his first meeting with Bernard in Windhoek in 1971:

In his quiet unassuming way he persuaded me to transfer from Windhoek to the BRI in Pretoria a year or two later.' Here, in Velcich House, one of the buildings in the Pretoria Botanical Garden, Mike was in charge of the ecological research unit. Phytosociological studies were the order of the day with the help of the Braun-Blanquet method, which had been promoted in South Africa by Marinus Werger from the Netherlands who was also active at the institute at the time, and who has also contributed to the current epic. Mike Panagos, one of the wizards in action in Velcich House, recalls that Bernard referred to their activities as the 'Dark Arts'.

The opening of the new building of the institute in the Pretoria National Botanical Garden in Brummeria took place on 2 July 1973, sixty years after the move into the old quarters at 590 Vermeulen Street, at the foot of Meintjies Kop, below the Union Buildings. During the ceremony, attended by over 500 guests from South Africa and overseas, it was announced that Bernard would take over the directorship from Dr L.E.W. Codd (Figure 9) towards the end of the year. He assumed that duty on 18 October (Figure 10). Shortly afterwards he wrote in a letter to Prof. J.P.M. Brenan, then Director of Kew: 'I will do my utmost to strengthen the already close bonds between Kew and ourselves, since we value them greatly.'

While Bernard was director of the institute the computerisation of the herbarium collection was begun and essentially completed. The Botanical Research Institute was one of the pioneers in developing an electronic herbarium specimen database. The system and the data it comprised, known by the acronym PRECIS, was considered in 1985 the largest of its kind in the world and it was the largest to be completed. The acronym was derived from PRE (the international acronym of the National Herbarium of the Botanical Research Institute) Computerised Information System. The system was developed



Figure 9. Leslie Edward Wostall Codd, director of the Botanical Research Institute, 1963–1973.



Figure 10. Bernard de Winter, director of Botanical Research Institute, 1973–1989.



Figure 11. 1980 staff meeting

in the course of some 15 years on a series of Borroughs computers by a team led by Jeff Morris. He recalls that development began in the early 1970s with the adoption of the Degree Square system based on latitude and longitude for recording distribution data. As no gazetteer of southern Africa was available to present names according to this system, Otto Leistner and Jeff Morris published 'Southern African Place Names' in *Annals of the Cape Provincial Museums* vol. 12 (1976), which comprises about 42 000 names.

The Degree Square system is still in use, even in these days of readily available GPS data, for plotting distribution areas rather than points of occurrence. An example is the *Tree Atlas of Namibia* (Curtis & Mannheimer 2005).

A major part of the PRECIS project was the encoding of the collection. This was done after hours by a team of some 30 volunteers. They worked four hours a night Mondays to Thursdays for nearly two years to capture data from nearly half a million herbarium specimens. The electronic database of PRE to date comprises 940 704 specimens; the total holdings of all SANBI herbaria are 1 283 272.

The system provided for the first time a complete inventory of all plant taxa in southern Africa with synonyms and literature references, checklists of particular localities and regions and listings of specimen data sorted in various ways for particular purposes.

Bernard was always supportive of the project and realised the benefits that PRECIS could bring to South African botany. In the days of mainframes (1970s–1980s), which occupied multi-level, purpose-built buildings, computer time was a new and unexpected item on the institute's annual budget. Yet Bernard was always able to motivate for sufficient funds to keep the project on track.

It may be mentioned that certain senior botanists queried the wisdom of spending large funds on computerisation rather than directly on research.

Bernard also encouraged the development of other computer applications within the BRI such as the computerisation of herbarium curatorial procedures, ecological and taxonomic classification, image analysis and typesetting. As a result the institute is in a position to provide computer-generated information and to give advice on various applications of computer technology in botanical research. In 1976 a separate section was created within the institute devoted specifically to data processing.

