Acknowledgment

I wish to thank Eric Green for his hospitality during my visits to South Africa, in addition to Dr. John Rourke and the other friendly staff at the Compton Herbarium, Cape Town, for providing study access to the herbarium collection, and also to Paul Debbert for sharing information on this species.

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Writings from the Readership

Favorite Anecdotes on Adrian Slack

Keywords: recollections: Adrian Slack.

It Just Sprang Up Out of the Peat!

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I first met Adrian in the mid-1980s, when he was running his famous nursery, Marston Exotics. At that time I had a very small nursery in Borneo, growing and exporting *Nepenthes*. Adrian's enthusiasm for carnivorous plants was such that he was one of my first customers, and I regularly sent small shipments of plants to his nursery. I finally got the chance to meet him whilst on vacation in England in 1984 and was immediately struck by his enormous energy and enthusiasm. After a tour of his nursery we retired to his local Public House (i.e. a bar), the Castlebrook Inn in Compton Dunden for a few beers. I was surprised, when just after entering the pub, Adrian clambered up onto a table and announced: "Listen everybody, this is my good friend Robert who has come all the way from Borneo." Naturally, many of the regulars there knew Adrian well and smiled fondly to themselves, however there were a number of people who, like myself, were from out of town, and I can still clearly remember their surprised expressions. Adrian signed a copy of his book for me that day. His 'signing' runs to a whole page, and that book is now one of my most treasured possessions.



Figure 1: *Nepenthes rajah* x *burbidgeae*, photo Robert Cantley

In 1985, while jungle trekking in Borneo, I stumbled across a *Nepenthes* plant with the largest pitchers I had ever seen. It was a

hybrid between *Nepenthes rajah* and *Nepenthes burbidgeae*, and had absolutely beautiful and enormous pitchers (see Figure 1). One of the largest lower pitchers was removed and shipped to England in time for Adrian to exhibit it in that year's Chelsea Flower Show. The pitcher took pride of place on his stand. There was no plant attached, not even a leaf, just a single massive pitcher and a short length of tendril, the end of which he buried in the peat covering his stand. I happened to be standing nearby when a BBC television camera crew arrived. They immediately homed in on the unusual pitcher and set up their camera to film it. During the filmed interview the presenter (anchor-man) asked Adrian what the pitcher was. Adrian removed his trilby hat, scratched his head and with a puzzled expression on his face replied: "I have absolutely no idea at all, it just sprang up out of the peat last night, and look!" he exclaimed, peering into the cavernous depths of the pitcher, "It seems to have devoured a frog already!" The anchor-man was lost for words...

Adrian Slack is a unique character, and his active presence in the world of carnivorous plants is greatly missed.

Working for Adrian Slack

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In the summer of 1979 I began working for Adrian Slack at Marston Exotics in Somerset. My duties as a novice consisted in the main of repotting and dividing the *Dionaea*, dead-leafing the *Sarracenia*, watering all the plants and building a new lagoon to take the expanding number of plants. I got the job through my father, Roy Cheek, a well-known horticulturist in Somerset. Adrian needed someone that summer to look after one of the out-stations of Marston Exotics near Barton St. David, and I was lucky enough to be taken on.

Before my enlistment with Adrian Slack that summer, I was already familiar with his name through an article that he had written for the Carnivorous Plant Journal of the Carnivorous Plant Society, which I had joined in London the previous year, on its creation. His text (Slack, 1978) elaborated in great detail a technique for raising *Drosophyllum lusitanicum* from seed to maturity as a small perennial shrub. The article was undoubtedly written from long experience with his subject and was the best part of that issue of the journal, as I recall. Clearly, here was someone with a deep knowledge of carnivorous plants.

