



◀Fig. 1. Arthur William Weyman. Photo courtesy of Evelyn Weyman.

Arthur Weyman (1860–1935)

Jim and **Mark Lawley** describe the life of a little-known bryologist

In Britain, the rare moss *Cinclidotus riparius* can only be found on one short stretch of the River Teme, growing on rock and stone in the river's flood-zone. It was discovered there, new to Britain in 1890, by Arthur Weyman, a solicitor of Ludlow. *Cinclidotus riparius* (English name: Fountain Lattice Moss) is one of the rarest of the British Isles' 750 or so mosses, one of very few that are known only from one place.

Arthur William Weyman (Fig. 1) was 30 years old when he found *Cinclidotus riparius*. He was born in Ludlow in 1860, the youngest of three sons of a successful solicitor. The eldest brother, Henry, was a solicitor, coroner, local historian and mayor of Ludlow. The middle brother, Stanley achieved great fame and wealth as a novelist.

Stanley, the novelist, and Arthur, who found the rare moss, shared a love of the outdoors, and in November and December 1885 the brothers

explored the Pyrenees together. Stanley's account (Weyman, 1893) reveals how they relished the wonder and beauty of what they saw: "... the slope was thickly wooded and above it rose the stupendous beauty of the Pic du Midi. The air was crisp, the rays of the sun fell warmly. At noon we lay on our backs in huge contentment, and ate and drank and gave the bones to the great dog which had come with us from the inn ... We looked at the hill-locked valley with its smiling pastoral scene, and then at the glittering heights that seemed to pierce the sky; and words failed us ..."

Arthur's love of plants is also made very clear: he "marvelled at the luxuriance of the vegetation at heights rare in England the cliff-faces, clothed in rich shades of brown and purple and green, in ferns and box and a hundred clinging plants ..."

The brothers' love of nature and the outdoors

caused them to wander where few others would go. On one occasion they found themselves on a “ ... frozen slope, from which a single slip would precipitate us into the giddy depth a sheer thousand feet below us; and in an evil moment we crawled above it, and clinging to the hillside ... tried to pass round the corner. Well, the fifteen minutes which followed were bad. We failed to get round. We became crag fast with the gulf yawning for us it seemed. A few moments of fear – then a struggle made with shaking limbs and shrinking eyes and we were safe again and down in the road from which we started. Down and safe, but still speechless and somewhat shaken, until a certain flask had been drained ...”

After three weeks exploring the Pyrenees, Arthur and Stanley arrived at the little village of Aramits in France. An over-zealous local Brigadier saw the brothers pointing to places of interest, observed their shabby walking clothes, heard them speaking a foreign language, concluded, quite erroneously, that they must be German spies and promptly arrested them. “We were taken, [this is Stanley’s account (1886)] it then being 6 p.m., to two cells, which formed a wretched outhouse adjoining the gendarmerie ... They were such places as would scarcely be used in England for dogs.

“A quarter of an hour later our doors were opened, and I was taken to my brother’s cell. One gendarme held a smoky, guttering candle: three others stood partly within, and partly without the doorway, around which a dozen women and children clustered, peeping at us. Our dinner, some greasy soup, with bits of bread and cabbage floating in it, was produced: we had only one basin, but, thank heaven, a spoon apiece: a lump of bread, and a bottle of thin sour wine completed the meal. Anxious not to seem cast down, we fell upon the horrid mess with apparent appetite, at intervals drinking toasts

and bantering the police; and laughing very loudly at our own jokes. ‘Vive la Republique!’ to which a glance round our cell gave point, was well received; so was ‘Le Beau Sexe’ but it was reserved for our third toast, ‘Madame la femme de M. le Brigadier!’ to bring down the house, the vicious emphasis which we threw into our enemy’s name sending his subordinates into a frenzy of delight. The more they laughed, and the most taciturn face wore a grin, the more fluent grew our French, and the wilder our folly; and when we wound up by begging them to bring our hot water at eight and to see that our beds were well aired and our boots well varnished ... When this was done, and we were back in our cells, we had at least the satisfaction of feeling that our entertainment had been as successful as unique; and that M. le Brigadier’s importance had not gained much at our hands.

