

## Request for loan of specimens of the woodland form (‘var. *sylvaticum*’) of *Ctenidium molluscum*

I am writing an account of the woodland form (var. ‘*sylvaticum*’) of *Ctenidium molluscum*, and would like to see material from as many places as possible in order to prepare a distribution map. Examination of material is also necessary for the preparation of a vice-county list. I would, therefore, be most grateful for the loan

of any specimens that BBS members might have. I have only seen one non-British specimen (from Spain), so any such would also be welcome.

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## Bygone Bryologists

This is the first article in a series about prominent British and Irish field-bryologists of the past. The authors would be very pleased to learn of any information that supplements its content.

A more general and at present unfinished *Social and biographical history of British and Irish field-bryologists* is available on-line at <http://ralph.cs.cf.ac.uk/HOB/HOBBintro.htm>.

### Henry Herbert Knight (1862-1944)

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#### Summary of bryological career

Henry Herbert Knight (see Figure 1) was eminent among an unprecedentedly large cohort of field-bryologists born early in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and achieving adulthood by the end of that century. They were sufficiently numerous and enthusiastic to make foundation of the Moss Exchange Club (MEC) feasible in 1896.

Knight’s expertise in identifying bryophytes attracted such respect from his peers that he

became the MEC’s distributor of mosses in 1909-10. In 1911 he became referee for hepatics, and held that position until 1933, when deteriorating eyesight obliged him to resign. In addition, he acted as excursion secretary for the British Bryological Society (founded in 1923 to succeed the MEC) in 1927, 1930 and 1936 (Graham, 2002), and became President in 1933.

Knight found no bryophytes new to science, but compiled highly regarded regional bryofloras for Carmarthenshire and Gloucestershire.

## Family background

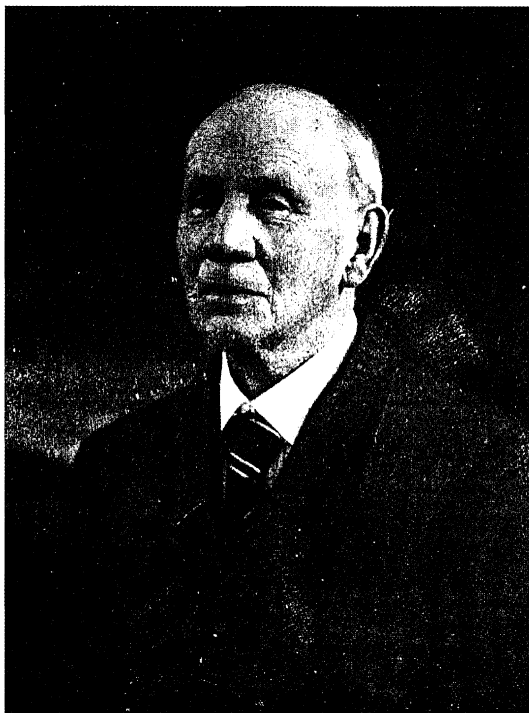


Figure 1. Photograph of H.H. Knight, from Price (1945).

On his father's side, H.H. Knight came of a family of priests that had long been based in Northamptonshire.

The Reverend Joseph Knight (1747-1814) was curate and rector of Kettering for 40 years, vicar of Geddington with Newton, and sometime chaplain to the Duke of Buccleugh and Queensberry. Joseph's brother, William (died 1816), owned and farmed land at Kettering, and William's son Titus shared his name with Titus Knight (1719-1793), who was a prominent independent minister at Halifax in Yorkshire. Titus Knight of Halifax worked as a collier in the Shebden mines for twenty years from the age of seven, during which time he is said to have learnt Greek, Latin, Hebrew and classical history. He became a Methodist preacher at the instigation of his friend John Wesley, but Calvinist leanings caused him to turn independent and deliver sermons at the

Tabernacle in London. He returned to Halifax where, having acquired a reputation, Square Chapel was built for him. Titus wrote a poem, *Hbadash Hamischcan*, in response to criticism of the expense of building the new chapel. His son, Reverend Samuel Knight (1759-1822), a fellow of Magdalene College, Cambridge, and first minister of Holy Trinity Church in Halifax, published popular devotional manuals. William Knight mentioned Samuel in his will.

Also with Kettering connections, Joseph J. Knight, President of Albion College, South Hackney, a noted figure in London's East End, devoted much of his life to work among the slums and poor. He advocated temperance, and was a close friend and colleague of General William Booth of the Salvation Army. Charles Dickens caricatured him as Anthony Hum in *Pickwick Papers*.

Henry Herbert Knight's paternal grandfather, Joseph, took holy orders, and Joseph's son, Henry John (1827-1900), was born in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Henry John in his turn entered the priesthood, and held the living of Abberton and Flyford Flavell in Worcestershire from 1862 until 1896. He probably chose to live and work in Worcestershire because his wife's family came from that region. He married Frances Elizabeth Allen (1834-1931) at Malvern Link in 1860. She was the eldest daughter of John Allen, gentleman (died 1871), whose family had farmed country around Malvern for generations, and of Susannah (*née* Perrins, *ca* 1804). Susannah was probably related to William Perrins (1793-1867), who co-invented, and made a fortune from, Lea and Perrins' Worcester sauce.