At that time Marston Exotics was easily the biggest carnivorous plant nursery in Europe. However, the out-station at which I worked consisted of only a single large polythene tunnel tucked away behind a chicken barn in a farm managed by one of Adrian's friends. Previously, Adrian had had other outstations scattered nearby. The main retail site for the business had been at Marston Mill (run by Adrian's first business partner, Timothy Heneage). At about that time, I believe, it was being transferred to another site at Compton Dundon, west of Glastonbury, which was owned by John Spiers, the third and last partner of the Marston Exotics business in Somerset. At the beginning of each week, I would cycle from Bridgwater, where my parents lived, beyond Glastonbury to West Pennard, and camp in my tent at a farm there, commuting daily to my work place. Sometimes I would sleep in the poly-tunnel amongst the plants. A major drawback was that at 4 a.m., I would be woken up by the dawn.

Adrian would visit once or twice a week to see how the work was going. He enjoyed tootling around the country lanes in his Morris. He would acidify the water tanks, deliver more stock for me to work on, pay me, and, out of the kindness of his heart, teach me such things as his method of propagating *Drosera* from leaf-cuttings, or the difference between *Sarracenia alata* and *Sarracenia flava*. I learned a great deal from him on the subject of growing carnivorous plants, both then and since. He talked of his selection of cultivars, his development of hybrids with certain preferred species clones, and his mischievous spreading of *Sarracenia purpurea* in Scottish bogs by lobbing *Sphagnum*

"bombs" with seeds onto inaccessible bog islands. Once or twice he took me to one of his favourite watering holes, the "Rose and Portcullis" at Butleigh for a ploughman's lunch. It did not take much to learn of his enthusiasm for civil-war battle reenactments. He was always on the cavalier side, of course. He was and is a man of diverse interests and abilities. Few realize, for example, that the beautiful line drawings that illustrated the Marston Exotics Catalogue and his books were drawn by Adrian himself.

"Carnivorous Plants", Adrian's first and foremost book (Slack 1979), came out that autumn. It was a revolution in the literature on the subject of the horticulture of these plants. Written in beautiful prose, it remains the bible of carnivorous plant growers, owing to its comprehensiveness, the fruit of years of meticulous research in the Royal Horticultural Society library in London and many years of experience and experimentation with a wide range of living carnivorous plants. It also focussed the interest of a broad public on carnivorous plants, and Adrian Slack himself. Adrian began to make television appearances and was interviewed on the radio.

That autumn, I went back to university and did a herbarium specimen-based project on *Sarracenia*, for which Adrian generously supplied much material. In his position, I doubt that I would have given up material of rare species such as *Sarracenia oreophila* for this purpose, as he did. He has a benevolent disposition and has helped not a few other growers of carnivorous plants. He was always generous with advice to other growers, and enjoyed the free exchange of information on horticultural techniques and botanical facts, whether at his nursery, or by letter or at the annual Chelsea Flower Show, at which he was a regular fixture in his Panama hat and with his wine glass. He encouraged and supported the fledgling Carnivorous Plant Society by lending plants for shows and by writing articles for its journal. Indeed, it seemed to me that although he took an interest in the financial side of his business, Marston Exotics, making money was not the first thing in his life. To a degree, carnivorous plants for Adrian were a hobby that had gotten gloriously out-of-hand. Adrian's books and Marston Exotics were extensions of his plant collection and his personal research. At that time, although others were beginning to be interested in collecting, growing and documenting these wonderful plants, no one else in Britain had taken the subject so far as Adrian.

In the summer of 1980, I began a year working for Peter Taylor at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, which persuaded me to seek a career in taxonomic botany, but I would visit Adrian whenever possible on my weekends home to Somerset to visit my family and tend my growing collection of carnivorous plants. As I progressed with my academic career, Adrian would bring up questions of plant identification and nomenclature during my visits. By then he was in contact with people from around the world who were interested in carnivorous plants. By this means he obtained new material for Marston Exotics and for his books. At some stage in the 1980s, Marston Exotics must have held the world's largest range of carnivorous plant species, hybrids and cultivars. The mail-order business was thriving, and the company had begun to move into selling to garden centres. Newspaper articles on Marston Exotics, its plants and its partners were not uncommon in the local and national press. One that got particular attention, I remember, featured *Sarracenia* × *excellens* 'Lochness'. Adrian and his plants, particularly his *Sarracenia* breeding, were treated in some detail in a chapter in a popular book on leading naturalists (Pettifer & Brown, 1981). Here Adrian was rubbing shoulders with the likes of Konrad Lorenz, Miriam Rothschild and Tom Eisner. In the process of researching Adrian for this book, the writers took him out to the USA and for the first time, Adrian got to see *Sarracenia* in the wild. After the success of his first book, Adrian began a second, with many more colour pictures than the first (Slack, 1986). It also was much in demand.