*B*otanical visitors to the institute, too many to count – as the lazy historian would put it – were invited to stay at the De Winter home. Here they were warmly welcomed, comfortably accommodated and treated to Mayda's culinary art, which could have been derived directly from Switzerland. These visits added greatly to the close relationship between the institute and sister organisations worldwide. (It

may be related here, in the strictest of confidence, that certain visitors from cooler climes, unaccustomed to the effect of the African sun on the human body, were encouraged by Mayda on their first visit to make free use of the readily available water, soap and towels.)

Their visitors' book is a Who's Who of the botanical world of the time starting with Derek Reid; Gerrit Davidse; Bertil Nordenstam; Jan Lundgren; Hans-Christian Friedrich; David, Sue, Paul & Antony Cutler: 'much better than home!'; Gilbert Bocquet; C.G.G.J. (Kees) van Steenis & M.J. van Steenis-Kruseman (1975): 'proving that one can make intimate friends even after the age of 70!'; Olive Hilliard: 'a splendid visit as usual'; Bill Burt: 'splendid hospitality – the best possible background for work at the BRI'; Del Wiens; Owen Lewis: 'a real home from home'; Ted Schelpe; Hermann Merxmüller (1977): 'your friend since twenty years'; Bob Drummond: 'a long and valued friendship'; Arthur Cronquist; Ray & Marion Specht; Willy & Brigitte Giess; Peter, Tamra & Francis Raven (1982): 'what a delightful time, looking forward to seeing you in St. Louis in 1985'; Stan Seagrief; Shirley & Gren Lucas; Owen Lewis: 'this is becoming such a delightful habit'; Tony Hall; Roger Polhill: 'happiest memories from an adopted itinerant botanist'; Yitzchak Gutterman; Gerrit Davidse: 'heartfelt thanks for making this my most enjoyable and productive overseas trip ever'; Hugh Taylor: 'I don't deserve this luxury'; Dietrich & Ute Müller-Doblies: 'in the last five years we visited you five times'; Frank White: 'the cuisine *chez de Winter* was memorable, and what magnificent birds you have in the garden'.

Meals in the De Winter home were a formal, 5-star event, orchestrated to perfection by Mayda, with Bernard pouring the wine and opening by saying grace: 'For what we are about to receive, o Lord, make us truly thankful'. As the years went by, the pauses between words tended to increase in length.

Prof. Peter Raven, then director of the Missouri Botanical Garden, recalls:

Our first visit to South Africa, convened to celebrate the completion of the buildings in Pretoria, took place in June, 1973. We stayed with the De Winters. A more gentle and hospitable couple could not have been imagined. They were kind in every way, true to their beliefs, and generous

to those with whom they came in contact. The political situation at the time was complex, but one never doubted where the De Winters stood, bolstered by their strong Christian beliefs, or in their faith that the system must change in due course, as indeed it did.

Bernard was a member of the Gereformeerde Kerk, and Mayda of the St Wilfred's Anglican Church, within three blocks of each other. Each went to their respective churches. Such was their respect for each other.

Their art collection was choice and precious. It included works of South West African/Namibian artists and depicted mainly nature: animals and landscapes. Particularly striking was a piece depicting a herd of wildebeest arising from a mirage. The collection was obviously well known, as one of the burglaries to their home had focused on art. The burglars had managed to manipulate the electric fencing to create a sufficient space between wall and wiring.

Dogs were part of the De Winter family. Any colour – as long as they were black; any breed – as long as they were Standard Poodles, the favourite breed also of Winston Churchill, the one with the bulldog spirit. They were allowed the freedom of the house, but under strict orders. Regular visitors to the doggy parlour, they were ever ready for Croft's of London.

Bernard played a decisive role in the formation of the South African Association of Botanists (SAAB). One of its founder members in 1973, he was its vice president until 1975 and was elected president in 1976. He was also chairman of the Advisory Committee for Botanical Research to the minister of agriculture, a body which came into being in 1975 at the instigation of SAAB with the aim to promote botanical research, particularly physiology, within the department to the benefit of the country as a whole. Bernard held the position of chairman of the body until its dissolution in 1989.

