



## CEDRIC, THE BM(NH) AND STEAK & KIDNEY PUDDINGS

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### Background

My introduction to Cedric Shute was in October 1961 at the British Museum (Natural History) in South Kensington (BM to all who worked there and still to me), a day or two after I had arrived to start research for a PhD supervised by the renowned palaeobotanist Professor Thomas Maxwell Harris at Reading University. Harris accompanied me on this first visit to introduce me to the collections of Wealden fossil plants and to choose my first loan of specimens, starting with algae and bryophytes.

Harris was then deeply engaged in his monumental revision of the Yorkshire Jurassic flora and had decided that the Wealden flora, being the only other English Mesozoic flora of note, was in dire need of the same treatment; having been scarcely looked at since Sir Albert Charles Seward published his two-part Wealden flora in 1894 and 1895. This proved to be not quite true when I discovered, not very long after, that Norman Hughes at Cambridge regarded the Wealden flora as his pet project into the future and rather resented my entry onto the scene. Harris assured me that Hughes was so involved in Cambridge college Senior Common Room life of wining and dining that, apart from fieldwork looking for new Wealden plant localities, he was more or less tinkering with the flora and would never make significant progress in the laboratory. Hence, within one week I had become acquainted with two of the most delightfully outspoken and significant people in my life, Tom Harris and Cedric Shute; both with a dry sense of humour which can set me off laughing to this day.

### BM(NH)

The cathedral-like BM(NH) building on Cromwell Road in South Kensington (Text-fig. 1a), designed by Alfred Waterhouse and completed in 1880 (Stearn 1981), is a highly-ornamented natural history haven (or Heaven) which remains externally much as it was when built. Internally it is almost unrecognisable as the building I first entered in 1961, not least the cacophony which must now be incessant. With special permission to arrive before the visitors I walked into a gleaming, tiled Main Hall, silent except for a murmur here and there and the sound of footsteps of staff arriving (clicking of leather-soled shoes then of course) making their

way to the Key Pound on the left where they received their large bunch of keys for the day from a uniformed Warder. The finer detail of this daily event and its afternoon reverse has been described in lyrical detail by the ‘trilobite man’ Richard Fortey (2008: 8).

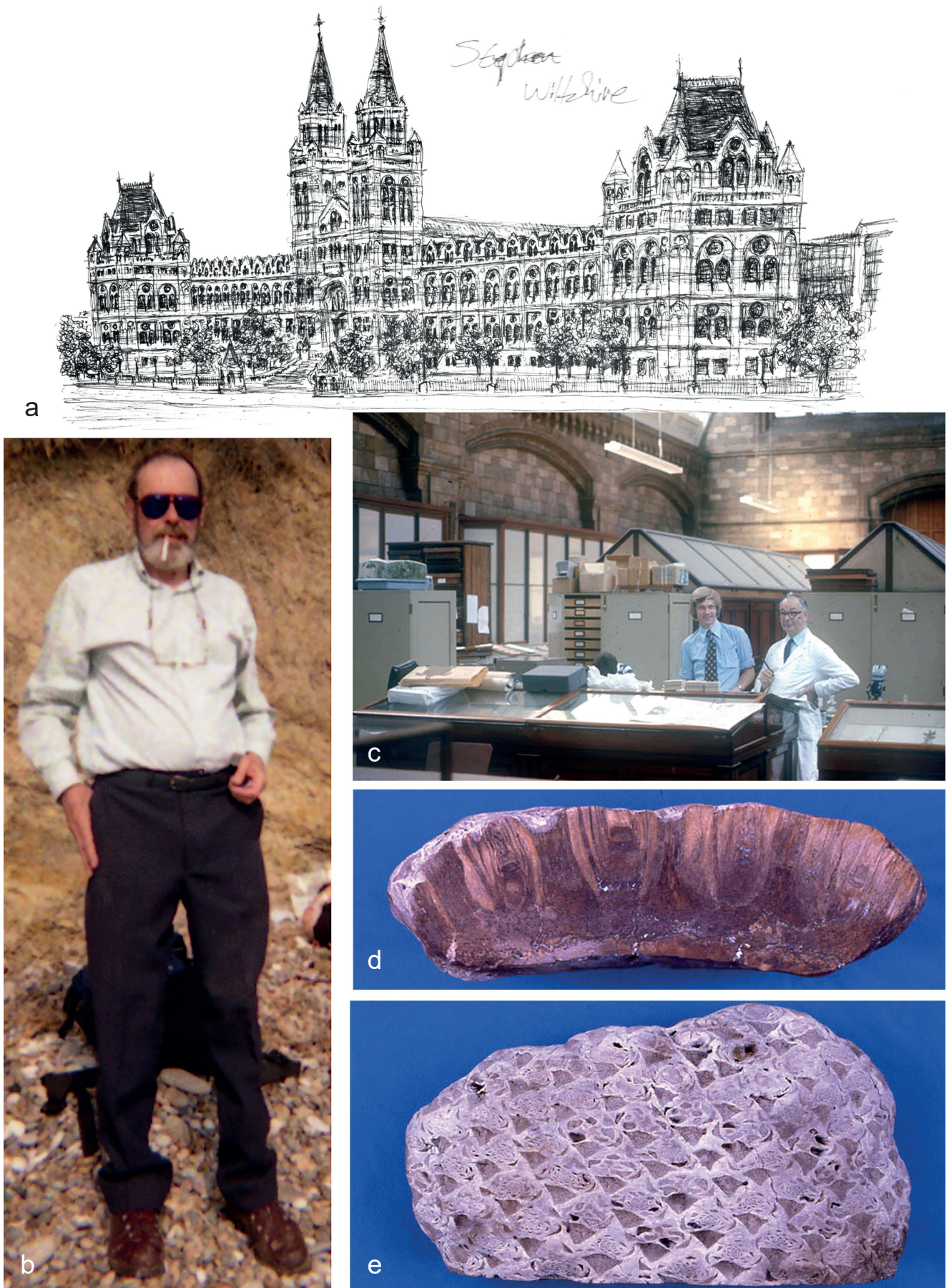
To the right of the Main Entrance was the ‘shop’, a small kiosk which stocked a few black and white (maybe even sepia) postcards of Museum architecture and some of the exhibits. Alas I have not got any of these in my BM archive. The routine for me was having a Receptionist phone through to the Department for someone to collect me, walk down the long gallery lined with Mary Anning’s plesiosaurs and let me into the Palaeontology Department through the locked shiny door next to a Giant Sloth. Once inside I was stuck for the duration and a visit to the Ladies Room (in the Public Area) required an escort with a key, usually Cedric of course.