Through Adrian I first learnt of the likes of Eric Green and Allen Lowrie. I remember Adrian being convinced in the early '80s that stock of a sundew he had was a new species. He had received it from Eric Green in South Africa, and was marketing it in the Marston Exotics catalogue as *Drosera aliciae* "Highland Red". At the time I was sceptical. However, several years later, observing the peculiar, thick, red, uncinate hairs on the

lower surface of the leaf (unknown in *Drosera aliciae*), it occurred to me that he might be right. I found supporting characters. This led to a chain of events that ended in me describing it, my first published species, as *Drosera slackii*, in his honour. It was published in 1987. By the time that it was published the stressful circumstances which led to the sale of Adrian's beloved Marston Exotics had unravelled. Adrian's business partners decided to move on. Clearly, new partners and investment were needed. I was flattered and overwhelmed in the summer of 1986 to be approached by Adrian as a possible business partner, but reluctantly declined for want of capital and the temptation of an alternative career in taxonomic botany. The pressure to find a new partner became more pressing. In the autumn Adrian tragically suffered a severe stroke. Marston Exotics was later sold, and the plants were transported to a new site in the Midlands, hundreds of miles away.

Adrian now lives quietly, with his sister Julia, in Barton St. David. He learned to walk again, but his speech and writing are still affected by his stroke, although both have improved steadily over time. He still enjoys his collection of plants as the adjoining photograph, taken in the summer of 1999, shows (see Back Cover).

Most of us that grow carnivorous plants today owe a great debt to Adrian Slack. He has inspired us through his unparalleled books on the subject, and has made available for us to cultivate and study many plant species, previously unobtainable.

I shall always be glad of taking that opportunity long ago, to work for Adrian, and to have known him subsequently. Thank you, Adrian for firing my interest in carnivorous plants and for teaching me so much on the subject.

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His Cream Linen Suit and Panama Hat

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In the summer of 1987 I had the unique opportunity of buying Marston Exotics.

The day I drove down to Somerset to see Marston Exotics tucked away in deepest countryside is one I shall never forget. The nursery was like an oasis filled with the strangest plants I had ever seen. It was mid August and the first thing I saw as I entered he tunnels were the *Sarracenia*. The colours and flowers were truly stunning and it did not take long to decide to buy the business.

Adrian was suffering from the affects of a severe stroke at the time, so his partner John Spiers dealt with the business and over the next few weeks told me of some of Adrian's life and travels. I only met Adrian twice and sadly he could not communicate. We all felt the deepest sympathy for him after all of thirty years of dedication of growing and breeding these amazing plants, and more importantly bringing to the public's attention one of the largest collections at that time.

Adrian was intelligent, quick witted and full of enthusiasm. Being related to the Tolstoy family made his history even more intriguing. He spent his early childhood in Herefordshire (ironic to think that I later moved Marston Exotics to the same area), and his interest in carnivorous plants started when he found an illustration of a *Drosera rotundifolia*, this drove him to seek out the plants in the local wetlands and bogs. His interest in plants carried him through to the age of 18. Beginning a career in landscape architec-

ture was his ambition.

By the late 1950s Adrian became enthralled with carnivorous plants and his other interests—painting and English 16th century history—took second place. He spent three years in Cumberland, Northern England in the early 1960s and had access to the Bishop of Penrith's walled garden, which was full of old and Victorian glasshouses. Here his early hybridising of *Sarracenia* began and trials were carried out on *S.* × *excellens.* He also tested cultivating carnivorous plants outdoors in the British climate.

He eventually made his base at Frome in Somerset, where at an old mill and garden he started commercially producing insectivorous plants and called his business Marston Exotics.