During a meeting in 1976 Bernard mentioned to Peter Raven that he needed someone to work on mosses for the *Flora of southern*

Africa (FSA). This turned out to be what the Germans call a *Sternstunde* (a great, decisive moment) in the history of southern African bryology. Peter mentioned the discussion to Bob Magill, who was working at the Herbarium of the Missouri Botanical Garden at the time. Bob wrote to Bernard expressing his interest in bryophytes and in flora work. Bernard offered him a position, and, as Bob put it himself, the rest is history.

Bob Magill totally transformed and modernised the moss herbarium of PRE. In 1979 he published *The bryophytes of southern Africa*, an annotated checklist together with Ted Schelpe; in 1981 Part 1, Fascicle 1 of Bryophyta for FSA; in 1987 Part 1 Fascicle 2; and in 1998, after his return to the USA, together with Jacques van Rooy, Part 1, Fascicle 3. All fascicles are provided with exquisite pencil drawings executed by Rita Weber and later by Gill Condy. He was also instrumental in the employment and promotion of Sarie Perold who became an internationally recognised authority on liverworts. During Bob's time at the institute the computerisation of the herbarium collection was in progress. Bob took great interest in the project and made valuable contributions. He also made good use of Bernard's 'Shop Smith', a miracle woodworking machine that Bernard could handle with great expertise, to build bed frames and a table.

Looking back on his five years with his family in South Africa, Bob mentioned that he had a great time, learned a lot and got to work on one of the most interesting floras; although he found – to the chagrin of the Kolonialers? – that Fynbos is not a good moss habitat.

During the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the institute in 1978 the then minister of agriculture, Hendrik Schoeman, an old schoolmate of Bernard, made the following remark:

'Dr de Winter was always a dedicated, hardworking scholar, and look how far he got in life – he attained directorship of this institute.' To which he added in jest: 'Now look at me – a loafer and a chancer at school – and what became of me? Just a minister.' But dedication and hard work were not the only striking characteristics of Dr de Winter. As Dr Dyer once wrote of him: 'He is genuinely keen on his

profession. One may even say that he has the outlook of the old school, which worked for the sake of the advancement of science more than for personal gain.'

Prof. Brian Huntley, former chief executive officer of SANBI, recalls:

As a visiting collaborator, working with the BRI team appointed to coordinate and facilitate the Savanna Ecosystem Project in the late 1970s, I was impressed by the warm congeniality of the whole BRI community. It was a close-knit family of passionate taxonomists and ecologists, led quietly by Bernard, carrying forward as he did the tradition of his illustrious predecessors – Pole Evans, Dyer and Codd. It was a privilege to work in the presence of such icons of South African botany, and Bernard made his colleagues from visiting institutions, even a junior worker such as myself, feel at home at a time which could be described as the Botanical Research Institute's 'finest hour'. It was an honour to work in his team.

One of the highlights of Bernard's career was his election as General Secretary of AETFAT (Association for the taxonomic study of the flora of Tropical Africa) which led to the highly successful first-ever congress of that association to be held on the African continent in January 1982 (Figure 12). Beverley Momberg was appointed in 1980 in a secretarial post to help prepare for the congress. She appreciated Bernard's style of running the institute like a big family with a relaxed atmosphere. In the long, drawn out discussions on the most suitable venue for the congress, Bernard displayed great diplomatic skills and genuine empathy. Politically, the capital of South Africa was very far from the obvious choice at the time.

As director of the institute he was very aware of the role the institute should play in serving the country and beyond that, the international world of botany. He was utterly dedicated to the institute and its functions and he seemed to hold the interests of the institute before his own ego. Some colleagues saw themselves as members of the 'BRI family', which provided them with a well-rounded botanical development.



