

## ALBERT WILSON (1862-1949)

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This is one in a series of articles about prominent British and Irish field-bryologists of the past. The author 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 on-line at <http://britishbryologicalsociety.org.uk/>

### *Bryological career*

Albert Wilson first became interested in cryptogams after meeting James Alfred Wheldon (both men were chemists as well as keen amateur botanists) in 1898, and joined the Moss Exchange Club in 1908. He also joined the Lichen Exchange Club at that time, but the lichen club folded after five years.

Wilson became knowledgeable about Yorkshire's bryoflora while living in that county, and later acquired similar or greater knowledge of the bryofloras of Lancashire and Westmorland.

Wilson distributed mosses for the newly formed British Bryological Society in 1923-4, and for some years kept the Society's account of vice-county records, as well as contributing over 2,500 packets of his own to the annual exchanges.

He attended few meetings of the BBS during the last 20 years of his life because of increasing deafness, and declined the offer of vice-presidency for the same reason.

His herbarium was presented to York Museum, with further plants at Merseyside Museums, the Department of Botany at Edinburgh, Manchester Museum, Cardiff, Oxford and Ulster. The Natural History Museum in London has some of his correspondence.

### *Family background and biography*

Albert Wilson was born on October 12<sup>th</sup> 1862, at Calder Mount, Garstang, Lancashire, the third child of four born to Charles Wilson (1813/4-1900) and Susanna (*née* Jesper, 1828/9-1916).

The Wilsons were Quakers, and Albert's great-grandfather Thomas Wilson (1741-1788) had been a woollen-manufacturer at Thornton, Yorkshire. His grandson Charles (Albert's father) was born at Thornton, and became a clothier/merchant tailor.

The Jespers, who were also Quakers, were from Essex, Susanna being born at Purleigh, near Maldon, a daughter of John Jesper (1797-1843) and Sarah (*née* Levitt). A Samuel Jesper, who was born at Macclesfield, Cheshire, married Charles's sister, Susannah. The Wilsons often had Jespers from Purleigh staying with them at Calder Mount.

Calder Mount was a spacious house about a mile from Garstang, with a large garden containing a vinery, greenhouses, fernery and orchard. Both Charles and Susanna were interested in plants. Charles owned a telescope, and his sons became interested in science, meteorology and horticulture. Indeed, Albert kept daily records of temperature and rainfall, and sent in records over a period of 40 years.

Albert first became interested in plants at the age of thirteen, when he was at Stramongate School for Quakers, Kendal, where he began to collect and press flowering plants, ferns, and a few mosses for his herbarium, but not liverworts or lichens. From the age of 15, he spent a year at The Woodlands school at Hitchin, Hertfordshire, where countryside over chalk gave him his first experience of calcicoles.

In the following year, Albert became apprenticed to Harrison, Parkinson & Co., pharmaceutical chemists at Bradford, Yorkshire, and had little time for botany during the next four years. However, he did join the Botanical Record Club in 1882.

In 1883 he went to London to study for his pharmaceutical examinations, qualified in 1884, and returned to Bradford as an assistant pharmacist. Later he became a partner in the firm to which he had been apprenticed.

Albert became friendly with John B. Foggitt (born 1861/2), one of the botanical family of Foggitts who for many years had been chemists at Thirsk, Yorkshire. John Foggitt in turn became a pharmacist, and was living at Horton near Bradford in 1881, so may either have met Albert at that time, or later in London. Foggitt later lived at Southport and Kirkby Lonsdale, and sometimes botanised with Wilson.

Albert married Alice Mary Thorp (1861/2-1945) in 1890, and the following year they were living at 20 Merton Road, Bradford. In 1897 they moved out to Ilkley with their son Howard (born 1891/2), who became an optician in later life. Albert travelled to work in Bradford for the next 15 years, until he retired in 1912 at the age of 50.

Albert and his wife moved to Garstang in 1912, in order to help his elderly mother. After she died in 1916, they moved to Bentham, and then in 1918 to Havera Bank, Sedbergh, Westmorland. The country around Sedbergh offered plenty of opportunities for Wilson to indulge his interest in bryophytes, which had first been stimulated when he met another pharmacist, James Alfred Wheldon (1862-1924) in 1898. Wheldon was exploring the districts around his home at Liverpool for mosses, and Albert sent him gatherings for naming which he had collected in the remoter parts of west Lancashire. Over the next nine years, from 1898 to 1907, Wheldon and Wilson did the groundwork for their *Flora of West Lancashire* (1907), and during this period Wilson became serious about and competent in bryology.

After their *Flora* was published in 1907, Wheldon and Wilson continued their friendship, collecting vascular plants, lichens and bryophytes on holidays together, particularly in the Scottish Highlands, Westmorland, and the Isle of Man.

Wheldon died in 1924, and that year Wilson moved from Sedbergh to Ro Wen, near Conway, where he lived until 1946. He continued to record in Westmorland, the Lake District, and also explored the country around his home in North Wales, often in company with Arthur Augustine Dallman (1883-1963). In 1932 he started to prepare his *Flora of Westmorland* (1938), with his son Howard often driving him to locations in the family's car.

Albert's wife died in 1945, after which he went to live with his son at Pear Tree Cottage, Priest Hutton, near Carnforth, Lancashire, where he died in May 1949, aged 87.