Adrian developed an image of a romantic English naturalist. A committed vegetarian and addicted to French wines, he could always be seen at flower shows like Chelsea captivating an audience who would flock around his stand. Adrian was the complete English Edwardian eccentric.

After a trip to the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia and northern Florida, U.S.A. in 1974, Adrian's enthusiasm on seeing the *Sarracenia* specimens spurred him to expand on hybridising. Together with John Watkins and Paul Temple, he founded the British Carnivorous Society during this time.

Adrian's business was expanded by mail order, covering the U.K. and many parts of the world. His many lectures and avid writings led the way to radio and television broadcasting. He continually experimented with the cultivation of aquatic and tropical *Utricularia*, Mexican *Pinguicula*, tuberous *Drosera* and *Drosophyllum*. By 1976 work had started on his first book, 'Carnivorous Plants,' covering the plants' history, natural habitat, and cultivation notes. It captivated audiences, not only in Britain, but worldwide.

During the early eighties Adrian showed magnificent displays of Carnivorous Plants at the Chelsea Flower Show, winning the R.H.S. Lindley Silver Medal in 1981, and after that became five times Gold Medalist. His enthusiasm for talking and explaining to all ages about the plants was exceptional. The lasting picture in my mind is seeing him in his cream linen suit and Panama hat talking to a twelve year old, showing the plants on the show-stand, with a glass of French wine not far away.

A Special Debt of Gratitude

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During my world travels in 1986, I was humbled by the privilege to meet with Adrian Slack at his home. Although this was more than a few years ago, it still remains fresh in my mind and a fond memory. This man, my mentor for the growing of carnivorous plants during the earlier years of my collecting, never hesitated to help with the many questions I would throw at him in the letters that streamed back and forth. Adrian's two books, "Carnivorous Plants " and "Insect Eating Plants and How to Grow Them", take their pride of place amongst my many other books dedicated to this fascinating hobby. To this day, his books are still some of the most accurate in information for the growing of these sometimes difficult plants. To Adrian I also owe a special debt of gratitude, for his never tiring efforts in growing the *Drosera* from here in Western Australia. He succeeded in growing and distributing the pygmy *Drosera* "Species Bannister" I discovered in the late '70s, that eventually became *Drosera mannii*. To Adrian, I thank you. You deserve all the accolades dedicated to you. Best wishes always!

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I first met Adrian Slack in 1985 when I was trying to learn how to grow a Venus Flytrap. By a marvelous bit of luck, he was in my neighborhood library. Adrian reassured me that my task was surmountable, and showed me how to avoid repeating the Dionaeicide that characterized my disastrous attempts in grade school. In the following weeks, Adrian taught me a great deal. But then, alas, I had to leave to begin my graduate studies. I wondered when I would see him next.

Two years later, I encountered Adrian again, this time in a bookstore. He was as engaging as ever, and for many months following he tutored me again on carnivorous plant care. His gentle wit and lucid manner was a refreshing respite from my studies—what better way to rejuvenate my spirits, sagging under the weight of General Relativity, than to hear about Adrian's views on the subtleties of *Pinguicula moranensis* color (or rather, "colour") forms? or to review Adrian's primer (rhymes with simmer) on *Triphyophyllum*?

In time, it seemed I learned all I could from Adrian. But as if sensing my wandering attentions, he returned in 1986 with a second volley of lugubrious commentary on carnivorous cultivation. I was engrossed once again.

Ah yes, Adrian, my good friend.

If you have not yet realized it, my relationship with "Adrian" is entirely artificial. I have never met him, spoken with him, or even written to him. When, as above, I refer to "Slack," I am usually referring to his two books. But despite never having met him, I hold him in highest regard. And I am not alone in having such anonymous affection for him—hordes of carnivorous plant growers who have been raised (and also, raised plants) on his books consider him their horticultural mentor.

Since a number of carnivorous plant horticulture books have been published in the last decade, have Slack's two books weathered well? Yes, yes, yes. His books remain the standards against which all subsequent carnivorous horticulture books have been measured; few survive the comparison intact!