Figure 12. AEFAT congress in Pretoria, 1982: Prof. J. Miège, Prof. P. Raven, Prof. J. Léonard, Prof. J. Brenan and Dr B. de Winter.

Some of his staff members saw distinct traits of a teacher in him and thought that his application of rules regarding office hours and the tea break tended to be too rigid, as you would expect from a school principal. The 10:00 tea break (strictly 15 minutes!) and the preceding tea bell had been an ancient tradition from the days when the Herbarium building stood next to Vredehuis, one-time residence of Genl. Hertzog, at the foot of the Union Buildings. The tradition was carried on through Bernard's reign and beyond. It may be mentioned here that Hermann Merxmüller of the Botanische Staatssammlung, Munich introduced a tea break in his institute after his first visit to PRE.

Bernard had a very clear view on how botanical specimens should be correctly collected: always carry a temporary plant press into the field and ensure that each specimen is pressed immediately. He was loath to accept that a plastic bag might under certain circumstances be a necessary collecting tool. Charlie Boucher took Bernard on a collecting foray up Jonas Kop near Villiersdorp over steep rugged terrain. Bernard soon spotted some high-altitude grasses new to him

and started putting them in his temporary press. And he discovered that around every rock clump there were more different species. He straightened his back, looked a bit further, gave a deep sigh of resignation and threw down the samples he had gathered saying that this was a hopeless task. His inquisitiveness got the better of him and he graciously accepted the proffered plastic bag to carry the intriguing gems he had found. During dinner that evening he commented wryly that he now accepted that plastic bags were a useful botanical tool 'under exceptional circumstances'. Later he sent Charlie a list of the grasses he had collected that day, including an unidentified, probably new species he was following up on.

Bernard was a facilitator and stimulated his staff to widen their knowledge and expertise. Brian Schrire remembers how Bernard challenged his views on the taxonomic, ecological and biogeographical implications of the groups he was working on; how it always felt like a discussion between equals at the research level; that Bernard was as receptive to being challenged back, which Brian, from his rather junior position, found tremendously stimulating.

Bernard spoke quietly and gently and led his staff with authority, tempered with empathy and understanding. In spite of differences of opinion he may have had with his colleagues, he never made them feel inferior, but rather treated them as equals with their own opinion.

Bernard's love affair with the grass genus *Eragrostis* was mentioned earlier. The same group also turned out to be the favourite of Lyn Fish (née Smook), the resident grass specialist at the National Herbarium, Pretoria. In her early years she was happy to follow Bernard's advice, but as her experience grew she began to realise that she was a lumpener and he a splitter. He had divided the *Eragrostis lehmanniana* material into 18 groups of which she would have recognised a lot fewer. Was this perhaps the same trait that Paul Herman detected when he said that Bernard tended to have too many solutions to a problem; or why he quoted him as saying: 'My wife said to me, Bernard, you always have 10 different solutions to a problem'; or why Inez Verdoorn once said to Otto: 'he is no taxonomist'?

Bernard described about 30 new species, most of them in Poaceae with 12 in *Eragrostis* and five in *Stipagrostis*. When he raised the status of *Stipagrostis*, which had been a subgenus of *Aristida*, to genus level he made numerous new combinations. In Ebenaceae, a family which he revised for the *Flora of southern Africa*, he described four new species. There is also a species of *Citrullus* (Cucurbitaceae) and a most unusual, highly specialised species growing in the cracks in large smooth granite boulders under desert conditions. This species was discovered by Bernard and Otto in the Kaokoveld in northwestern Namibia. It belongs in the Pedaliaceae and Bernard described it as *Rogeria petrophila*. Further studies revealed many unique features and it was therefore placed in a new genus as *Dewinteria petrophila* (Figure 13) by Braam van Wyk and Ernst van Jaarsveld. Bernard described six new genera, all in Poaceae, and eight species are named after him, three of them by his staff members, two by Willy Giess, a colleague from Windhoek, two from the Botanische Staatssammlung in Munich and one by a botanist from Geneva.