Cedric, a year older than me at 24, had been employed at the Museum for about 2 years in a curatorial capacity (I think following National Service). During the three years of my studentship he was required to act as my ‘minder’ on every visit because the collections were in drawers under the display cabinets of the Fossil Plant Gallery which was open to the public. The school parties of little boys in particular were drawn like magnets to specimens being examined in open drawers and it was practically impossible to spread specimens out for comparison or selection for borrowing.

The Keeper of Palaeontology was Errol White (a ‘fish man’) who on an early visit appeared in the Gallery to ask “Shute” the question “And who is this young lady?” Satisfied to hear I was Professor Harris’s PhD student, his permission, required for every loan, was never in question. By 1962 I was trusted to sign my own Loan Agreement with approval from Cedric’s immediate superior Mr F. M. Wonnacott, who also called him Shute and I, of course, was Miss Watson. In 1963 Harris became a Trustee of the BM(NH) and my credentials were secured into the future with borrowing a type specimen becoming much easier.

### Wedding Day

It might seem a little odd to relate that I spent the morning of my wedding day in 1964 at the BM(NH) in the company of Cedric choosing specimens for a loan to



**Text-fig. 1.** a: Memory drawing of the British Museum(Natural History) building, South Kensington commissioned from the artist Stephen Wiltshire by Joan Watson 2003. b: Cedric Shute in characteristic stance whilst on field work in Dorset, 2006. c: BM(NH) Fossil Plant Gallery closed to the public in the 1970s; Chris Hill (left) and Graham Elliott working on top of the original Waterhouse display cases. d: Vertical section of a portion of Wealden cycadeoid trunk showing leaf bases and flowers. See text for explanation. e: Surface of same specimen etched in hydrofluoric acid to expose triangular sections of leaf stalks with a flower in the axil of every leaf.

be taken with us to our new life in Scotland at St. Andrews University. Having chosen a no-fuss, no-expense ceremony Dr Christopher Michael Bradford Henderson and I were married by Common Licence (in lieu of Banns) at Saint Mary's Church, Putney Bridge, the Parish where Michael was resident. It seemed eminently sensible, and enjoyable, to spend the morning usefully employed. I chose ferns to investigate next, probably influenced by Harris to progress systematically up the evolutionary scale, and that was my second error of the event. My first was to have my longish hair cut on the previous day by a student at the Reading Hairdressing College, without paying much attention to the result. Arriving at the Museum the next day I was greeted by Cedric with the question "Is that a wig hat you're wearing?" Ask your grandmother about wig hats or look at the pictures on Google. The 1960s craze had passed me by but I had inadvertently acquired one I couldn't take off. I grew my hair again in Scotland whilst trying to make head or tail of the Wealden ferns which all looked alike to me and had no cuticle to boot, except for a few spores of which I made *camera lucida* drawings (Watson 1969).