“Nevertheless, in these two cells we were severally locked up for thirteen hours ... without light, fire, or any warming apparatus. It was freezing many degrees ...” The next day Arthur and Stanley were force-marched some 9 miles to Oloron: “... during the greater part of the journey [we] had to carry our baggage, the gendarmes threatening that if we did not do so they would handcuff us and compel us to perform the journey in that fashion. This threat they enforced by preparing the chains and handcuffs. They had before in our presence ostentatiously loaded their revolvers. In this way we were conducted, a gendarme on either side of us, through several villages and a great part of the town of Oloron in the presence of some hundreds of people.”

Fortunately the British Vice-consul soon intervened to secure their release. In a subsequent letter to the Foreign Office, Stanley pointed out that Arthur’s “health was so much shaken by the exposure and fatigue that for that reason

alone he was compelled to return prematurely to England”.

Once safely home in Ludlow, Arthur resumed work as a solicitor in the family firm. In 1888 when he was 28 he married a vicar’s daughter. Their first child, a son, was born in 1889 and the second, a daughter, in 1892. Yet Arthur, as we have seen, was an out-of-doors man and perhaps he chafed a little at his new-found obligations. His longing for the outdoors, the broad acres, the farms and water-mills, the coverts and dingles, the wide-flung hillside, and his willingness to venture where few others dare had to find expression somehow. It was his love of the outdoors and his keen powers of observation which led to Arthur’s arrest in France. In 1890 it was a decision to venture into the River Teme and those same powers of observation that enabled him to find the moss *Cinclidotus riparius* (Fig. 2).

Again and again, we find that the most significant discoveries are made by lone naturalists, self-starters, going off on their own and looking purposefully. It would have been only a short walk down the hill from Weyman’s dusty law offices to the river on that summer’s day in 1890, but while everyone else stayed on the riverside path or strolled across the bridge that spans the river, Arthur Weyman went down to the water’s edge, waded in and looked.

A year later, in 1891, Weyman wrote up his discovery in the *Journal of Botany* as “A new British Moss. — Last summer *Cinclidotus riparius* W. Arn. was found by me in the River Teme, near Ludlow, Shropshire ... this is the first record ... for Great Britain....”

But alas! The road to bryological stardom can be long and paved with difficulties. In 1896, in the first edition of his *Student’s Handbook of British Mosses*, Dixon doubted the distinctness of *Cinclidotus riparius*. “I have examined specimens

gathered by Mr Weyman in the R. Teme, and I feel considerable doubt whether this is not a form of the next species [*C. fontinaloides*], with shorter, rather broader leaves than usual, and I find that Mr. Bagnall, to whom the English specimens were first submitted, is now inclined towards the same view. The cells in *C. riparius* are quite smooth, while those of the plant in question are, frequently at least, distinctly though shortly papillose, exactly as in *C. fontinaloides*; and the upper cells have the walls somewhat incrassate as in that species, although it may be doubted whether this is, in the case of the two species in question, a safe distinction. Taking into account the fact that *C. fontinaloides* is a variable moss, and sometimes at least approaches very near to the habit and structure of Mr. Weyman’s plant, I think it is much more probable that the latter belongs to that species, rather than to *C. riparius*.” By the 3rd edition in 1924 his opinion had hardened: “*Cinclidotus riparius*, which has been included in our Moss-flora, must be expunged. All the specimens so named have proved to be forms of *C. fontinaloides* with shorter, broader leaves than usual.”

▽Fig. 2. *Cinclidotus riparius*. Des Callaghan.



Later W.E. Nicholson examined plants collected from the River Teme (Nicholson, 1932) and concluded that *C. riparius* did after all occur there. He wrote that Dixon agreed with this view, although E.F. Warburg (1958) points out that “an examination of the correspondence on the subject in the Cambridge University Herbarium suggests, however, that Dixon’s concurrence was not as whole-hearted as one is led to think from Nicholson’s paper”. Indeed, Warburg (1958) agreed with Dixon (1904) that “it would be unsafe to found an entirely new record of *C. riparius* on barren plants alone.” So when Arthur died in 1935, his great discovery was no longer recognised in print. Dixon’s view indeed prevailed until the end of the 20th century when Tom Blockeel (1998) concluded that Weyman had been right all along, enabling Arthur to rest easy in his grave at last.