In his later years and into his retirement he worked together with Inez Verdoorn on the large genus *Hermannia* (Malvaceae, Byttnerioideae). His part of the work has not come to fruition. As Ashley Nicholas put it: 'After he retired he was leaning over specimens of *Hermannia* pondering their taxonomy'.

Bernard served on numerous committees and other bodies not mentioned above, such as the Joint Council of Scientific Societies, the Board for National Scientists, the Board of the National Zoological Gardens, the Research Committee for National Botanic Gardens, the National Working Group for Herbarium Curators and several Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) committees including the Committee for Endangered Species. During the International Botanical Congress in Berlin in 1987 he was elected to the General Committee on Botanical Nomenclature of the International Association for Plant Taxonomy for a period of five years.

With some 10 000 plant specimen numbers collected, 1.5 per day overall, Bernard counts among the prolific South African plant collectors. Most of his earlier collections are from what is now Gauteng,



Figure 13. *Dewinteria petrophila*

Mpumalanga, especially the Kruger National Park, and Limpopo. In 1955 he paid his first visit to South West Africa/Namibia, which marks the beginning of a long meaningful connection with this country. During the next few years he collected in the Okavango and Ovambo-land in the north, partly in company with local botanists, the Kaokoveld in the northwest together with Otto Leistner, and the Diamond Area in the south. Later collecting trips included southern Botswana, Zimbabwe, the Caprivi Strip in northern Namibia as well as KwaZulu-Natal and, together with Inez Verdoorn, especially with an eye for *Hermania*, the Cape.

He produced almost 100 scientific publications, gave speeches and talks too many to count, attended and chaired innumerable meetings, and wrote reports, motivations, letters, complaints, please and please-explains to sink an armada, or perhaps more aptly phrased: for Africa.

All these years he strove towards the development of an institution to serve the botanical needs of the country as a whole. With the amalgamation of the BRI and the National Botanic Gardens of South Africa, the stage was set for turning this vision into reality.

On 31 July 1989, his 65th birthday, Bernard lay down his seal of office and his judge's hammer.

Looking back on his directorship there were two issues which he could not quite come to terms with: (1) Could he have done anything different concerning the amalgamation of the institute with the National Botanic Gardens of South Africa? (2) Could he not have done something towards the eradication of pompom weed, *Campuloclinium macrocephalum*? Lesley Henderson reported that, as far as is known, Bernard was the first to record this species as a garden escape in the early 1960s. There was a small dense clump of this species growing conspicuously, but innocuously for many years next to a busy road at the foot of the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria without any indication of spreading. Then it was seen around Durban in the 1970s, next to the CSIR in Pretoria in the 1980s and in the 1990s it started invading large areas in Gauteng and Mpumalanga. By now it has invaded mainly

grassland vegetation in many parts of South Africa and is considered a major threat to natural grazing in the region.

In August 2008 the De Winters moved to the Equestria Village Retirement Centre in Pretoria East when Bernard had decided, at first rather against the wishes of Mayda, to scale down. Bernard's green, or rather splendiferously multicoloured, fingers were also in striking evidence in the large flower pots and the small garden that he maintained at their new home.

On 23 May 2009 a reunion of staff members who had served under Bernard was arranged. Invitations were sent to some 130 persons, and seeing that many of them were no mere singularities, that was about the number of guests at the dinner table. For old times' sake the gathering took the form of a staff meeting, complete with an agenda listing items such as staff matters with apologies and in memoriam; under matters arising the first item was starters, concluding with main course.

He and Mayda retained their keen interest in plants and in botany in general, but devoted much of the rest of their lives to their fellow citizens. This account therefore concludes with the history of their lives as humanitarians, as Rotarian and Rotary-Ann.

Bernard joined Round Table in Pretoria as soon as he was old enough and he was an active member of the organisation for his full term.

