

EDMUND FREDRIC WARBURG (1908-1966)

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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/>

Botanical career

Warburg first became interested in botany as a result of his parents' interest in plants, and was further stimulated by T. G. Tutin and fellow students at Cambridge, including Paul Richards and Eustace Jones.

He joined the British Bryological Society in 1945, and was elected president for 1962-3. He edited the third edition of the *Census Catalogue of British Mosses* (1963), and planned but did not produce a new British Moss Flora with A. C. Crundwell.

Warburg found the following bryophytes new to Britain: *Molendoa warburgii* (Outer Hebrides, 1946), *Schistidium atrofusum* and *Weissia controversa* var. *wimmeriana* in East Inverness-shire in 1951, *Syntrichia virescens* in Yorkshire (1958), *Platygyrium repens* in Oxfordshire in 1962 (with A. R. Perry), *Seligeria oelandica* in County Sligo, Ireland (1962) with A.C. Crundwell, and *Schistidium boreale* in Caenlochan Glen, Angus in 1964.

With A. R. Clapham and T. G. Tutin, Warburg co-authored *Flora of the British Isles* (1952, 2nd edition 1962), which was the first comprehensive vascular plant Flora of the British Isles for over seventy years, and remained a standard work of reference since publication. Warburg contributed much new material to this Flora, for example in the account of roses.

His plants are at the Natural History Museum in London, and in the university's herbarium at Oxford.

Family background and biography

Edmund Fredric Warburg was born in London on March 22nd 1908, the eldest of four sons of Sir Oscar Emanuel Warburg (1876-1937), O.B.E., a businessman and chairman of London County Council in 1925-6, and Catherine ('Kit') Widdrington (*née* Byrne,

1879-1951). Edmund's brothers were James Widdrington (1911-1986), Robert Oscar (1914-1965) and Thomas Raphael (1916-1987).

The Warburgs were German-Jews, and changed their surname in the 16th century from von Cassell to Warburg - Warburg being their new town of residence near Kassel (Cassel) in Hesse, central Germany. At that time, Jews in Germany were not permitted to use their second names, so were named after their place of residence. The Warburg's ancestor Simon von Cassel (died 1566), who had moved to Germany in 1559 was himself descended from the del Banco family of Venice, Italy. Anselmo del Banco (died 1531) was an Italian banker, Jewish money-lender and founder of the Jewish community in Venice, who became the most prominent Venetian Jew. He fled sectarian persecution in Italy, and settled in Germany.

The Warburg family has long been in finance, and includes other notable relatives such as the banking families of Moritz Warburg in Hamburg and New York, and S.G. Warburg in London. The publisher Fredric John Warburg (1898-1981, of Secker and Warburg, see *Dictionary of National Biography*) was a cousin of Edmund's. Relatives also included the systematist Otto Warburg (1859-1938) and the plant physiologist Otto Heinrich Warburg (1883-1970) who invented the Warburg manometer and was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1931 for his contributions to biochemistry.

Oscar's parents were Fredric Elias Warburg (1832-1899), a foreign export merchant, and Emma Jane (*née* Raphael, 1844-1925). Fredric Elias Warburg was born in Gothenburg, Sweden, a son of Samuel Warburg (1800-1881) and Emma (*née* Gluckstadt, 1809-1880). In 1881, Fredric and Emma lived in Hastings, Sussex.

Oscar Warburg was a senior wrangler at Cambridge, and put his mathematical abilities at the disposal of the Admiralty in the First World War, enabling them to chart the route of Zeppelins approaching London. He also used his understanding of the Stock Exchange to invest his family's money wisely.

Oscar was the first member of his family to marry outside the Jewish faith. His bride, Catherine Byrne was a daughter and third of nine children of Sir Edmund Widdrington Byrne (1844-1904), barrister, judge, and Member of Parliament for Walthamstow, Essex in the 1890s, and Henrietta Johnstone (*née* Gulland, 1850/1). Edmund Byrne was a son of Edmund Byrne (born 1820/1), solicitor, and Mary Elizabeth (*née* Cowell, 1819). Henrietta's parents were James Gulland (1803-1869) of Newton Farmhouse, Wemyss, Fife, and Lucy (*née* Perfect, 1814-1884). Catherine's siblings included Lucius, a barrister, Ted who died on the Somme, Doris who played hockey for England, Peggy a headmistress of Tunbridge Wells High School, Evan (a patent agent), Jean, headmistress of Redland High School, and the youngest, Nona. In 1881 the Byrnes lived at Upper Tootings, Ayncombe House, Streatham, Surrey.

In the 1911 Census Return, Edmund's father Oscar gave the family's address as 2, Craven Hill, west London, but most of Edmund Fredric's early years were spent at the family home, Boidier, on a large estate (including 100 acres of woodland) at Headley,

near Epsom in Surrey, where his father was a very keen gardener, and his mother kept all kinds of animals and plants, including an aviary of canaries and other exotic birds, dogs, ponies, and numerous visiting rabbits, hares and hedgehogs. Edmund and his mother spent many hours tagging the trees and other plants on the family's estate.

Edmund was educated at Marlborough College between 1921 and 1927, whence he went to Trinity College, Cambridge to study mathematics, but soon transferring to natural sciences, and studying with T.G. Tutin. After graduating, he studied for a Ph.D. in the developing field of cytotaxonomy, and then took a research fellowship at Trinity in 1933. Later in the 1930s he joined the staff of Bedford College, London, but in 1941 he started interpreting aerial photographs for the Royal Air Force at Medmenham in Buckinghamshire. In moments of leisure at Medmenham he began to study mosses, and went out looking for mosses with Paul Richards when on leave at Cambridge.

Warburg took up a post in the Department of Botany at Oxford as curator of the Druce herbarium in 1948, where he remained for the rest of his life, being appointed Reader in Plant Taxonomy and a Fellow of New College in 1964.

In 1948 Warburg married Primrose Churchman (*née* Barratt 1922), daughter of Gilbert Barratt (born 1882) and Phyllis Churchman of Melton, Suffolk, one of four daughters of the Churchman family of Melton that made cigarettes. Edmund and Primrose had two sons and a daughter, and lived at Yarnell's Hill, near Oxford.

Warburg died on June 9th 1966.

Bibliography

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Acknowledgements

I thank Jane Banfield, Hugh Biddell, Will and Alison Warburg, John H. Warburg and Nigel Garrett for information supplied and comments that they have made about this article.