

WILLIAM MITCHELL SUTCLIFFE (1816-1885)

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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

Sutcliffe was one of several bryologists active around Todmorden, Hebden Bridge and the Craven district of west Yorkshire in the early and middle parts of the 19th century; John Nowell (1802-1867) preceded him, James Needham (1849-1913) came later, and several other working men were also keen cryptogamists.

His bryophytes are at Halifax Museum.

Family background and biography

William Mitchell Sutcliffe was born at Field Head, Stansfield, west Yorkshire on January 11th 1816, the son of Thomas Sutcliffe and Mary (*née* Mitchell). Thomas Sutcliffe was born at Great House, Colden in 1782/3. Sutcliffes had owned and occupied Great House since the beginning of the 17th century. Thomas became a manufacturer at Edge Mill in 1808, but gave that up and moved from Field Head to Heptonstall, where he set up as a grocer. Mary was a daughter of John Mitchell of Hill Top, Stansfield. William had three sisters, one of whom, Susan (c.1805-?1881) did not marry and lived with William and his family in later life.

William was educated at the local grammar school, and from 1834 until 1839 was apprenticed to his cousin W.G. Mitchell, who was a doctor at Cross Hills, near Keighley. However, William did not become a doctor, but returned to Heptonstall. In 1851 he was living with his widowed father and elder sister Susan, and working as an assistant overseer.

In 1860 William married Rachel Lister (born in Wadsworth in 1829, daughter of George Lister, timber merchant of Hebble End, Hebden Bridge). At the time of the 1861 Census Return, William and Rachel had Susan Mitchell living with them in Smith Lane, Heptonstall, so Thomas Sutcliffe had presumably died by then. William gave his occupation as grocer and assistant overseer, while Susan was the proprietor of eleven houses.

In 1871, William and Rachel had moved to Top of Town, Heptonstall, and had four children: Thomas (born 1861), Emily (1862), George Lister (1864-1915), and Ada (1866/7). By then William was working full-time as a grocer. In 1881, the family lived in Main Street, Heptonstall. Thomas was an apprentice mechanic, and George was an architect's apprentice, with the two girls helping in their father's grocery and drapery shop. George Lister Mitchell later became a well-respected architect, and wrote *The Modern Carpenter, Joiner and Cabinet-maker: a complete guide to current practice* (1905, Gresham Publishing Company).

William Sutcliffe died in 1885.

Acknowledgement

I thank Diana Monahan of Hebden Bridge Local History Society (<http://www.hebdenbridgehistory.org.uk>) for providing information and the photograph of Mitchell.