

OBITUARY

EILY EDITH AGNES GLEDHILL (NÉE ARCHIBALD) (1914–2007)

Eily Gledhill (Figure 1) was born on 7 September 1914 in Walmer, Port Elizabeth, as Eily Edith Agnes Archibald. Her father was a merchant in Port Elizabeth and her mother, Lilian Irving, a keen collector of succulent plants, particularly of the genus *Haworthia*.

Upon finishing her schooling at St Dominic's Priory, Walmer, Eily enrolled at Rhodes University where she completed her B.Sc.Cl.L. degree with Botany and Mathematics as majors. Later she obtained an M.Sc. degree in Botany with a thesis on jointed cactus; and went on to London University to do her Ph.D. thesis on plant populations. When Eily returned to South Africa she joined the Division of Chemistry of the Department of Agriculture. In 1941 she was appointed as lecturer at the Botany Department of Rhodes University where she continued the research in which she had been engaged at Chemical Services—relating soil survey results to plant distribution. In the 1950s, she was occupied with trace element research on citrus and pineapple cultivation in the Eastern Cape. It was at Rhodes University where Eily met and married Jack Gledhill, head of the Department of Physics and Electronics.

Eily Gledhill's botanical work included a survey of the Alexandria District as well as ecological surveys of the Fish River Catchment Area in 1946 and of the Greater Addo Elephant National Park in 1954. During this time she was engaged in assembling the ± 9 000 specimens that are today lodged in the Selmar Schonland Herbarium in the Albany Museum, in the National Herbarium in Pretoria and in the herbarium of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. Many of these are signed cryptically 'E2A2' (Lubke & Brink 2004) which refers to the initials of her maiden name. With Dr M.A. Pocock and others she started the Rhodes University Herbarium to house the collections made by students. This has now been amalgamated with the Selmar Schonland Herbarium.

Eily described a number of new species and worked on a revision of the genus *Albucca*. She also published 'The genus *Dioscorea* in the Cape Province west of East London' in 1967. Many of her numerous publications were illustrated by herself with accurate black-and-white drawings. Furthermore, her book published in 1969 and with a second edition in 1981, *The Eastern Cape veld flowers*, in which she describes 554 species from 125 families, each illustrated by her fine line drawings, is still of great value to students of botany and the public at large (Figure 2). In the preface she writes: 'If this guide assists owners of land and visitors to know more about the plants of the eastern Cape, it will have achieved its object, for any one who becomes interested in this unique flora cannot fail to realise why it needs to be protected'. She coined the term *bonte-*

veld which has become recognized as a veld type and is widely used.

Eily Gledhill's interests were not only confined to plants. In 1939, she joined St John Ambulance and taught first aid and child care courses throughout her active life. Through this Eily was honoured in 1992 by Queen Elizabeth II, the sovereign head of the order, by her promotion to Dame of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem.

Eily was a member of the British Ecological Society, the Royal Society of South Africa, the Botanical Society of South Africa, the Van Riebeeck Society and the South African Ornithological Society.

She also became more and more interested in local history and contributed to *The 1820 Settlers Illustrated*, edited by Guy Butler (1974) and to Rex and Barbara Reynolds's (1974) book, *Grahamstown: from cottage to villa*. She was instrumental in the restoration of many buildings including the Observatory Museum and in 1980 she researched and published with her husband a book, *In the steps of Piet Retief*, about the famous trekker's activities in Grahamstown as trader and farmer.



FIGURE 1.—Eily Edith Agnes Gledhill (1914–2007). By courtesy of St John Ambulance, Grahamstown. Copied by FotoFirst.



FIGURE 2.—Various members of Crassulaceae (taken from Gledhill 1969: t. 28).

She realized the tourist potential of Grahamstown and published many pamphlets and booklets on frontier forts and founded the Grahamstown Guild of Tour Guides, leading many tours herself. Makana handicrafts, which created jobs for township women and Abalizi, a low-cost housing project, were also founded by her.

Eily Gledhill died on 30 May 2007 in Grahamstown where she had lived and worked for most of her life. She was a woman of great intellect and high principles but my (E. B.) most prized recollection of her was her delightful, quirky sense of humour which always lightened the working day at the herbarium whenever she visited her special friend, Grace Britten.

She is commemorated in *Haworthia eilyae* Poelln. (Gunn & Codd 1981).

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