Life was very pleasant in that ancient university town by the sea, where Michael took up a new Lectureship in Geochemistry and I was a volunteer Demonstrator in Botany with research space in a hut very similar to the one I had inhabited at Reading. However, four golf courses for £3 per annum, per resident couple; seals bobbing around in the Eden Estuary watching us; the background of Lightning Jets flying from Leuchars Air Base; the regular thrill of them 'accidentally' breaking the sound barrier proved not enough to nurture two budding careers. A promised Geochemistry Lab was not to be funded and the plethora of over-qualified academic wives trying to get jobs did not bode well for me. Before two years were up I was back at Reading to consult Tom Harris and then South Kensington for Cedric to parcel up a new loan, which this time went with me to Manchester University.

The ferns had been abandoned in favour of conifers, which I already thought more interesting and obviously with cuticles galore to satisfy my favoured method of working. This was certainly a disappointment to Cedric who was hoping the cycadophytes were next on the list. (see below).

## Sabbatical Leave

By 1974, work had continued for several years on the conifer family Cheirolepidiaceae, with a visit to the Smithsonian Institution to borrow material and collaborative work using the SEM at Imperial College with K. L. Alvin was underway. The Fossil Plant Gallery had been closed off from public access (Text-fig. 1c) and became a much-needed and wonderful space where I could spread out and sort through the many small miscellaneous specimens or the huge cycadophyte leaves to my heart's content, without Cedric having to stand on guard. It seemed the perfect time for sabbatical leave in London. Hence for four months, March to June, I joined Cedric as a fixture in Palaeobotany with my own set of keys and freedom to roam plus space in the basement for acid work. I lived in Barry Thomas's house in New Cross and led the life of a commuter on the Metropolitan Line of The Tube.



**Text-fig. 2. a:** Three members of the 'Beard Society' (see text); left to right Cedric Shute, Richard Bateman and Chris Cleal, 2006. **b:** Hairy bennettitalean scale-leaf species named as a new species *Cycadolepis shuteana*, by Watson and Sincock (1992).

My husband came down for weekends with his aunt and uncle in Thames Ditton and a good time was had by all.

I had been invited several times by Cedric to join the infamous lunchtime visit which took place almost daily to the famous 'Hoop and Toy' pub by South Kensington Station. I eventually succumbed and joined the party, with some trepidation. I can't remember what I drank, probably ginger beer, and the event remains a blur. However, I do have a clear memory of Cedric's immortal and oft repeated response when we returned to the Museum: "I'm not taking you again. You're like a leper at a wedding!" I certainly agreed with him, but might have expressed it as 'a fish out water', and was pleased to be let off the hook. My response of choice was to call him Ceddie, a name he disliked but was always used by his colleague Tom West who by then had emigrated to New Zealand.

By now I knew Cedric's colleague and lunch partner Cyril Walker (a 'fossil bird man') who kindly invited me

to the Festival Ballet with free tickets he had been given. This was my first experience and great enjoyment of this art form and I have always thought it paved the way to the 'Balletomania' which struck Michael and me in the 1980s.

One of my favourite of Cedric's duties, latterly together with Mark Crawley, was selecting and organising items for rebinding; old monographs, reprints and textbooks in the Seward Library which were decrepit and more or less falling apart. There seemed to be a no-expense-spared budget available so the bindings chosen can only be described as sumptuous. All were hand bound in the finest leather and they were given free reign to choose any colours and styles. Thus the shelves of the Seward Library became a joyful array of beautiful tomes with contrasting spines, backs and corners in assorted jewel colours finished with gilt decoration and lettering. I doubt the budget runs to such indulgence in 2024.