Arthur Weyman was no one-moss wonder, and seems to have been at the height of his powers in the early 1890s. He is also credited with first discovering the moss *Bryum weigelii* on the Long Mynd in 1893. And, just as you can still find *Cinclidotus riparius* in the River Teme if you know where to look, so you can still find *Bryum weigelii* living on the Mynd in a few particularly wet places. But be careful when you go to look for this moss! You risk sinking through a treacherous, floating carpet of vegetation into water hidden beneath.

So here again, on the Long Mynd we note Arthur Weyman’s penchant for wandering away from the beaten track towards less safe places, as well as his keen powers of observation when he reached them. The French police had a point, perhaps: Arthur had the makings of a good spy. He was certainly a first class moss-hunter.

At some point around the turn of the century, Arthur Weyman seemed to lose interest in mosses. In 1896, the first year of the newly

formed Moss Exchange Club’s existence, he contributed 82 mosses that he’d collected to the exchange of specimens between members. But then Dixon (1896) poured cold water in print on his best find, and in no subsequent year did he contribute so much as a single specimen to the exchange, so presumably he’d given up collecting, and by 1908 he had left the Moss Exchange Club altogether. He seems instead to have become a pillar of the local establishment, holding numerous public offices in Ludlow, and in 1915 was president of the town’s golf club.

Arthur died in December 1935, aged 75. His obituary in the *Ludlow Advertiser* (Friday 3 January 1936, p. 3) states that “Ludlow has lost a true friend who worked ‘behind the scenes’ very largely, by the death of Mr Arthur William Weyman, of Broad Street, Ludlow, who passed away on Thursday of last week at the age of 75 years. He was blessed with a happy and generous disposition and was always willing to assist anything that would advance the borough.

“A member of a distinguished Ludlow family, although actively associated with many local organizations, [he] did not quite achieve the fame which has fallen to his brothers. The eldest, Mr Henry T. Weyman, who can be styled “Ludlow’s Grand Old Man”, has the proud distinction of being senior coroner in Great Britain, for over 60 years ago he was appointed to that office by public vote.

“The third brother, the late Mr Stanley Weyman, is probably the most widely known member of the family, for it was he who wrote those historical novels which have been famous throughout the world. By the reason of those works it can be said that the name of Weyman will live as long as there are archives of Ludlow, and, indeed, as long as good literature is in demand by the English-speaking races.

“Among Mr Arthur Weyman’s former public

offices were the following: Member of the Ludlow Charity Trustees; governor of Ludlow Grammar School; supt. registrar for the Ludlow district; clerk to the old Ludlow Highway Board; clerk to the Ludlow Rural District Council; clerk to the old Ludlow Guardians; clerk to the Ludlow and Church Stretton Board of Guardians; registrar of Ludlow County Court; and clerk to the Ludlow Assessment Committee. Ill health caused his resignation from these offices some years ago, as a result of a serious illness from which he never recovered. He had also filled the office of churchwarden at Ludlow Parish Church.

“In common with the whole of the family, [the] deceased was a staunch supporter of the Conservative cause, and worked hard in the interest of the party when he was able. An idea of his fidelity to their ideals can be obtained from the fact that he cast his vote at the last General Election, although he was so weak that he had to be carried up the steps to the Town Hall. On that occasion he expressed much pleasure at seeing familiar faces once again.”

There’s no mention in this obituary of Arthur’s prowess as a naturalist. It’s poignant to think that Arthur himself died without knowing how significant his discovery really was (he was presumably unaware of Nicholson’s re-evaluation of the *Cinclidotus* from the River Teme, since he has long since left the Moss Exchange Club).

But if the obituary is a little underwhelming (“[he] did not quite achieve the fame which has fallen to his brothers”), there are good reasons for thinking that Arthur is celebrated as Clement, the hero of Stanley Weyman’s masterpiece, *Ovington’s Bank* (1922): “[he] could not observe a rare flower without wondering why it grew in that position.”

As we research the bygone naturalists who discovered our islands’ wildlife, it becomes clear that Arthur Weyman is a recognisable type.

Many of the important discoveries have been made by individuals working alone, venturing away from the beaten track, looking closely ... Their names are often forgotten but they made important contributions, and their stories should not be forgotten ...

Notes on sources

Ovington’s Bank by Stanley Weyman was reprinted by Merlin Unwin Books in 2018 with an appendix by Jim Lawley. You can read more about Arthur Weyman, his discoveries and his family in Mark Lawley’s *Wildlife in the Marches* (2015) published by Marches Publications. This book also contains valuable genealogical information about the Weyman family.

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