

# Frances Elizabeth Tripp (1832–1890)

This is one in a series of articles by **Mark Lawley** about prominent British and Irish field bryologists of the past. Mark would be very pleased to learn of any information which supplements its content. *A Social and Biographical History of British and Irish Field-bryologists* is also available online at [www.britishbryologicalsociety.org.uk](http://www.britishbryologicalsociety.org.uk)

Fanny Tripp wrote *British Mosses, their homes, aspects, structure and uses* (1868; 2nd edn 1874; 3rd edn 1888). It was a popular book of two volumes, delightfully illustrated, and which deservedly fetches high prices when bought and sold nowadays. Fanny etched each of the 108 illustrations on copper, drawing from living specimens, the plates then being coloured by hand at Benjamin Fawcett's, the printer.

## Family background and biography

Fanny was born on 1 August 1832, and christened at St Sidwell, near Exeter in Devon, the eldest child of eight born to the Reverend Robert Henry Tripp (1801–1880) and his first cousin Elizabeth Ann (*née* Tripp, 1803–1868). Robert Henry was vicar of Altarnun, Cornwall, for 33 years from 1842. Altarnun is on the edge of Bodmin Moor, and Fanny's interest in plants may have begun when she played on the moor as a child.

Robert Tripp was the second child of six born to the Reverend Robert Henry Tripp (1754–1825), rector of Rewe, Devon, and of Kentisbury from 1791, and his second wife Mary (*née* Leigh, 1772–1828).

Elizabeth Ann Tripp was a daughter of George Tripp (1752–1830) and Elizabeth (*née* Deacon, 1765–1836). Elizabeth was a daughter of William Deacon (1733–1792) and Elizabeth (*née* Judson); William Deacon's parents were James Deacon (1691–1749), alderman of Portsmouth, and Elizabeth (*née* Antram, 1697–1782). Fanny was descended from the Earls of Portsmouth.

George Tripp was an elder brother of Robert Henry senior, and they were sons of John Tripp (1719–1766), barrister and sometime mayor of Taunton, and Ann (*née* Upton, died 1800). Ann Upton was a daughter of the eminent classicist and schoolmaster Reverend James Upton (1671–1749, see *Dictionary of National Biography*) and his wife Mary (*née* Proctor).

George Tripp became a post captain in the navy, but left the service under a cloud in 1799–1800 after his nephew (who was serving on his ship) died while Tripp was apparently drunk in command. George retired to Staveley, Yorkshire, where his elder brother John (1745–1814) was rector, and became a prosperous farmer.

Fanny Tripp's younger siblings were Emma Mary (1834–1835), Reverend Robert Henry (1835–1904), Reverend George (1837–1896), John Chilcott (1838–1839), Charles Upton



◀ Fanny Tripp, ca 1860s. Courtesy Bridget Thurgate

(1841–1912), William Blomefield (1843–1919, who became a civil engineer) and Emma Mary (the second, 1845–1902). William Blomefield Tripp's son, Noel Francis (1888–1975) became a vicar with an interest in natural history, including bryophytes. He ended his clerical career at Diddlebury in south Shropshire (1945–1958), after which he retired to Ludlow, and joined the BBS in 1967. Ludlow Museum has about 500 microscope slides of bryophytes that he prepared.

Fanny did not marry, and lived with her parents as a girl and young woman. In 1841, 1851, 1861 and 1871 they were at Altarnun, 8 miles southwest of Launceston in Cornwall. Her maternal grandmother, Frances, left a considerable estate to Fanny, and she took up numerous worthy causes, contributing to and raising funds for them. For example, after taking up the cause of Italian Unification, she organized nurses and went out with them to Italy to nurse Garibaldi's troops. This was a cause in common with the author Isabella Fyvie Mayo, who recalled that '*Miss Tripp was a small woman – not one of those who shine in society, though she spoke with much precision and good sense ... When in London, Miss Tripp boarded with a lady who at that time kept a fashionable school in Kensington.*' (In *Recollections*

*of What I Saw, What I Lived Through, and What I Learned, During More Than Fifty Years of Social and Literary Experience*, pp. 178–180; John Murray, 1910.)

Fanny also contributed to and raised funds for benevolent causes, and did a lot of work with the Kyrle Society, which Miranda Hill had founded in order to improve housing for the working class; for example, they provided fresh flowers for workhouses and hospital wards, and were also involved with William Morris and the National Trust in its early days.

Apart from her popular book on mosses, Fanny Tripp also wrote books for children.

Her father having died in 1880, Fanny was at 3 Ovington Square, London, at the time of the 1881 Census Return, not far from where Margaret Plues (who also wrote popular natural history books) lived. Fanny became deaf in later years, and used an ear-trumpet with great dignity, but little advantage. This saddened her, for she missed all the country sounds, and also music, which was important to the Tripps. Her father had been a skilled cellist, and singing was important to everyone at the vicarage. Fanny also became rather overweight, and died of a heart attack on 26 December 1890 at 152 Oakley Street, Chelsea, aged 58.

### Acknowledgements

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