This delightful, extended working visit, with plenty of room to spread out, was a precursor to even better facilities with the opening of the newly-built East Wing into which the Palaeontology Department moved in 1976 (Stearn 1981: 381). The modern plumbing in the East Wing almost seemed too good to be true and a staff Tea Room positively decadent. Life at that time was bliss and my dearest wish would have been to work there permanently on the staff. However, the BM(NH) was changing and never to be the same again. It soon became clear that these would be seen as Halcyon Days before stringent financial pressures were imposed by the government. The resulting reforms led to spectacular changes including widespread redundancy of scientists, new commercial ventures (selling far more merchandise than postcards) and of course the much-disliked change of name to Natural History Museum with even the Archbishop of Canterbury losing his status as Chairman of the Trustees (Stearn, 1981). The steady modernisation of exhibits (apart from the Mineralogy Gallery which miraculously remains intact to this day) gradually obliterated the familiar glass-topped Waterhouse cabinets. This had little or no effect on Cedric and me because the Fossil Plant Gallery had already been blocked off from public view and remained unaltered until the East Wing opened. Thanks to Cedric I am the grateful owner of the 'Wealden Plants' sign from the top of such a cabinet. A first-hand account of the changes to 'Noah's Ark in Kensington' (Forley 2008: 260) is entertaining reading for anyone who knew the BM(NH) in the 1960s and 1970s. Cedric impressively survived the turmoil, unaffected by the changing and opaque grades within the ranks of the Scientific Civil Service, to become a Palaeozoic palaeobotanist of note, up to and beyond his retirement in 1997.

### ***Eury- and Dory- Cycadolepis.***

In the Wealden Rufford Collection are a large number of isolated scales which Seward (1895) had designated *Eury-Cycadolepis* (oval or orbicular) and *Dory-Cycadolepis* (narrow and pointed), certainly from gymnosperms, possibly part of a cycad. Cedric took an unexplained interest in these unprepossessing things and was determined to see me work on them. He drew in his colleague Mark Crawley (then officially my Mesozoic museum contact) and during

the 1970s both of them used to chorus "What are you going to do with Eury- and Dory- Cycadolepis?" They didn't get a hint (nor did I) until Caroline Sincock started a PhD on the large cycadophyte leaves in 1982 and finally a definitive answer in the late 1980s. My answer was "They belong in the Bennettiales and we are going to name them after you!" Hence in 1992 *Cycadolepis cedricii*, *Cycadolepis shuteana*, *Cycadolepis markii* and *Cycadolepis crawleyana* saw the light of day, with *Cycadolepis cromwellensis* (after the BM(NH) location) for good measure (Watson and Sincock 1992). The *C. shuteana* scales (Text-fig. 2b) are strongly hairy and specially selected for Cedric as a member of 'The Beard Society' (Text-fig. 2a).

### **The Anglepoise Lamp**

This is probably my favourite Cedric story but I cannot date the event accurately; certainly in the 1980s when the Bennettiales were under intense study. Caroline Sincock was working on the fronds and flowers in Manchester whilst I was tackling the collections of large, massively heavy and confusing *Cycadeoidea* trunks in the Smithsonian Institution, the Peabody Museum at Yale University and the BM(NH). The BM collection supposedly included several important trunk fragments including the type specimen of a *Cycadeoidea* species collected and described by the botanist Robert Brown (he of Brownian motion fame). Only one Brown specimen could (and can) be recognised as such but it presented the seemingly insuperable problem of being a brownish, silicified, featureless, highly-polished, water-worn beach specimen; examined and set aside by generations of palaeobotanists. The specimen became my bête noire but it was very pleasant to handle and stroke the smooth surface whilst sitting chatting in the Seward Room contemplating what to do about it. On this occasion my question "What shall I do with it Cedric?" was answered by him deciding to interrogate (or torture) me by shining the Anglepoise lamp in my eyes. As I dodged the beam and looked down I suddenly saw a faint diamond pattern on the smooth surface. This was a Eureka Moment and the use of "Nature's own fume cupboard" (T. M. Harris, pers. comm. 1961) was clearly called for. I whisked the siliceous lump back to Manchester, put it in the garden, poured a generous amount of hydrofluoric acid over the surface and left it under an upturned plastic bucket. The outcome can be seen in Text-fig. 1e; an array of leaf-bases with a flower in every axil. The vertical polished face (Text-fig. 1d) was untouched by the acid but removal of a thick layer of yellowed varnish revealed the leaf stalks and flowers in vertical section. We had found our neotype of Brown's *Cycadeoidea saxbyana* (Watson and Sincock 1992: 191, text-fig. 129, pl. 19).

### **The Hurricane**

By 1987 photographs of the large Bennettitalean fronds were urgently needed and the only viable option was do this in the Museum. Michael and I were then deeply into our ballet obsession so chose Thursday October 15th when a friend was dancing at a theatre in Bromley, Kent. This was before I used sheets of crossed Polaroid for photography so



