

RICHARD RICHARDSON (1663-1741)

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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

Richard Richardson was a member of the first generation of Englishmen to take informed interest in bryophytes. He was a contemporary of Adam Buddle, Samuel Brewer (who came to live near Richardson), Samuel Doody and William Vernon. These men corresponded with the older naturalist, John Ray, supplying information for his publications on natural history.

Very little is known of Richardson's own bryological career and discoveries. However, he corresponded with Dillenius, Gronovius, Petiver, Sir Hans Sloane, and many other naturalists – a correspondence fortunately preserved and published by his great grand daughter (see below), and revealing that Richardson occupied an important – even pivotal – role in sustaining interest in botany among contemporary naturalists.

Vascular plants collected by Richardson are at Oxford and the Natural History Museum in London. His letters are at the Royal Society, British Library and Bodleian Museum.

Family background

Richardson was born on September 6th 1663, brought up, and lived most of his life at Bierley on the outskirts of Bradford, a district at the heart of Yorkshire's textile industry. Wool had long been crucially important for England's balance of trade, and in the days before banks existed merchants had to be literate and numerate in order to correspond and trade with people elsewhere. This combination of wealth and literacy created the opportunity and inclination to take up natural history, which explains why the textile industry bred a remarkable number of prominent botanists, not only in Richardson's time, but also the remainder of the 18th century and throughout the 19th. *A Social and Biographical History of British and Irish Field-bryologists* (see above) discusses this interesting socio-economic link more fully.

Richard Richardson's forebears had already made their money by the time he was born in 1663, and the family's financial worries were of the kind that most people could only dream about. His ancestors had intermarried with a number of other prominent families of the neighbourhood – families such as Midgley, Pollard, Hopkinson, Sharp, Savile, Kaye, Kirshaw, Currer and Ferrand. Thus, a paternal uncle who was another Richard Richardson (1635-1699) married Hannah Sharp, who was sister to John, Archbishop of York. And Elizabeth, the daughter of another paternal uncle, Joseph Richardson (1648-1742), married the poet Thomas Warton senior (1688-1745).

Further back in time, Thomas Richardson (1503-1543) of Westmill, Hertfordshire married Mary Beeston, who descended on her mother's side from the Duttons (gentry of Cheshire), Grosvenors and Botelers (Butlers). Sir Robert Grosvenor (died 1396), soldier, of Hulme, Cheshire merits an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. The Grosvenors are also ancestors of the dukes of Westminster. Sir Almeric le Boteler (1205-1235), Lord of Warrington, lived at Bewsey Hall, Warrington.

The Richardson estates extended a third of the way around Bradford (which was admittedly but a small market town in the late 17th century), including most of North Bierley and beyond towards Wibsey and Calverley. However, the Richardsons were middle class made good, rather than aristocracy, and none of them became peers of the realm, although in the 1630s Richard's paternal grandfather (also Richard, 1604-1656) paid £40 for declining the honour of a knighthood from Charles I.

This elder Richard Richardson married Jane Hopkinson (c.1608-1662), who was a daughter of George Hopkinson of Lofthouse near Leeds, and sister to the antiquary John Lofthouse. Richard and Jane were blessed with eleven children, of which the eldest son, William (1629-1667) married Susanna Savile (c.1638-1708) in 1659. Susanna was a daughter of Gilbert Savile (c.1607-1658), gentleman of Elland, Halifax. William and Susanna had three children – Jane (1660-1716) who married Edward Ferrand (1656-1742) of Bradford, Richard (the botanist), and William (1666-1716) who married Mary Kirshaw, daughter of John Kirshaw.

Biography and descendants

Jane, Richard and William lost their father while they and he were still young (Richard was not quite four at the time of his father's death). Their father died intestate, so Richard, being eldest son, inherited the estate.

From the grammar school at Bradford, Richard went up to Oxford, but seems to have left without a degree, and spent three years at the Dutch university of Leiden in the 1680s, where he trained as a physician while lodging with Paul Hermann, the professor of botany. Hermann had not long returned from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), full of enthusiasm for its flora.

Richardson practised as a doctor on returning in 1687 to the family seat at Bierley Hall, which he caused to have rebuilt. However, Richardson was sufficiently wealthy not to need to over-exert himself professionally, and was able to fully indulge his passion for plants by travelling widely in England, Wales, and Scotland.



Richard Richardson, from an original painting engraved for *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, Volume 1 (1817), by John Bowyer Nichols. Image reproduced with the permission of Martin Roundell Greene.

Richardson took particular interest in mosses and lichens, as well as vascular plants. He also developed the gardens at Bierley to an extent hitherto unknown in northern England. Not confining himself to growing plants of medical interest, Richardson's gardens became renowned as rich in both native and foreign plants, particularly when a hot-house was built in about 1718. Later, his eldest son Richard (1708-1781) altered the house (which is now demolished) and further developed the garden at Bierley.

Apart from his medical and botanical interests (he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society on October 23rd 1712), Richardson was a county magistrate, and also a diligent antiquary. Lacking financial constraint, he amassed a very large library of botanical books.

In 1699 or 1700, Richard married Jane Crossley, daughter of John Crossley of Kirkshaw House, Halifax, but neither she nor their infant son survived.

In 1705 he married Dorothy Curre (1687-1763), daughter of Margaret Fothergill and Henry Curre (1651-1723) of Kildwick. Dorothy was 24 years younger than Richard, and bore him five sons and two daughters, not counting those who died in infancy. Of these children, Henry (1710-1778) married Margaret Clive Wilson, granddaughter of Robert Clive of Styche, near Market Drayton in Shropshire. Their son, Reverend Henry Richardson (1758-1784), became rector of Thornton-in-Craven, and assumed the name of Curre at the end of his life. Henry and Margaret's daughter Frances Mary Richardson Curre (1785-1861) published her great-grandfather's correspondence in 1835 (*Extracts from the literary and scientific correspondence of Richard Richardson, M.D., of Bierley, Yorkshire*, edited by Dawson Turner), so ensuring its survival for posterity.

Of Richard Richardson's other children, a daughter, Dorothy (1712-1772) married Sir John Lister Kaye, MP, (1697-1752), from whom the botanist Robert Kaye Greville (1794-1866) was descended (see *Field Bryology* 84:13-16). John Lister Kaye's mother was born Dorothy Saville c.1678 at Elland, a daughter of Robert Saville, Esq., of Bryan Royd, Yorkshire, born 1652. Kaye's father, George, was a son of Sir John Kaye, MP, (1641-1706) and Anne Lister (c.1645-1702), who was a daughter of William Lister, Esq., of Thornton, Craven.

Richard Richardson died on April 21st 1741.

References

The library and archive of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society (Leeds) contains the following papers with material relevant to the Richardson family of Bierley:-

- 1) Papers of the family of Richardson of Bierley, Bradford, including deeds, estate records, wills, correspondence and notes. MD335/2-MD335/2/2/3/28.

2) “Richardson’s correspondence”, published in 1835, which includes a memoir of Richard Richardson, M.D. (compiled in 1815), which begins with Richard Richardson, Esquire (born 1604), described as grandfather of Dr. Richardson. Library shelf ref: 7F14.

Acknowledgements

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