

LITTLETON BROWN (1698-1749)

Mark Lawley
email: m.lawley@virgin.net

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

Nothing is known of Brown's bryological discoveries. Not only did he live long ago, but his herbarium (if such he had) is unknown today, and he left no papers. Nor do any bryological discoveries he made adorn published literature. Rather, his eligibility for consideration as a bryologist rests on his reputation with his contemporaries. In 1725-6, William Sherard of Oxford wrote to Richard Richardson of Bierley, Bradford, Yorkshire that "Mr Brown... is the keenest botanist I have met with, and knows most of the plants in the *Synopsis*. Dr Dillenius has been a moss-cropping with him: he has an excellent eye." In 1726 Brown accompanied Dillenius and Samuel Brewer on a tour of North Wales, an excursion which brought a number of bryophytes to first public notice when Dillenius's *Historia Muscorum* appeared in 1741. However, Brown left his companions after they explored Cader Idris and before Dillenius and Brewer went into North Wales, and it is not clear how many of the bryophytes they found were attributable to Brown. Brown subsequently supervised or funded part or all of the printing of Dillenius's *Historia Muscorum*, for a 'Calendar of Treasury Books and Papers' in the library at Cornell University records that the Treasury issued a warrant to the Customs Commissioners to refund duty to Brown for paper used in the printing of Dillenius's book at Oxford University.

Family background

Littleton Brown was the seventh child in a family of nine born to Jeremiah (d. 1734) and Mary (d.1717) Brown of Bishop's Castle, a small market town in Shropshire. Littleton's father, Jeremiah, was an attorney, and acted as steward for the estates of Robert More senior, gent., and managed electoral bribes for Richard Vernon, the local Whig candidate in 1722.

Jeremiah Brown's eldest son, Francis, seems not to have been baptised at Bishop's Castle, but possibly at Mansell Gamage in Herefordshire. The *Alumni Oxoniensis* cites Francis Brown, son of Jeremy, gent, of Garnons (in the parish of Mansell Gamage),

Herefordshire, who matriculated in 1704, aged 15. Francis followed his father into the legal profession, and became a member of the Inner Temple, London, but died in 1721. A document at Shropshire Archives (the Record Office in Shrewsbury), dated 1719 (ref: D3651/B/31/2/6) refers to Jeremiah Brown Sr., of Bishop's Castle, gent., and Francis, of the Inner Temple, London, esq., eldest son and heir of the said Jeremiah senior. It is possible that Francis was a son of a marriage before Jeremiah married Littleton Brown's mother, or perhaps Jeremiah and Mary were living at Garnons before they moved to Bishop's Castle.

Jeremiah's other children were all baptised in Bishops Castle: Elizabeth in 1689, followed by Maria (or Mary) the following year, Jeremiah in 1693, Sands (a girl) in 1695, Judith in 1697, then Littleton, Anna Margareta in 1700 and Gulielmus (William) in 1706. William died young.

Several Brown (or Browne) families held land in the Clun valley during the seventeenth century, and Jeremiah senior (?1662-1734) was probably the third son of Thomas Brown (or Browne), gent. (died *circa* 1707-1710), and Margaret (or Mary) of Clunton and Clunbury, a few miles south of Bishop's Castle. One of Jeremiah's brothers had a daughter, Ann, who in 1731 married Edmund Waring (d. 1739) of Bishop's Castle and Owlbury. It seems likely that Edmund Waring was related to Anne Waring (1662-1722) of Elston Hall, Nottinghamshire, paternal grandmother to the botanist Robert Waring Darwin (1724-1816) and his younger brother Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802), and hence great-grandmother to Robert Waring Darwin (1766-1848), physician of Shrewsbury, and great-great-grandmother to Charles Robert Darwin (1809-1882).

Jeremiah's second son, Jeremiah junior (1693-1761) had five children by Sarah Luscott (1724-1769) of Clunbury, but Jeremiah and Sarah did not marry. Of Littleton Brown's other brothers and sisters, in 1721 Mary married Somerset Davies, a mercer of Ludlow, Sands married Thomas Garnett at Hopesay (a village not far from Bishop's Castle), but Anna Margareta was buried in Bishops Castle shortly after her eighteenth birthday in 1718.

Anna Margareta only just survived her mother, Mary, who had died the previous year. Nothing is known of Littleton Brown's mother before her married life. Was her maiden surname Littleton, and if so, how was she related to the other Littleton (or Lyttleton) families of the West Midlands, such as at Pillaton Hall in Staffordshire, Spetchley in Worcestershire, or Munslow, Henley, and Moor Park near Ludlow in Shropshire? These Littletons owned big estates and were socially very prominent.