Soon he was recommended and became a member of Rotary International, an association that he and Mayda have actively served and supported both in deeds and financially for the rest of their lives. The Rotary motto:

'Is it the TRUTH?

Will it be FAIR to all concerned?

Will it build GOODWILL and better FRIENDSHIP?

Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?'

was truly also the life motto of Bernard and Mayda.

The De Winters and fellow Rotarians, including Clive Perkins, who was to remain a close friend of Bernard and Mayda to the end, created a school in Winterveldt, one of the townships north of Pretoria.

It consisted of three prefab class rooms with offices housed in two containers. In the beginning the region was part of Bophuthatswana and the teachers were provided by and paid for by that government. With the new government this arrangement was terminated and the De Winters financed the school for a few years. It is now privately run.

In 2003 the De Winters and Clive became involved via Rotary with the Winterveldt HIV/AIDS Project, which had been started in 1998 and is still run by four dedicated local men. Originally it was housed in a small poorly built mud office block. Through the efforts of Bernard, Mayda and Clive this centre now comprises a brick meeting room and store, a large covered area for functions, a kitchen, four toilets and a palisade security fence.

Recently Bernard launched 'Knitting for Winter' within the framework of the Winterveldt HIV/AIDS Project. Elderly ladies of the area knit for others in need of care with wool that was delivered to them by Bernard.

For a number of years Bernard took part in a Rotary project that takes 35 handicapped children from the Meerhof School for a week to the Kruger National Park.

The De Winters regularly accommodated overseas students visiting South Africa as part of the Rotary youth exchange program.

Bernard created and financed a loan scheme to promote technicon students.

He and Mayda started a monthly feeding scheme, originally on behalf of Mayda's church, St Wilfred's Anglican Church, for 23 destitute families. Even at the age of 90, after Mayda had passed away, he negotiated a special discount for the undertaking with the City of Tshwane.

Bernard was the president of the Rotary Club of Pretoria for two terms and he and Mayda have attended Rotary Conferences throughout the world.

At the age of 92 Bernard was still the most respected and loved member of the Rotary Club of Pretoria East.

For many years Bernard and Mayda ran the plant stall at markets held at St Wilfred's Anglican Church in Hillcrest. Much of the plant material for the sale had been supplied from their own garden, carefully bagged or potted and looked after for months until ready for sale.

During their humanitarian work in townships north of Pretoria their bakkie was once hijacked and once stolen. Fortunately they were not harmed and their vehicle was in both cases speedily tracked and returned undamaged. Bernard and Mayda described these experiences in an undramatic, matter-of-fact way as though they were everyday occurrences.

Gill Condy, for many years the resident botanical artist of the institute, remembers:

