

## DAVID LILLIE (1854-1940)

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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*

David Lillie explored north-east Scotland, searching for bryophytes far from his bryological contemporaries, and would have met other bryologists rarely if at all. He discovered *Barbilophozia atlantica*, *Lophozia gillmanii*, and *Tayloria tenuis* new to Britain, and *Phaeoceros laevis* new to Scotland. He also found *Dicranum elongatum* on Unst, Shetland in 1907, where it has not been seen since. Lillie was also knowledgeable about lichens. His herbarium of British plants is at Glasgow Museum, Kelvingrove, with additional British and foreign specimens at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh.

Lillie joined the Moss Exchange Club in 1899, and acted as distributor of gatherings to members in 1914 and 1918.

### *Family background and biography*

Lillie was born at Wick, Caithness on October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1854, the twelfth and youngest child of the Reverend William Lillie (1801-1875), minister of Wick Parish Church, and Isobella (or Isobel) (*née* Milne, c.1807-1858). William was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity by Aberdeen University in 1858, and remained minister at Wick until his death.

William was born on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1801, a son of John Lillie (c.1770-1836), farmer and joiner of Crossgight, New Deer, Aberdeenshire, and his first wife, Elizabeth (*née* Lendrum, 1771-1803 or 1808). The male line of Lillies has been traced back to William Lillie (born c.1650) of Auchnagatt, Aberdeenshire; he was David Lillie's great-great-great grandfather. John Lillie married Elizabeth Lendrum in Peterhead, and William was born either in Peterhead or in the village of New Pitsligo, Tyrie, Aberdeenshire. He was educated at New Pitsligo and then at King's College, Aberdeen University. After graduating M.A. in 1820, he became a schoolmaster at Ellon, Aberdeenshire in 1824,

where he met and married Isabella in 1831. Isabella Milne was a native of Ellon, where her father, Thomas Milne (1773-1857) was a farmer and merchant, trading in groceries and spirits.



**Reverend David Lillie.** Photograph courtesy of Reverend Alastair Gray, minister of Watten and Bower.

William and Isabella's first seven children were born at Ellon. Thereafter the family moved to Wick in 1844, where four younger children were born, and William became the first minister after the Disruption of the previous year. There, William further advanced his reputation as a man of probity, labouring in diverse communal affairs such as education, as well as those of his ministry. In 1858 the University of Aberdeen conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity, in recognition of his learning, ability, and services to the Church.

Of David's eleven elder siblings, William (1832-1852) became a medical student, but died of exposure in Greenland, Ann (1833-38) and Sophia (1835-36) died young, Thomas (1836-1873) died in San Francisco, John (1838-1878) was a land-surveyor at Elgin, Morayshire in 1861, and died in California, Alexander (1840-1875) graduated from Aberdeen University in 1859 and became a schoolmaster in London. James (1842-1891) became minister at Castle Douglas, Dumfriesshire and subsequently senior chaplain at St. Andrew's Church, Calcutta, dying at sea during a voyage back to Britain. James's son William (1873-1909) became a medical doctor and accompanied David on his botanising trip to the Shetlands in 1907. Robert Innes was the eldest sibling to be born at Wick (in 1845), and became a merchant in Honolulu, Hawaii, and died in San Francisco. Next youngest was George (1849-1929, who became an inspector for the poor at Lybster, and married Agnes Brown (c.1850-1914), daughter of George Brown, farmer of Watten, see below). Then came Mary Jane (Jean, 1851-1916, who married John Mowat, bank agent of Lybster, Caithness in 1870; their son James Dugald Lillie Mowat was killed in action in 1915), and Adamina (1851-52) who died in infancy. David's elder brother George was likely the person of that name who collected vascular plants in Caithness between the 1890s and 1920s.

David Lillie was educated at Pulteneydown Academy, Wick Parish School and Aberdeen University, where he graduated M.A. in 1874 and B.D. in 1877. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Aberdeen on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1892.

At the time of the 1871 Census, he was staying in Ellon with his maiden aunts Ann and Jane Milne. In 1881 he was a minister without charge and living at 25 Fife Street, Mortlach, Banffshire.

On November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1889 he married Frances Margaret Brown (1855-1931), the youngest child of George Brown (1808/9-1881), a farmer of Watten, and his wife Mary (*née* Purves, c. 1812). George and Mary both came from the Borders. George was christened at Norham, Northumberland, and was a native of Twizel, on the Northumberland side of the River Tweed. He moved to Caithness in about 1828, becoming a merchant at Stafford Place, Wick, in company with Thomas Purves senior, brother of his future bride. In 1835 George Brown took the tenancy of the farm of Mains of Watten, which he made one of the finest and best cultivated in Scotland. In 1851, George Brown was farming 865

acres, with the help of 46 labourers. He was well regarded as a breeder of sheep, and in later years was assisted by one of his sons, also George, who became well known for practical experiments in agriculture. George Brown senior was also a Justice of the Peace.

Mary Purves was born at Abbey St. Bathans, near Duns, Berwickshire. She may have been related to the noted preacher James Purves (1734-1795), who merits an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and whose uncle lived at Duns. George Lillie, David's elder brother, married Agnes Brown, Frances's elder sister.

David and Frances had five children, of whom the two eldest were born at Eday, Orkney, where David had become assistant minister in 1889. Helen (1890-1977) became a medical doctor (M.A., M.B., Ch.B.) and in 1925 married Professor John Garrett (1888-1948), Principal of Murray College, Sialkot, India (now in Pakistan), which had been established by the Church of Scotland in 1889.

David and Frances's second child was Isobel Milne (1892-1973) who graduated M.A. and B.Sc., became a schoolteacher in Bridlington, Yorkshire, followed by Mary Purves (1893-1995) who was born at Latheron, Caithness and also graduated M.A., going on to teach in Ullapool and Stornoway. She nursed David in his final years. Isobel and Mary were both teachers in Glasgow in 1950. David and Frances's fourth child Adziel (1894-1976) was born at Watten, where David had become minister in 1892 and was to remain in post for 46 years; she became a missionary in Africa, and was in India in 1940. Isobel, Mary and Adziel did not marry. 'Adziel' is presumably a variant of 'Adiel', for David's maternal grandmother (wife of Thomas Milne) was born Anne Adiel.

David and Frances's youngest child, William, was born at Watten in 1899. He was educated at the Miller Institute in Thurso, and then at Aberdeen University, where he graduated M.A. in 1921, and took a degree in Pedagogy at London in 1922. Later that year he joined his elder sister Helen at Murray College, Sialkot, India, where he was appointed Missionary Professor. He returned to Britain in order to be ordained priest at Glasgow in 1931, taking his degree of Bachelor of Divinity there in 1938. However, he did not return permanently from the Punjab until 1946, where he bryologised on holidays in the Himalayas with his colleague and brother-in-law John Garrett. William became Doctor of Divinity at Aberdeen in 1948, and lectured there in Biblical Studies until his retirement in 1969. He died at Aberdeen in 1980.

David Lillie retired from the ministry in November 1938, and moved to Swiney, Lybster, where he died on February 21<sup>st</sup>, 1940.

### *Acknowledgements*

I thank Robert Bain, Library Assistant at Wick Library for his kind assistance in providing information for this article, Reverend Alastair Gray of Watten for sending the

photograph of David Lillie, Stuart Lillie, David Long and Sandy Payne for information received, and Mark Pool for suggesting a line of enquiry.

*Bibliography*

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