Apart from Littleton Brown's first name, other circumstantial evidence for his mother being connected with the Littletons includes that family's high profile in political life and the legal profession of the 17th century. William Littleton (1591-1653) became a Burgess of the borough of Bishop's Castle in 1628, and steward of the manor of Bishop's Castle, as well as Chief Justice of the circuit in North Wales in 1649. William, who married Judith Eaton and lived at The Moore (Moor Park) was a son of Sir Edward Littleton (1550-1622) of Munslow and Henley, and Mary (*née* Walter, 1565-1633). Sir Edward

was also Chief Justice of North Wales in his time. Sir Edward's eldest son (William's brother), Edward (1589-1645), became Baron Sir Edward Littleton of Henley, and was solicitor-general and Lord Keeper to Charles I. He merits an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, as do his sons, Edward (1625-1702) and Sir Thomas Littleton (c.1619-1681) of Stoke St. Milburgh. Sir Thomas's son, Sir Thomas junior (c.1647-1709) is also in the *DNB*.

So did Jeremiah Brown senior meet his bride through connections within the legal profession? Certainly, Jeremiah became steward of the manor of Bishop's Castle, just as William Littleton had been many years before.

If Littleton Brown's mother was connected with these Littleton gentry, his father's family were by comparison minor landowners. Nevertheless, the wills of the two Jeremiahs mention land in the parishes of Bishop's Castle, Lydbury North and Mainstone in Shropshire, and Llanfairwaterdine, Beguildy and Churchstoke across the Welsh border.

In the late 17th and 18th centuries, another branch of the Browne tribe lived at Mellington Hall, Churchstoke, a few miles west of Bishop's Castle, where a Thomas Browne was High Sheriff of Montgomeryshire in 1735. The Brownes of Mellington were bailiffs of Montgomery from 1680 until 1860. Jeremiah junior's will mentions Thomas Browne of Mellington Hall, Churchstoke.

Thomas Duppa of Cheney Longville, Wistanstow, near Craven Arms and Robert Price of Berriew were co-executors with Thomas Browne for Jeremiah junior's will; were these gentlemen husbands of some of Littleton Brown's relatives? The same will also mentions Reverend Clive of Wigmore, husband of Jeremiah's late sister.

Other documents dated 1730 at the Record Office in Shrewsbury refer to Jeremiah Brown of Mellington. Was this man one of the Jeremiahs of Bishop's Castle, or a different person? Indeed, tracing pedigree in a family of Browns (or Brownes) is difficult because the surname is so common, and much remains to be clarified about Littleton Brown's family background and connections.

Biography

Littleton Brown went up to Oxford in 1715, and graduated in 1719. Virtually nothing is known of how he spent the next thirteen years, but in March 1723 he became deacon at Peterborough. By 1726 he was in London, but also sending botanical records from the Welsh border to the German botanist Dillenius in Oxford. That summer he accompanied Dillenius and Samuel Brewer on their botanical tour in Wales. He was elected to Fellowship of the Royal Society in 1729. In 1732 Brown became vicar of Kerry, near Newtown in Montgomeryshire, and held the incumbency until his death. He was also a Justice of the Peace at the Welsh sessions, and probably derived much of his income from lands which he inherited from his father.

Brown knew Robert More junior (1703-1780) of More, near Bishop's Castle, who corresponded with Linnaeus. More was a bryological friend as well as neighbour to Brown, and the Record Office at Shrewsbury has a letter from Brown to More, dated September 1739, in which Brown offers to take any mosses which More has found but cannot identify to Oxford (where he was going on his journey to London). He also mentions not being able to find Hypopitys (a flowering plant, *Monotropa hypopitys*, or Yellow Birdsnest) in the neighbourhood.

Brown seems not to have felt continually bound by his pastoral responsibilities at Kerry, and may never have lived there. Apart from his ties at Bishop's Castle, he apparently spent quite a lot of time at Bath (Somerset) and in London. In 1736 he found a strange insect in a pond at Bexley (south-east London) and communicated his discovery to the Royal Society. And in 1743, writing to William Shenstone, a minor poet, Brown invited him to accompany him on a two-year tour of Portugal and elsewhere. Shenstone also mentions having seen Brown's fossils, plants, poetry, etc.

Brown may also have had property or relatives or both in Gloucestershire. The Record Office at Gloucester has a letter from Littleton Brown of Lydney (ref: D2026/A14), dated 1742. He died "late of Bishop's Castle", an intestate bachelor at Bath, where he was buried at the abbey on September 7th, 1749. Littleton Brown's father had bequeathed his properties to Littleton rather than to Jeremiah junior, but these passed to the elder brother after Littleton's death.