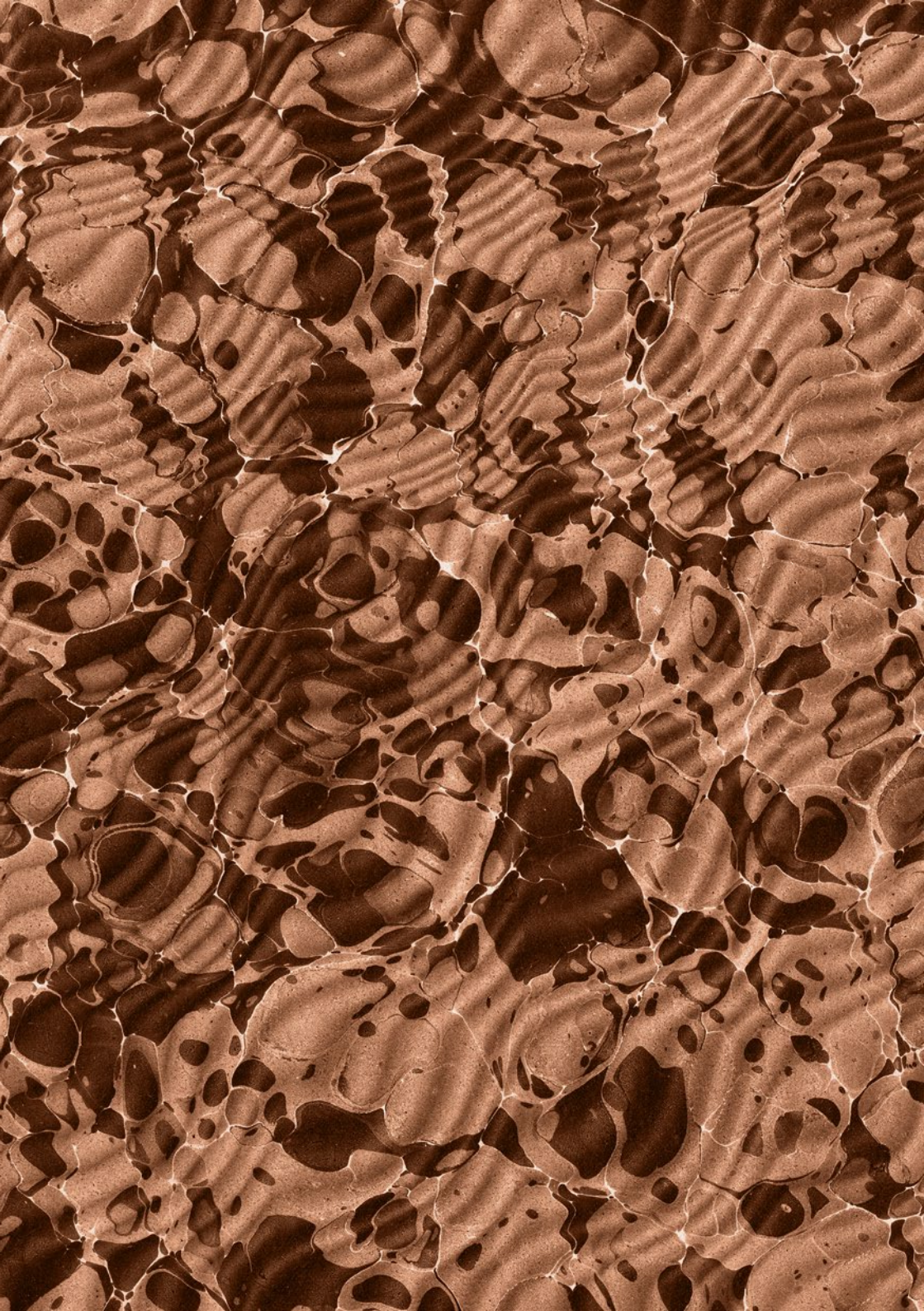
After Dr de Winter retired we remained in contact, mainly through his wife, Mayda, and our affiliation with the Anglican Church. We would often meet up at church functions, or outside Pick 'n Pay where Bernard would be collecting for the Rotary Club, another great passion they shared, reaching out to the less fortunate. When they moved to their retirement home in Equestria, the same complex as Donald and Berenice Killick, I would pop in for tea. They were always interested to hear about the herbarium activities and about their former colleagues. They shared wonderful memories from the early days of the BRI. While planning for the Mary Gunn Library centenary celebrations, the librarian, Anne-Lise Fourie, and I called in for tea to pick up stories about Miss Gunn. Never would we have imagined that Mayda would pass away two days later. Sadly, Bernard was to follow shortly after, but he had led a full and purposeful life.