Consider Slack's first book, "Carnivorous Plants." The writing is slippery-smooth, accurate, and entertaining. Jane Gate's photographs are still some of the best, anywhere. And did you notice that Slack himself drew the many marvelous drawings in the book? He is an extraordinary botanical artist!

His second book, "Insect-Eating Plants & How to Grow Them," is smaller in format but larger in personality, as Slack lets his presence be felt more than before. He tells us that Venus Flytrap flowers are "among the most unattractive I have seen," and that not only is the *Sarracenia* hybrid *S.* × *umlauftiana* unspeakable-sounding, it is also unspeakable-looking! If he is critical, it is because his horticultural standards are so high. Over his twenty-five year career of hybridizing *Sarracenia*—during which tens of thousands of seedlings were raised—he deemed only a dozen as being worthy of cultivar names.

Slack's greatest contribution to horticulture is in raising a crop of growers who are working to maintain his high standards of horticultural excellence. The ICPS has become the cultivar registration agency for carnivorous plants, and horticulturists are now registering cultivars of exceptional value and beauty. This vision of Slack has been realized.

So return to your carnivorous greenhouses, terraria, gardens, and bogs, and in Slack's exalted tradition, grow the most captivating plants you can. Develop cultivars that make us quiver with delight! But I warn you—Slack's standards are high. Look at the cultivars in his books and do your best to match them in quality. It will not be easy. Make Slack, er, Adrian, proud!

A Great Local Character

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When our Biology Department moved to a new building in 1972, we received a new greenhouse for its roof. The greenhouse began with a general collection, including cacti, succulents and orchids. I am an orchid enthusiast so the orchid collection grew bigger at the expense of the cacti. I smuggled the cacti downstairs, one by one, and either put them on my colleague's lab window-sills or into one of the general purpose greenhouses downstairs.

Tim Heneage, later a director of Marston Exotics, was a member of Millfield's Maths Department in those days. One day he invited Mike Cole (my head of department) and myself to visit his home to meet his friend Adrian Slack, and to see some of Adrian's carnivorous plants which were housed in Tim's greenhouse. It was a remarkable day in every way. Tim lived in a huge mansion house. Both he and Adrian are wonderful company with a fund of hair-raising stories, many involving their participation in the "Sealed Knot", where they dress up as Roundheads and Cavaliers, and re-enact old battles. Adrian is a larger than life character with a fondness for Edwardian clothes and a breathtaking knowledge of all things horticultural. Going into their greenhouse was a completely new experience for Mike and myself. I had never seen *Sarracenia* in my life before, and here before me were many hundreds, including rank after rank of *S. flava*, sticking up like mad organ-pipes above the rest. And it was not just *Sarracenia*. Adrian showed us plant after plant; *Drosera*, *Cephalotus*, *Byblis*, *Pinguicula*, *Utricularia*, an enormous *Drosophyllum* several years old, *Nepenthes*, Venus Flytraps... It was the largest collection of carnivorous plants in Europe. Adrian told me that the single original plant of *S. flava* came over from the USA on the Queen Mary.

We saw a lot of Adrian after that. We started putting together a collection of carnivorous plants and Adrian gave us much advice. He was very interested in microscopy and came over to Millfield many times to look at our binocular microscopes and our photomicroscopy set up. On several of our annual "Parents' Days" he put on an exhibition and sale of his plants in one of our downstairs labs; we bought many plants ourselves. About then, around 1977 or 1978 Adrian completed his first book "Carnivorous Plants" and I remember his showing us his line drawings and some of Jane Gate's superb colour photographs.

It was about then that Tim Heneage and Adrian started Marston Exotics. Although based in Frome, they had many greenhouses and polytunnels at Compton Dundon, just over the hill from Millfield (which is on the edge of Street in Somerset). We continued to buy plants from them for many years. In the rush of school life I have rather lost touch with Adrian, but he still lives nearby where he remains a great local character.

He Loved to Shock Them

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My first encounter with a carnivorous plant was when I was nine years old. A field trip into the mountains of Wales introduced me to the double delight of wading through *Sphagnum* bogs and encountering a plant that ate insects. Wow, heaven!

