

Jim Archibald

Horticulture enthusiast who was known around the world for his plants expertise

■ **Jim Archibald, plantsman.**

Born: 1 September, 1941, in Edinburgh. Died: 9 August, 2010, in Wales, aged 68.

JIM Archibald gained a deserved worldwide reputation as a seedsman and plantsman who collected exotic and unusual plants from many remote parts of Europe.

He and his wife Jenny then nurtured the seeds back in their nursery near Cardigan in Wales and sold them to their many devoted customers, who they invited to "join us at the cutting edge of horticulture".

Everything horticultural for the Archibalds was an adventure. They specialised in supplying seeds from wild species for enthusiastic gardeners.

Archibald himself was a plantsman of much knowledge and distinction; he was revered as an expert and took pride in describing his business as "small and personal".

James Cartledge Archibald's father worked in an Edinburgh paper mill and grew up in Musselburgh, where the family grew

begonias. From an early age Archibald demonstrated a keen interest in gardening and in 1953 won a prize at the annual show of the Scottish Rock Garden Club for his alpine plants.

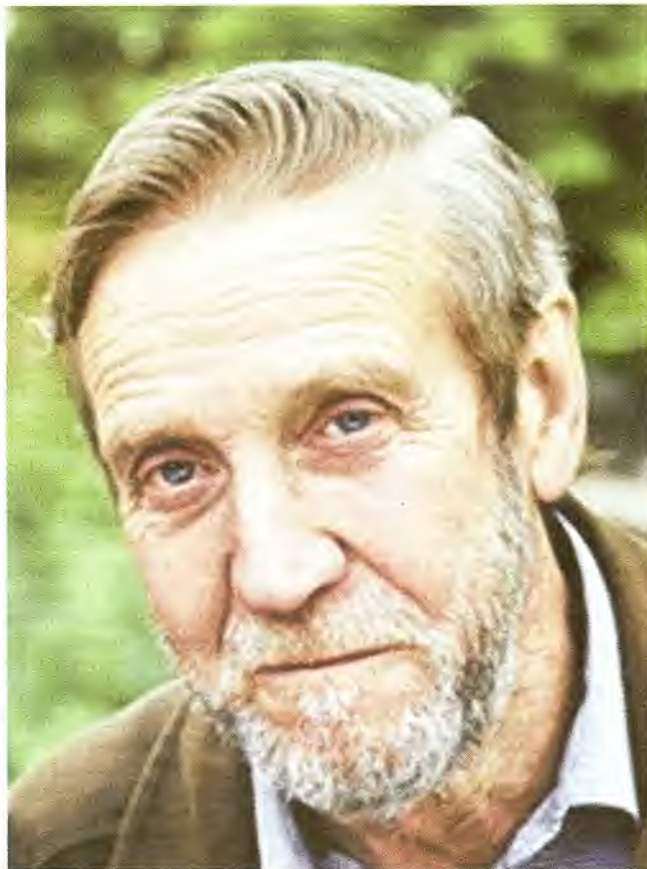
He attended the Royal High School where he painted and performed *Lady Macbeth* in the school play. He also edited the school magazine.

But during the school holidays Archibald went to work at Inshriach, the nursery run by Jack Drake at Aviemore. There he furthered his knowledge and love of perennial and alpine plants.

After reading English at Edinburgh University he received a commission from the American Iris Society to collect a plant from Iran.

He and his first wife, Janette Stephen, delivered the plant and he began giving lectures to horticultural societies. On one such occasion he spoke of plants in southern Spain and the Atlas mountains.

An enthusiastic member of the audience wrote afterwards: "He was erudite, fluent, funny, informative and had a very listenable voice, for he never lost his refined Edinburgh accent,



though he didn't pepper his vocabulary with Scotticisms, other than to use the adjective 'wee'."

In 1967 Archibald started up

The Plantsman near Sherborne in Dorset. Initially he specialised in cultivating hellebores and hostas, but in 1983 he left

the nursery to concentrate on seed collecting. It was at this time that he began touring Europe in search of lesser known and rare species. It was always a challenging journey, as he travelled – later with his second wife Jenny – in a camper van collecting alpine seeds.

The seeds had to be clearly documented and carefully preserved during the journey, and space in the vehicle became limited.

However, Archibald was resigned about the loss of home comforts.

"These days the road system makes it a lot easier," he once commented. "We rarely need to go anywhere more than a few hours from at least a track."

The Archibald business of JJA Seeds became a byword for its authority in the cultivation of rare specimens, and within a few years he was making trips to Turkey and the Americas.

He also made solo expeditions to Iran, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and his last overseas journey was five months ago to Georgia.

Many recall Archibald as "a superb plantsman and a born enthusiast". He was known for the comprehensive bulb and seed lists the firm published annually in its direct sales catalogue.

In those, the instructions were

meticulously written in detailed and comprehensive language.

But, typical of Archibald, there was often a witty phrase that reflected his own growing experiences or how to look after a plant that needed especial care.

The instructions always reflected his enthusiasm for plants and the cultivation of lesser known plants.

"We sell dreams to ourselves and hope to pay for their reality by work and knowledge. What are seeds but dreams in packets?"

John Lawson, who owned and ran Aviemore's Inshriach for many years, recalls Archibald as a student.

"Jim worked here for a few summers and was very friendly and always an enthusiast. He lived for his plants and enjoyed cultivating them.

"He was an excellent speaker on seeds and all aspects of horticulture. Jim was a lover of plants and always enjoyed sharing his experience of nurturing rare species."

In 2003 Archibald received the Lyttel Trophy, the Alpine Garden Society's highest award, and the Farrer Medal at this year's South Wales Show.

Jim Archibald is survived by his wife and by a son and daughter of his first marriage.

ALASDAIR STEVEN