

## HUGH DAVIES (1739-1821)

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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*

Davies's most important publication is *Welsh Botany* (1813), the first part of which is the first detailed flora of a Welsh county (Anglesey), listing 166 mosses and 28 liverworts for Anglesey. Davies was in the bryological vanguard of contemporary botanists, and seems to have taken interest in bryophytes from about 1790 onwards. He found, for example, the moss *Glyphomitrium daviesii* (which is named after him) at Carreg Onnan and Llanfihangel Dinsylwi near Bwrdd Arthur in 1790 and on Snowdon a few years later. Other mosses he found include *Acaulon muticum* from Tywyn Aberffraw, *Antitrichia curtispindula* on Red Hill, Beaumaris (Anglesey), *Hennediella heimii* at Penmon on Anglesey, *Pterygoneurum ovatum* near Llangoed and Friary and Lleiniog on Anglesey, *Scleropodium tourettii* at Llansadwrn, as well as the liverworts *Riccia canaliculata* at Llyn Traffwll on Anglesey, and *Targionia hypophylla* at Tyfry, Rhoscefnhir, Anglesey.

Davies was a friend of Thomas Pennant (1726-1798), corresponding with him at least as early as his time at Lan-faes and Penmon in the later 1760s and early 1770s, and toured the Isle of Man with him in 1774, returning there alone the following year. He provided information about the natural history of North Wales for publications by Pennant, as well as William Hudson's *Flora Anglica* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1788), Smith and Sowerby's *English Botany* (1790-1814), and Turner and Dillwyn's *The Botanist's Guide through England and Wales* (1805).

Davies's herbarium is at the Natural History Museum in London, and the National Museum and Gallery of Wales, Cardiff has 192 of his specimens (of which 154 are bryophytes) collected between 1790 and 1809. The National Library of Wales has his manuscripts, with some papers at the University College Library at Bangor. Warwickshire County Record Office, Priory Park, Cape Road, Warwick has two of Davies's letters and an engraving of a shark (from a drawing by Davies) in material relating to Thomas Pennant (refs: CR2017/TP20/1, CR2017/TP212/1, and CR2017/TP738/13).

### *Family background and biography*

Hugh Davies was born at Llandyfrydog, Anglesey on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1739, the youngest of six children of the Reverend Lewis Davies (died 1749), rector, and his wife Mary (*née* Knight). Lewis Davies became rector of Llandyfrydog in February 1722/3. Mary was a daughter of Joshua Knight (1651/3-1694/5) of Caernarfon and Jane (*née* Owen, daughter of Hugh Owen of Gilfach, Penmorfa, Caernarfonshire, and Jane (*née* Glynn). Hugh Owen was descended from Einion Ap Adda of Cefungoed/Cefumelgoed. Jane Glynn was descended from Cilmin Droed-Dhu of Lleuar, Clynnog, who died some time after 819 A.D.



**Reverend Hugh Davies**

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Hugh had several older siblings: John (born about 1724), Robert (born 1728), Ann (born 1730), Lewis (born 1731), and Margaret (born about 1734). Of these, only Ann and Margaret survived childhood. Ann married Owen Owen (1721/2-1760) in 1753; one of their sons - also Owen Owen (1754-1833) – became a surgeon in Beaumaris, having followed Ann and Hugh's maternal uncle, Thomas Knight (1685/6-1760, physician of

Caernarfon) into the medical profession. Margaret married John Higgon, who came from Pembrokeshire. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Higgons were mainly associated with Spittle and Haverfordwest, but a branch had settled at Treddafydd Ucha in the parish of Llanychlwydog in the upper Gwaun valley. A John Higgon became officer of excise at Beaumaris, and later moved to Caernarfon. This brought the Higgon family into contact with the Prichards of Dinam Hall, the Knights of Caernarfon, and the Davies family of Llandyfydog, Anglesey. Hugh Davies's family background of rectors, physicians and customs officers indicates that he came from a comfortably placed stratum of the middle class.

Lewis Davies died when Hugh was ten years old, but Hugh nevertheless completed his education at the free grammar school in Beaumaris, and then at Oxford (1757-1762). He took holy orders, being ordained deacon in 1763 while still at Oxford, and priest in 1764 by the Bishop of Bangor. He was appointed curate to Llangefni with Tregaian in April 1763, and his name appears in registers at Llangefni until July 1766.

He worked on Anglesey from 1763 until 1787: as curate at Llangefni (1763-66), Llanfaes and Penmaen (or Penmon, 1766-75), and Penymynydd (1775-78). While at Llanfaes and Penmaen he also held the post of usher (from 1764) at his old school in Beaumaris. In September 1778 he was inducted as rector of Llandegfan with Beaumaris, a living that was in the gift of Lord Bulkeley.

About 1787-9 he left Anglesey in order to take up his longest-lasting post as rector of Aber, Caernarvonshire. He was inducted to this living (which was also in the gift of Lord Bulkeley) in November 1787, and was also chaplain to Lord Bulkeley.

Davies lived in Beaumaris for some years during his incumbency at Aber, and left the cure of souls in his parish to a succession of curates. This enabled him to indulge his increasing preoccupation with natural history, assisting Pennant, Hudson, Sir James Edward Smith and Sowerby with their work. In 1793 he read a paper on 'Four British Lichens' to the Linnaean Society in London, followed by further papers in 1808 and 1811.

Davies seems to have either been a hypochondriac or afflicted with an unending succession of illnesses – from haemorrhoids to sciatica - in his middle and late ages. In his 60s, for example, his afflictions interfered with his ability to “wander a little in search of mosses and grasses”, and in closing a letter to a friend in which he complained of numbness and paroxysms in his leg, he wrote that “I suspect, my dear Sir, that if I go on at this rate, you will have cause to wish my upper extremities in the same state as my lower.” Davies left Aber in about 1801 on account of a nervous condition, but did not resign his benefice there until 1816. He died on February 16<sup>th</sup> 1821, aged 81, and was buried in the churchyard at Beaumaris.

Davies's will reveals his meticulous and careful character, but he was also a kindly and thoughtful bachelor. He bequeathed £300 to his nephew William Biggin, with one third of the rest of his estate going to the Reverend Richard Prichard of Dinam, Anglesey and

his wife Ann, another third to his nephew Owen Owen, surgeon of Beaumaris, and the remaining third to be administered by Owen for his sister Jane Owen.

#### *Acknowledgement*

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#### *Bibliography*

Owen, T.J., (1961). 'Hugh Davies: The Anglesey Botanist.' *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society and Field Club*, pages 39-52.