

JAMES NEEDHAM (1849-1913)

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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

Needham took up botany in 1885, in his mid-thirties, following a ramble to Hardcastle Crags with the Hebden Bridge Cooperative Society. In 1889 he met Charles Crossland (1844-1916), a master-butcher of Bull Green, Halifax, who introduced him to mosses and fungi, and the two men often accompanied each other on excursions. Needham became an accomplished mycologist, and contributed many records to W.B. Crump and C. Crossland's *Flora of the Parish of Halifax* (1904). Needham also discovered the liverwort *Jubula hutchinsiae* in Hebden Valley near Hardcastle Crags in 1896.

He often assisted other naturalists, one of whom was so grateful that he gave Needham a microscope "as a memento of a pleasant day spent ... under your leadership..." Tom Blockeel recounts (see Bibliography, below) that Needham gained admiration and respect in local circles for his botanical expertise.... Needham's "house was a store of botanical specimens, the walls being closely hung round with framed, mounted mosses.... On the other hand, Needham often had to tolerate a lot of leg-pulling from his workmates and the local farmers whose land he searched", with one farmer describing his eccentric conduct in searching one pasture for the fungus *Clavaria* as "babby wark". William Nowell wrote that "James Needham made a notable contribution to our knowledge of the flora of the district, including mosses and fungi, to such extremes that a farmer once described him as "looking for summat as he we'nt know he's fun till he gets it whom and puts it under t' microscope."

His herbarium is at the Bankside Museum in Halifax, with 95 additional plants at Bolton Museum. Leeds Museum Resource Centre has many of Needham's letters and manuscripts, including the record book for bryophytes and fungi of the natural history section of the Hebden Bridge Literary and Scientific Society, for which Needham was recorder between 1907 and 1911 (catalogue ref: LEEDM.C.1990.1). Hebden Bridge Local History Society also has memorabilia relating to Needham.

Family background and biography

James Needham was born at Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire on March 19th 1849, the eldest child of ten born to Thomas Needham (1829-1885), an iron moulder, and Mary (*née* Greenwood, 1830/1). Thomas was a son of John Needham (born c. 1801-6), also a moulder, and Betty (*née* Crabtree, c.1805/6).

Families working in the textile industries of northern England in the early and middle 19th century were themselves close-knit, and at the time of the 1851 Census Return, Thomas and Mary Needham lived next door to John Needham who had three younger members of the Crabtree clan with him.

James's siblings were Hannah (born 1850), Martha (1854), Betty (1856), Mary Elizabeth (1859-1890), Charlotte Ann (1861-1899), Alice Eliza (1864), Prisca E. (1866), Rachel (1868) and John (1870). In 1861 James was a doffer in a cotton mill, as was his sister Hannah. In 1871 he was an iron moulder (like his father); Hannah and Martha were cotton threstle-spinners, Betty was an apprentice dressmaker, and Mary Elizabeth and Charlotte Ann were cotton doffers.

In 1871, James married Mary Ann Parker (1851-1889), daughter of William Parker (1803/4-1880), who was an odd job man in 1861, and Caroline (*née* Whitaker, 1817). James and Mary had six children: Emma (born 1872), Thomas Henry (1873-1938), Betsy Ann (1876), Lavinia (1878), William Eurast (1881), and Mary Jane (1884-1896). William was a tailor's cutter (fustian) in 1901.

Mary died in 1889, and in 1899 James married Amelia Jones (1851/2-1905). Amelia was born in Wednesbury, Staffordshire.

James Needham died in Hebden Bridge on July 14th 1913, and was buried at Birchcliffe Baptist Old Chapel, Hebden Bridge.

Acknowledgement

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Bibliography

Blockeel, T.L., (1981). 'The early bryologists of south-west Yorkshire.' *Bulletin of the British Bryological Society* 38: 38-48.