Delight faded as, try as I might, I could not grow a sundew, nor any other carnivorous plant. Years then passed as I worked overseas with no thoughts of carnivorous plants. On my return to the UK, my brother, who knew my habits better than I did, bought me a birthday present—"Carnivorous Plants" by Adrian Slack. Joy!

The obvious place to buy plants was Adrian's own Marston Exotics, and so started my communication with him. Adrian's membership in the Society of Cavaliers and Roundheads (the largest military re-enactment society in Europe, dedicated to re-enact-

ing the 17th Century English Civil Wars) led to talks of re-enacted battles where, characteristically, Adrian remembered finding time to sip wine while others fought! (England's history might have been so different had Adrian been a real Roundhead or Cavalier!). Indeed, Adrian could rarely be seen without his trademark glass of red wine, which he would readily share from his handy stock of bottles that would last the show (maybe!). But to see Adrian at his happiest was best done by watching him in the company of women. Adrian received frequent invitations to speak at Ladies Meetings and delighted in letting these ladies know, in deliberately shocking form, all the gory detail of a fly's death in the arms of a Venus Flytrap or sundew. He loved to shock them, and took a childlike delight in it. And who can blame him?

It is a great shame that Adrian is not able to be the public figure he once was. I miss his individuality and his eccentricity. As to carnivorous plants, Adrian had a knack of being informative whilst remaining secretive. Yet he shared enough to teach many of us how to begin and I happily admit to being one of his students. And I treasure my graduation day when he finally approached me at one Chelsea Flower Show to ask if he could photograph one of my plants!

New Cultivars

Keywords: cultivar: *Sarracenia* 'Adrian Slack', *Sarracenia* 'Vintage Slack', *Cephalotus* 'Hummer's Giant', *Pinguicula* 'Aphrodite'.

Sarracenia 'Adrian Slack'

Received: 10 May 2000.

When the idea for an issue of Carnivorous Plant Newsletter commemorating Adrian Slack was developed, it was obvious that it would be an ideal time to christen a cultivar *Sarracenia* 'Adrian Slack'. To live up to its namesake this cultivar would have to be something special, so I (BMR) looked for candidates. During my search, I contacted Peter D'Amato (California Carnivores). Peter said that while he had some lovely plants worth cultivar status (see *Sarracenia* 'Vintage Slack', below), he had another idea. Long ago, Peter had visited Bob Hanrahan's property in Alabama and saw a hybrid so beautiful that it brought him to his knees in rapture. This sounded good! I called Bob, and even though Bob has grown a vast number of *Sarracenia* over the years on his property and in his greenhouses, he knew exactly which clone I was inquiring about. He said that the plant was still alive, and that he would send a photograph.

I have seen many *Sarracenia* plants, but when the photo from Bob arrived, my jaw dropped. Clearly, this extraordinarily colorful and well-shaped clone was the long sought candidate for *Sarracenia* 'Adrian Slack' (see Front Cover and Figure 1). We nominated and submitted this cultivar name for registration on 28 March 2000.

While the exact parentage of *Sarracenia* 'Adrian Slack' is unknown, it is almost certainly a mix of *S. flava* and *S. leucophylla*. It is unclear if back-crossing is involved. In general form, the plant produces large pitchers much like those of *S. flava*. The influence of *S. leucophylla* is expressed, at most, as a slight undulation in the pitcher lid. While *S. flava* controls the pitcher form, *S. leucophylla* influences much of the pitcher coloration. The pitcher lid is arrestingly white, shot through with deep red veins (from *S. flava*). The upper pitcher tube is also heavily veined and lightly fenestrated. These pitcher characters define this exquisite cultivar. The flowers are not as spectacular as the pitchers, but are still intriguing. The petals are light pink, almost white, but may show occasional yellow highlights

Bob found this plant in the 1980s, growing in the Milton area of western Florida. It has grown well since then, and when left undisturbed produces the astonishing coloration documented in the photograph. This is a superior plant, and honors a superior man.

Sarracenia 'Adrian Slack' is very rare in cultivation, but is being propagated under