**Text-fig. 3. a: Field party at the Purbeck Fossil Forest, Lulworth Cove, Dorset. Left to right, Michael Henderson, Joan Watson, Cedric Shute (sitting on a limestone ‘Crow’s Nest’), Margaret Collinson. b: Field party at Worbarrow Bay, Dorset collecting Wealden fossil plants. Left to right, Cedric Shute, Tiffany Foster, Michael Henderson, Helen Cusack, Paul Kenrick.**

an array of the biggest leaves were duly immersed in vats of paraffin (kerosene) and left to stop bubbling overnight. Our evening at the ballet was a delight but we chose not to go to supper with the dancers after the show as we had to drive back to Thames Ditton and I intended to get an early start on Friday 16th. As we reached the gates of Hampton Court Palace our car was caught and moved sideways by an incredibly strong gust. I remember saying to Michael “Gosh, it’s windy!” Almost famous last words? We both slept like logs, as did the aunt and uncle, only to wake up to chaos in the garden and the tree-lined road. The TV news was of course spectacular and it was clear that transport into central London was going to be a problem to say the least, but I just had to get to the vats of paraffin; it was Friday after all. Getting through to anyone by telephone was out of the question so I set off at 10am, first through Richmond Park, a spectacular sight but my camera was at the Museum. The hazy details of the complex journey of trains, buses, tubes and walking was like a dream at the time, and remains so, but I got to Cromwell Road at 3pm and was delighted to find I was not alone at the Museum. The rush to take the photographs and drain off the paraffin was an all-hands-on-deck effort which is also now a blur. My most vivid memory is of rows of uprooted London Plane trees along the Thames Embankment. I wouldn’t have missed the experience for ‘all the tea in China’.

## Field trips

We were on two field trips with Cedric. 1994 was Yorkshire Jurassic collecting at Harris localities Scalby Ness, Cayton Bay and Hasty Bank but also a social gathering based in a Scarborough hotel. One group of five of the assembled party chose to go out for a fish and chip supper, returning later in a state of high amusement. They had been stopped on the way back by a passer-by and asked

“Are you at a meeting of The Beard Society?” The group only then noticed that all five were indeed sporting beards: Cedric, Barry Thomas, Chris Cleal, Richard Bateman and Bob Spicer (Text fig. 2a).

1998 was to the Dorset Wealden and Purbeck based in a Swanage hotel, arranged by myself, to three famous attractive localities with easy collecting if desired. These were i) Durdle Door, a scenic arch of vertical strata reached at low tide; ii) Lulworth Cove with the Purbeck Fossil Forest (Text-fig. 3a); iii) Worbarrow Bay with a chance to cross the Ministry of Defence firing ranges via the deserted village of Tyneham on an open weekend, usually with ferocious plywood enemy soldiers pointing machine guns at you out of the undergrowth. The collecting at Worbarrow was prolific as usual and the party was much engaged with the rich pickings whilst Cedric looked on offering encouragement (Text-fig. 3b) and enjoying the glorious views on a beautifully warm, sunny September day.

## Cedric and Steak & Kidney Pudding

At some point Cedric had occasion to visit John Franks in Manchester Museum, involving staying overnight. I have forgotten, or never knew, the date or details but the impact of this visit on Cedric was extraordinary. He had gone to a fish and chip shop for his supper and discovered that these establishments in Manchester serve Holland’s individual steak & kidney puddings, a famous Lancashire delicacy, with chips and ‘mushy’ peas (Text-fig. 4b), as an alternative to fish. His lasting joy from this experience became a constant source of reminiscence over many years and of course I gave him an open invitation to visit us in Manchester and repeat it as often as he liked. This never happened. Forward to 2006 when I gave a talk to the Linnean Society Palaeobotanical Group on Cycadeoid trunks, including an account of the part Cedric played in causing me to solve the long-standing



**Text-fig. 4. a: Cedric Shute and Joan Watson with his steak & kidney pudding (see text) in 2006. b: Steak & kidney pudding, chips and mushy peas, traditional fare in Manchester fish and chip shops.**

*Cycadeoidea* mystery. Nine years after his retirement this seemed the ideal opportunity to bring him a steak & kidney pudding from Manchester (Text-fig. 4a). This delicious dish happens to be one of my specialities (recipe available on application) but I may say that the Holland's offering is a very high quality, every day, easy option. I am frequently reminded of Cedric by this delicacy because my darling great nephew Freddie is also a major enthusiast.

### And finally

With all the Wealden collections more or less photographed and sampled and only the ferns left to knock into shape (I live in hope of help) it has no longer been necessary to travel frequently to London following my retirement in 2005. Since Cedric's sad demise my only 1960s contacts are Dianne Edwards (plenty of opera) and Barry Thomas (60 years of chit chat). E-mail has become my main communication medium and provided for some fun and repartee with Cedric during the 2016 National Referendum. His delightful, dour sense of humour remained intact. My last words to him, commenting on the outcome, were "What can I say?" He replied "You have said enough!" I hope I haven't said too much here.

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