

## **JOHN BISHOP DUNCAN (1869-1953)**

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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*

Duncan very likely acquired botanical interests from both parents, for his father was a schoolmaster, and John Bishop (1861-1935), a cousin on his mother's side of the family was also a keen naturalist.

Duncan was collecting mosses by 1885. He joined the Moss Exchange Club (the forerunner of the British Bryological Society) in 1901, and was Treasurer of the BBS from 1925 to 1945 and President in 1937-38. He edited the second edition of the Moss Census Catalogue in 1926, and added *Fissidens fontanum* (*Octodiceras fontanum*) from the River Severn at Bewdley, Worcestershire to the British list in 1901, and *Plagiothecium piliferum* from Ben Lawers, Perthshire in 1902.

His bryophytes are at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh, with others at the National Museum and Gallery of Wales in Cardiff, and Worcester Museum. The herbarium at Newcastle University's Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering has 1,500 of Duncan's bryophytes (from Scandinavia as well as Britain), and others are at the Hancock Museum in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Other of Duncan's packets are at Oxford, and Liverpool Museum also has 50 of his packets. Berwick Borough Museum has a group of about 100 flowering plants on loan from Berwick High School that Duncan collected between 1888 and 1896, mainly near Moffat, Dumfriesshire.

### *Family background and biography*

John Bishop Duncan was born in Edinburgh in 1869, the eldest child of John Duncan (born c. 1839), who was a son and eldest child of six born to John Duncan (born c. 1815), schoolmaster and carter, and Marion (*née* Taylor, c. 1811). JBD's mother was born Margaret Tyrie Bishop in about 1842, a daughter and third child of eight born to John Bishop (born 1812/3), a grocer, and Margaret (*née* Tyrie, 1812/3). Both the Duncan and Bishop families lived in Dalkeith in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. John and Margaret had three children: John Bishop, then Margaret Tyrie (born c. 1876), and Peter Rankine (c. 1880-1949). Peter was a law clerk in 1901, subsequently a partner in the firm of Marr, Duncan and Laing (later Marr and Duncan) in Edinburgh, and of Drummond Brothers, seed-merchants of Leith. He emigrated to Canada, where he married and died.

About 1871, John Duncan took his family to live in Moffat, where he was rector of and taught at the academy. It seems very likely that the Duncans would have known the Macvicar family, for John Gibson Macvicar (1800-1884) - Symers Macvicar's (1857-1932) father - was the minister at Moffat. Perhaps one family enthused the other about the delights of bryology.

After spending his childhood in Moffat, John Bishop Duncan became a bank clerk. At first he worked in Moffat, then at Kelso, Stratford-upon-Avon, and Birmingham (where he lived at the time of the 1891 Census), and later in Bewdley, Worcestershire (he was there by 1901, and lived in Park Lane, Bewdley in 1912).

Duncan remained a bachelor, and retired from the Midland Bank at Bewdley to Berwick-upon-Tweed in 1923, where he lived in Summerhill Terrace, just along from John Bishop (a nephew of his mother's) and his wife. John Bishop's father (John Bishop Sr., c.1838-1871), elder brother of Duncan's mother Margaret established a confectionery business at Marygate, Berwick-upon-Tweed in 1867. John Bishop Jr. (the eldest son, 1861-1935) entered the family business when his father died in 1871, and when John Towers (a brother-in-law of John Bishop Sr.) retired in 1899 John Bishop Jr. took his brother Thomas into partnership in the business, which retained the name of Towers and Bishop.

Duncan was still living in Summerhill Terrace in 1947, but had moved to North Road by the following year.

In addition to his bryological interests, Duncan was also a keen fisherman and gardener, and enjoyed music. For many years he was troubled with rheumatism, which tormented him until his death in 1953. He died at 4, North Road, Berwick-upon-Tweed on January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1953, and bequeathed his herbarium to Ursula Duncan (who was not related to John).

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Mr Michael Braithwaite supplied some information that has been incorporated into this article.