

ROBERT MACKENZIE STARK (1815-1873)

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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

Stark wrote an article 'Muscology of Cirencester' (*Annals of Natural History* (1841), *Marine Aquarium* (1857), *A Popular History of British Mosses* (1854; 2nd edition 1860), and articles in the *Transactions of the Botanical Society of Edinburgh* (1866 and 1873).

He added *Lepidozia cupressina* to the known Scottish flora. His herbarium is at Bristol Museum.

Family background and biography

Robert Mackenzie Stark was born on June 17th 1815 at Dirleton, Haddington, East Lothian, Scotland, a son of the Reverend William Stark (1772-1834) and Elizabeth (*née* Mackenzie, died 1862).

William Stark was a son of Richard Stark of Auchtermuchty, and became minister at Airdrie before moving to Dirleton in 1805. Elizabeth Mackenzie was a daughter of Robert Mackenzie, town clerk of Dumbarton. William and Elizabeth had eight children, including two sets of twins: Richard (born 1805, H.E.I.C.S. who went out to Bombay), twins Margaret and Mary (1810), Robert and his twin brother Duncanson (1815), George Gibb (1817-1897, who became a merchant at Leith), Margaret Mollison (1819-22) and Elizabeth Helen (1822).

Robert married Margaret Kerr Landsborough (born c1822/3) of Stevenston, Ayrshire at Stevenston in 1848. She was a daughter of the Reverend David Landsborough (1779-1854) who was a keen naturalist and botanist. He studied the algae of the Firth of Clyde, and also wrote about the natural history of the Isle of Arran. His sons (Margaret's brothers) also became good naturalists: Reverend David Landsborough junior (1826-1912) studied the flora of Ayrshire and Arran, and became an expert on molluscs, while William Landsborough (1825-1886) emigrated to Australia and studied the flora there.

For many years, Stark was a nurseryman at Edinburgh, and had a fine collection of alpine plants. In 1851 he and Margaret were living (without children) at 2, Grove Street, St. Cuthbert's, Edinburgh, where he was trading as a seed merchant and nurseryman.

Margaret had died by 1866, when Robert married secondly Margaret Henderson (c.1832-?1927), spinster and daughter of James Henderson (1803-1889), a piano-forte maker. Margaret lived at 7 Grafton Street, Fitzroy Square, London. She survived Robert, who died at 7 Grafton Street, London, on September 29th 1873, at the age of 58. His probate document described him as formerly of Woodbine Cottage, Trinity, near Edinburgh, and latterly of May Cottage, Sidmouth, Devon.