## Biography

H.H. Knight was born in 1862 at Sutton Maddock, between Bridgnorth and Telford in Shropshire, where his father held a curacy early in his clerical career, but shortly afterwards the family moved to Worcestershire. He went to Rossall's School in Lancashire (like his elder

brother) from 1874 to 1881, and thence to Cambridge. He graduated with distinction in mathematics, and took up a teaching post at Llandovery College in Carmarthenshire in 1887, where he taught for 20 years.

There his passion for botany became evident, and he was the first to study in depth the bryoflora of south Wales, particularly his adopted county of Carmarthenshire, not only establishing which species were common and widespread in the region, but also finding many local and rare plants. His *Manuscript catalogue of Welsh bryophytes*, completed in 1907 and concerned primarily with Carmarthenshire, was eventually published posthumously 40 years later (Wade, 1948, 1949).

Knight never married, and in 1907 he retired at the age of 45 and went to live with his mother, by then widowed and living in Cheltenham near her sister's family. Carmarthenshire's loss was Gloucestershire's gain, as Knight, with all the time in the world, began a thorough botanical exploration of his new county and surrounding districts that continued until his declining years. He explored by bicycle, unhurriedly familiarising himself with individual plants in places where he knew them to grow, watching them flourish or decline as the years passed by. By this old-fashioned method, Knight acquired an unsurpassed knowledge of Gloucestershire's plants. How differently we botanise today, rushing from one grid square to another in our insatiable urge for compiling spotty maps!

Knight had joined the Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club in 1909, and was one of the group of members that resurrected work on a projected *Flora of Gloucestershire*. He published annual lists in the *Proceedings of the Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club*, summarising his bryological findings in papers on mosses (Knight, 1914) and hepatics (Knight, 1920), and the *Flora of Gloucestershire* (Riddelsford, Hedley & Price, 1948) owes much of its cryptogamic content to Knight. He also contributed substantially to elucidating the

bryoflora of the Isle of Wight, which he explored when visiting his brother, who went to live in Ryde after retiring from his teaching post at Lancing College in Sussex.

Knight's relaxed life-style in retirement enabled him to travel more widely, and in later years he acquired a motor car, which he put to good use in transporting other members of the BBS to and from meetings. He accompanied his friend W.E. Nicholson on holidays to Switzerland in 1913, and later to France, Norway and northern Italy. In Sutherland in 1921 they discovered *Anastrophyllum joergensenii* new to Britain. While Nicholson tended to concentrate on liverworts, Knight was equally interested in mosses, lichens and vascular plants, particularly ferns and brambles (Graham, 2002).

By the mid 1930s and with the onset of old age, Knight had become less active in field work. As a member of the Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club's editorial sub-committee he concentrated on writing and editing text for the impending *Flora of Gloucestershire*. He presented his herbarium of Gloucestershire bryophytes (870 mosses and 190 liverworts) to Cheltenham Museum, and other material that he collected lies in the National Museum and Gallery of Wales in Cardiff, the County Museum at Warwick, and the School of Plant Sciences at Cambridge (Graham, 2002).

Knight died on 4 January 1944, when travel was difficult and folk had much else to concern and distract them, so that representatives of the BBS were unable to attend his funeral in Cheltenham – an additional sadness among friends during the dark and austere days of the Second World War.

Although an excellent all-round botanist with a special knowledge of groups such as ferns and brambles, Knight will be best remembered (to quote his friend W.R. Price) as 'enjoying more than a local reputation as a cryptogamic botanist'. Also, with a shy and retiring

disposition, it is easy to underestimate his personal and teaching contributions to British natural history.

## References

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# Threatened bryophytes

## *Acaulon triquetrum*

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### Status

Endangered (Church *et al.*, 2001); Wildlife & Countryside Act Schedule 8.

Status in Europe: Not threatened.

### Description

*Acaulon triquetrum* (or 'triangular pygmy-moss', for those who prefer to use the English name) is a minute, bud-like, green or reddish-brown moss growing up to 1.5 mm tall, with the capsule enclosed by the upper leaves (see Figure 1). It differs from the more frequent (though still rather rare) *A. muticum* in the keeled upper leaves, which give the plant a distinctly triangular appearance from above, and the curved seta (Church *et al.*, 2001). The two species have quite a different habitat and 'jizz'.

### Ecology

*A. triquetrum* is a winter annual, growing on bare, usually calcareous, soil close to the sea, often on

south-facing slopes and especially on cliff tops, particularly near the edge, where the open vegetation is maintained by soil slippage. It is also found near tracks and on turf-cutting scars. It was reported from mud banks at one of its former sites. Sporophytes are produced in abundance in winter and early spring (Church *et al.*, 2001).



**Figure 1.** *Acaulon triquetrum* on St Catherine's Down, Isle of Wight, 2002. Photo: Ron Porley.