

# 60 Years of Growing as a Family Business

“Without financial success we will not be able to meet our objectives towards our staff, customers and community. We are committed to reinvesting our profits in new infrastructure, products and services for the benefit of our customers and sharing a fixed percentage with our most committed staff.”

Extract from Dunscair's Five Core Values Statement

Eric Vickers helped his father Frank establish the business in 1948. Although now retired, Eric remains a director and shareholder in the company and as well as maintaining a very watchful eye on its development, can still be seen most days helping out on the forklift.

Before becoming a plantsman, Eric trained as a teacher. It was whilst they were both teaching at Crookings Lane Primary School that Eric and his wife Margaret met in the early 1950s. He was later appointed as headmaster of Mere Brow CE Primary School where he was not only successful in fighting its closure but expanded the school. Eric's final teaching appointment was as headmaster of Tarleton County Primary School.

Eric is passionate about nature, wildlife and gardening. He is also a keen fly fisherman and watercolour artist. His paintings of local landscapes and buildings are well known and examples of them are offered for sale in the Garden Café. Having just celebrated his 80th birthday and lived on the site for the past 60 years, he is the ideal person to describe the history of the company's rapid growth.



## A Short History of Dunscair Garden Centre

“My family came to Tarleton in 1948 when my father, Frank Vickers bought a two acre plot of land and built a bungalow. He had retired from Bolton Borough Police Force with a very small pension. With very little capital he commenced making a living from the land and created Dunscair Nurseries. The name was taken from Dunscair village in Bolton where he had lived and worked.

With a new rotovator, he grew vegetables and flowers from seed as it was cheaper. The resultant harvests were sold from a wooden table at the roadside and he also brought in local produce and fruit to re-sell. To progress he needed a greenhouse, but the local bank would not lend him the £100 required. Being determined and innovative he bought old bed angle irons and proceeded without any power tools to build his first greenhouse.

From the start I helped him in the evenings, weekends and holidays and soon we had one large greenhouse. Over ten years and using our own skills and labour we built another eighteen greenhouses 80' by 15' each. With family help from my mother, sister Barbara and husband Enty, my brother Chris and later my wife Margaret and subsequently our daughters Judith, Helen and Hilary, we grew a large range of crops and also lettuce and tomatoes commercially.



In 1972 my father decided to retire and with some soul searching, I agreed to take over and to leave my position as Headmaster of Tarleton County Primary School, a culmination of nearly 25 years teaching. With responsibility for three daughters at grammar school and also in order to help my parents, Margaret and I decided to diversify. We bought in £200 worth of shrubs and from this had requests for fertilisers, composts and sprays etc. from which the embryonic Dunscair Garden Centre was born.

# A Short History of Dunscar Garden Centre

To help us to progress Margaret took up part-time teaching and the girls also helped in the house and garden. Customer interest gave us the confidence to progress from a 30'x15' greenhouse as a shop next to our house, to purchasing a postwar prefabricated house from London. With this addition we progressed to selling tools, garden sundries, planters and garden furniture. Customers in those days entered between our two bungalows - not very private for us!

As trade grew, Helen joined the business, coinciding with our purchase of two adjoining acres of land on which our shop and plant area now stands. Soon after Hilary came on board too and we developed a larger shop and later a tea room. Hilary took charge of the nursery staff and all the growing while Margaret, Helen and I ran the shop. Over 20 years together as a team, we managed to expand the business and pass more and more responsibility onto Helen and Hilary. In the late 1990s we bought another adjoining two acres and bungalow on which the Garden Café now sits and a further two acres with a farmhouse behind our property. Dunscar Garden Centre was thus firmly established and now extends over 7 acres. In July 2004 we changed our name from Dunscar Nurseries to Dunscar Garden Centre Limited to reflect our transition from a small retail nursery to a fully blown garden centre. Hilary took over as Managing Director and 6 months later her husband Shaun joined the business. I was then able to retire finally and hand over the baton to the next generation to take the business further forward. Margaret and I wish them every success and I am sure Grandpa and Grandma would endorse this sentiment 60 years on."

**Eric Vickers**  
Director



Eric with one of his paintings



Frank building a greenhouse



Helen building the 'new' shop



The foundations for the present shop



The original shop and plant area