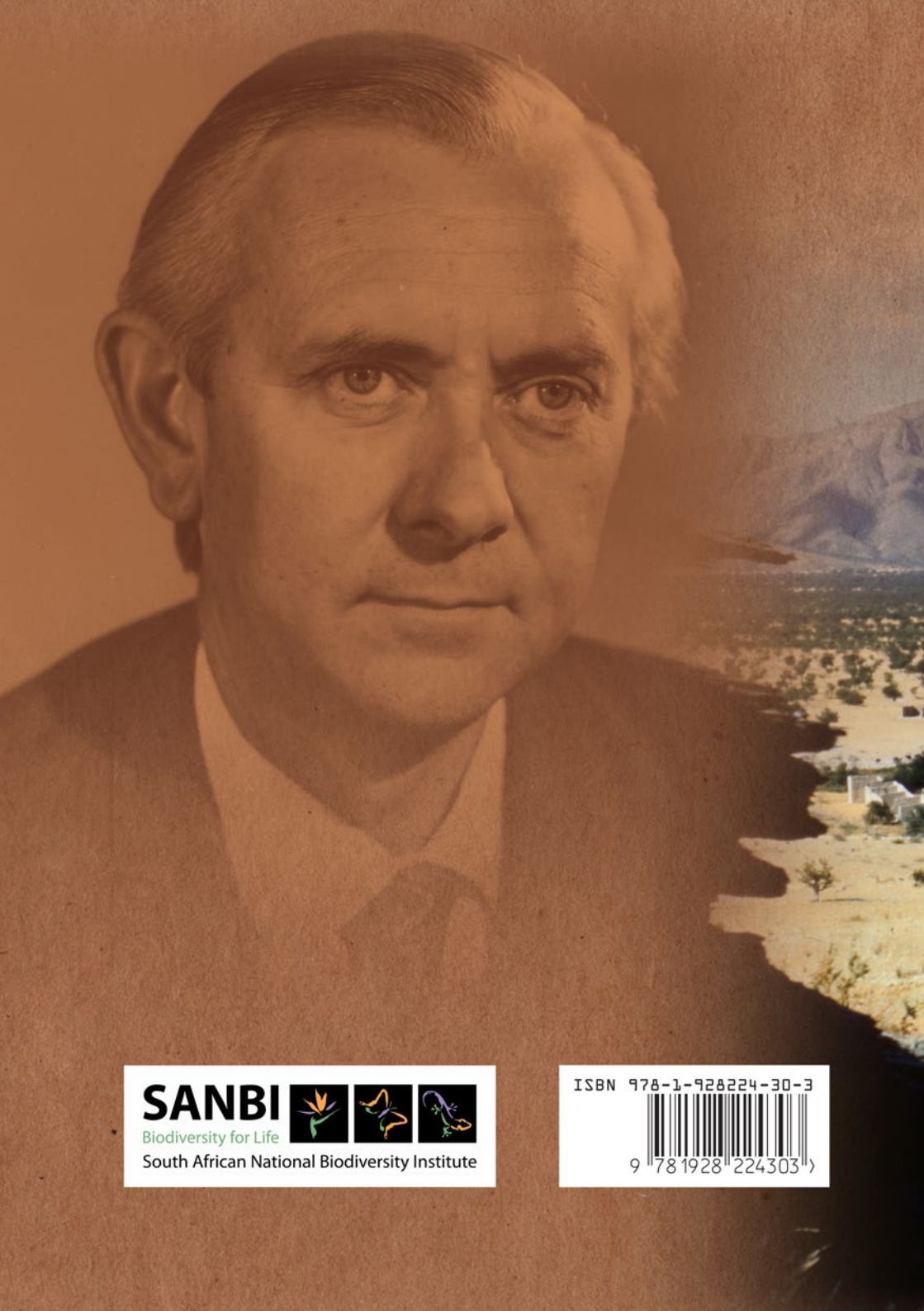
Looking back over their long friendship Clive Perkins relates:

When my late wife Brenda and I first met Bernard and Mayda they invited us to join them on a trip to the Kruger National Park. Brenda and I were in the back seat. They stopped. We looked around. No animals. No birds. Bernard

picked a grass and started discussing it with Mayda. Brenda and I looked at each other as if to say: are we spending a week with these people? Forty years later we were still best friends. They were never boring. I miss him terribly.

Ad perpetuam rei memoriam – for the
perpetual remembrance of the matter.





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