

WILLIAM PHILLIPS HAMILTON (1840-1910)

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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/>

Family background and biography

William Phillips Hamilton was the elder son of William Hamilton (1798/9-1856) and Elizabeth (*née* Phillips, 1809-1891). He was born on March 7th, 1840 in Cape Town, Cape of Good Hope, South Africa, his parents having married at Caledon, Cape Colony the previous November. William was master of a vessel at some stage of his career, so may have transported troops from England. William Hamilton also became governor of one of Her Majesty's prisons. Elizabeth had travelled from England as governess to the children of a Major Barnes, whose regiment had been posted to South Africa.

William Hamilton was the fifth child of John Hamilton, merchant (1738-1810) and Dorothy (*née* Hampton, 1771-1838) of Whitehaven, Cumberland. A manuscript written by WPH states that John Hamilton was a grandson of one of the Dukes of Hamilton, but no lineage has been traced.

Whitehaven was a thriving port in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, with maritime commerce a vital part of its economic profile, in which the Hamiltons played a prominent part. Several of William's siblings sailed the seas, and two – Jane (1803-1858, wife of James Gascoigne Gatliff, 1795-1826) and Henry (1800-1858) died in Buenos Aires, Argentina on October 27th, 1858. Like his sister Jane, William Hamilton also died in Buenos Aires, but two years earlier, in 1856.

Indeed, four of John and Dorothy Hamilton's children - Henry, Christian, Jane and William – lived in Buenos Aires, Argentina in the mid-19th century. Christian and Jane married two Gatliff brothers – William Hoey and James Gascoigne respectively – who were sons of James Gatliff (1765-1831, army officer and Church of England clergyman, who merits an account in the *Dictionary of National Biography*). A third Hamilton girl – Ann (1805-1891) married John Sim, and their daughter Dorothy (Dora, 1838-1913) married her first cousin William Hoey Gatliff (1825-1888).

Jane's husband James Gatliff died at Bonney on the west African coast in 1826, and in 1848 she joined her son James Reid Gatliff (who had left England for Argentina in December 1847) in Buenos Aires, where they ran a hotel. Jane married secondly Thomas

Moore, a wealthy English ironmaster in Buenos Aires, and James Reid Gatliff (1824-1879) married Jane Hamilton Browne (born in Market Hill, Co. Armagh, Ireland, 1834-1878), whose mother was sister-in-law to a male (Henry?) Hamilton uncle.

Elizabeth Phillips was born at Hanwood, near Shrewsbury, Shropshire, a daughter of Thomas Phillips (1778-1845) and Elizabeth (*née* Cross, died 1847). She was an elder sister of William Phillips (1822-1905), who became a respected antiquarian and naturalist, author of *A Manual of the British Discomycetes* (1877).

William and Elizabeth Hamilton were based in South Africa by 1839 and remained there until at least 1842, when WPH's younger brother James John was born, but Elizabeth and the two boys were living in Shrewsbury by the time of the 1851 Census Return.

Ten years later, Elizabeth was widowed, and working as a dressmaker in Shrewsbury, probably for her blood-relatives the Phillipses, who had a tailor's business in the town. Her sons, too, being fatherless, were apprenticed in the trade, and both later became master tailors. At the time of the 1861 Census Return, William was an unmarried hosier, lodging at 16 Bridgwater Square, St. Giles Cripplegate in London. Perhaps William and James also joined the family business; their uncle William Phillips employed 40 people at the time of the 1881 Census. By that time, though, WPH was himself self-employed, with ten people working for him.

WPH married Celia Vine (1851-1934) in 1878. She was a younger daughter of James Vine, who worked for the Inland Revenue, and Marion (*née* Waddell). Celia and WPH had three children – William Cecil (born 1879), Elizabeth (Bessie) Marion (born 1882) and Herbert James (born 1883). William Cecil died of Bright's Disease in 1891 at the age of 12. Indeed, 1891 was a terrible year for WPH, for his mother and brother also died within a few months of William Cecil. John Pool, the Registrar who signed the three death-certificates was likely the same John Pool who had married one of Celia's sisters. The 1890s reached a domestic nadir for WPH when Celia had an affair with the Reverend John Andrews, formerly headmaster of Shrewsbury High School. Their romance was sufficiently flagrant for Hamilton to knock Andrews down in the street on one occasion. Andrews and Celia eloped to the United States of America and were not present to answer the charges at William Hamilton's divorce hearing on January 17/18th 1896, when the judge was sharply critical of such conduct by a clergyman. Hamilton had sought damages from Andrews, but the latter had apparently sold up everything prior to skipping town. Celia Hamilton married Andrews in America on December 30th, 1897.

WPH's daughter Bessie married in 1909, and went to live at Caversham, Oxfordshire. Herbert James had gone to Australia in 1907, but returned to Shrewsbury to marry his sweetheart in 1909/10, and then emigrated permanently to Renmark in South Australia, moving to Tasmania in 1914.

With only his married daughter as a close relative remaining in England, WPH went to live with her in Caversham, and died there on June 10th, 1910.

Botanical career

Hamilton very likely found his interest in natural history kindled by his maternal uncle William, who had taken up botany in the 1860s. William Phillips was a close friend of his neighbour, William Allport Leighton (1805-1889), who published *A Flora of Shropshire* (1841) before devoting himself to the study of lichens and eventually writing the first British lichen-flora (*Lichen-flora of Great Britain, Ireland and the Channel Islands*, 1871, 3rd edition 1879). Phillips himself knew vascular plants well enough to bring out a paper on ferns and other vascular cryptogams in the 1877 *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society*. While Phillips moved on to concentrate on fungi, Hamilton made bryophytes his particular interest, and contributed many records to Richard de Gylpyn Benson's article on Shropshire mosses in the 1893 edition of *Journal of Botany*. Hamilton was also senior author of the botanical account of Shropshire in volume 1 of the *Victoria County History* (1908).

With Armitage, Benson, Binstead and Weyman, Hamilton was one of five of the 23 founding members of the Moss Exchange Club in 1896 who lived in the Welsh Marches. *Orthodontium gracile* from Hodnet in 1892 and *Sphagnum magellanicum* from Whixall Moss in 1905 were two of Hamilton's best discoveries in Shropshire, but excellent as he was as a field-bryologist, Hamilton's worthiest quality seems to have been his ability to coordinate the botanical efforts of his contemporaries in the county. An ultimately abortive attempt to publish a new Flora of Shropshire failed because of a lack of pre-publication subscriptions and ill health. The manuscript of over 2,000 pages was stolen but eventually returned to Shrewsbury Library.

Hamilton's herbarium of mosses (but no liverworts) is at Ludlow Museum. Many of these gatherings he collected himself. The National Museum and Gallery of Wales at Cardiff also has about 87 of his bryophytes, collected between 1886 and 1906. Liverpool Museum has 20 of his packets.

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