

PETER EWING (1850-1913)

Mark Lawley
email: mrbrbryology@gmail.com

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

Ewing took up botany as a pastime at evening classes in Glasgow, and studied all plants except fungi, taking particular interest in sedges and liverworts. He shared his father's interest in photography, and often photographed plants. He joined the Glasgow Naturalists' Society and became president of the Natural History Society of Glasgow.

Ewing added the liverworts *Cephalozia ambigua*, *Odontoschisma macounii* (with William Young), and *Tritomaria polita* to the British list. His first botanical publication was in 1883 – a list of the plants of Ben Laoigh, followed in 1884 by accounts of an excursion to Ben Lawers and Creag-an-lochan, and of another to Glen Shee. He wrote several 'Contributions to the topographical botany of the west of Scotland' from 1887 onwards.

Ewing also studied sedges in detail, and had an intimate knowledge of the floras of the Scottish hills, especially Breadalbane and Clova, which he frequently explored in company with Frances Buchanan White and James Fergusson. He was also a friend of James Stirton, and Robert Braithwaite often stayed with him.

His herbarium is at Glasgow.

[[photograph of Ewing in Report of the Watson Botanical Exchange Club \(1912-3\)](#)]

Family background and biography

Peter Ewing was born at Kinross, on July 13th, 1850, the second of six sons of Peter Ewing (1818/9-1900) and Agnes (*née* Blackwood, 1826), who also had two daughters. Agnes was a daughter of Robert Blackwood (1792-1866), a handloom weaver in 1841. Peter's father was a woollen-weaver in 1851, but subsequently sold books and stationery in Kinross, and later also at Callander. The father also became a keen photographer, and exhibited photographic slides at Edinburgh in 1861.

Of Peter's siblings, William (born 1854/5) was a sailor in 1871, Robert (born 1848/9) was a photographer in 1881, Catherine (born 1859/60) was a telegraphist in 1881 and married George Wilkie in 1884, George (born 1861/2) was a tailor in 1881, Eliza was also born in 1861/2, and Alexander was born in 1865/6.

Peter left school at the age of nine, and became apprenticed to his father, who by that time had forsaken weaving for his new career of selling books and stationery. In 1867, aged 17, he became apprenticed to a joiner, and gave his occupation as a wright in 1871. Later he moved to Glasgow, where he went to evening classes in order to develop his carpentry skills, and also attended botanical classes to develop his hobby. He gave up joinery and became a surveyor for an architect, and subsequently for the Phoenix Fire Insurance Company, for which he eventually became a manager.

Ewing was tall, sinewy and rather spare in build, and an accomplished mountaineer.

Peter's first wife was Mary Bayne Kirk (1852-1899, born at St. Andrews, Fife, a daughter of Robert Kirk, a gardener). Mary was at one time a teacher. She and Peter produced five daughters and two sons: Jeanie (1882-1958) who died unmarried, Agnes (1884-1885), Mary May (1886-1970), Mabel (1887-1969), twins Kate (1889-1969) and Peter (1889-1958) and Harry (1893-1962). Mary, Mabel and Kate were born in Bothwell, Uddingston, north-east Lanark. Jeanie was a dressmaker in 1901, Peter was a joiner in 1911, and Harry was an analytic chemist in 1911. Mary, Isabel and Kate were unmarried typists in 1911.

Peter's wife Mary died in 1899, and in 1901/2 he married secondly Elizabeth Raymond Burden (1860-1951), a good field-botanist and daughter of John Burden (1820/1-1867) of Glasgow and Marion (*née* Weir?). John Burden was a painter and paper-hanger in 1851, but subsequently became an oil and colour merchant. In 1881, at the age of 21, Elizabeth was head of her household in Glasgow, and worked as a clerk. Her younger sisters Jessie Weir Burden and Minnie Weir Burden worked as dressmaker and warehouse-girl respectively. Peter and Elizabeth had a son Raymond (1902-1971).

Ewing's address in 1911 was 'The Frond', Bothwell, Uddingston, north-east Lanark. Soon after retiring, Ewing died at Glasgow on August 3rd, 1913.

Acknowledgements

I thank Dee Bowker, Jane Collie and James Finlay for information supplied.