

## WILLIAM GARDINER (1808-1852)

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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*

Gardiner discovered *Barbilophozia lycopodioides* new to Britain in Glen Doll, Angus in 1843, *Philonotis seriata* on Beinn a' Bhuird in 1844, and *Buxbaumia aphylla*. He compiled *Flora of Forfarshire* (1848), and *Twenty Lessons on British Mosses* (1846), with a second series with specimens in 1849. This was one of the earliest attempts to popularise field-bryology. He also wrote short volumes describing some of his explorations in localities such as Glen Esk, Loch Lee, the Sidlaw Hills, Schiehallion, Ben Macdui, Loch Aven, Lochnagar and Braemar.

His plants are at the Natural History Museum in London, Kew, and The Lamb Collection at Dundee Central Library includes a foolscap volume of 1,000 pages in neat copperplate writing. The Department of Biological Sciences, Dundee University has about 450 of his specimens collected between 1830 and 1850 and bound into volumes. His letters are at Kew, with further letters, publications, manuscripts and tributes at Dundee Public Library. The University and Jepson Herbaria at the University of California, Berkeley have several hundred of his Scottish mosses. Hull University has about 170 of his specimens, mostly from Angus, with further specimens in the Bromfield herbarium at Winchester, Hampshire. His lichens are at the Hancock Museum in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

### *Family background and biography*

William Gardiner was born at Overgate, Dundee on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1808. His mother was unmarried, and hawked pottery. His father, also William (born in Dundee in 1789) was a weaver, gardener, botanist and poet. William senior's father, James, was also a weaver of Dundee.

William senior had an elder brother, Douglas (born 1786), who was a weaver, keenly interested in botany and geology, who became custodian of his local library and museum, and directed the organisation of 'The Dundee Rational Institution' in 1810. The institution folded in 1821, however, when "*its affairs fell into confusion, and its property was scattered under the hammer*".

Douglas cultivated a botanic garden at the back of the Overgate and was described by John MacVicar as a “*true genius and true gentleman, but very hard up for the means of living and bringing up his family, which, however, his poor wife (also a gentle creature) perhaps felt more than he, for Douglas fed much on ideas, and these not always sound ones, which got him a bad name with many.*”

Douglas’s younger brother William seems also to have had a poor reputation, being known as “*Ne-er-do-weel Willie*”.

The Gardiners almost certainly knew Patrick Macvicar (c.1763-1842, grandfather of the bryologist Symers Macvicar) who was a minister at Dundee in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and shared with him their interest in botany. Douglas and William senior also knew George Don, who kept a nursery near Forfar and botanised in the Scottish Highlands.

William junior was apprenticed to an umbrella-maker at the age of ten, in whose employment he remained for five years. In about 1824, aged 15, he began work for Mr George Robertson, hosier and umbrella-maker, and remained in his employment for twenty years.

Gardiner also pursued interests in writing poetry and botany, and accompanied his father and uncle on their botanical rambles, as well as attending evening classes in botany. He was also a lifelong friend of William Jackson (1820-1848), tailor and botanist of Dundee. In 1838 the Botanical Society of Edinburgh employed him to collect alpine plants in Scotland, and later the Botanical Society of London employed him in similar fashion. From 1841 onwards he spent much of his time collecting and selling botanical specimens. In 1844, despite his new responsibilities as husband and family man, he left his employment with George Robertson and went entirely self-employed, enabling him to spend more of his time botanizing, collecting plants for people and institutions that paid him. One such patron was George Stephenson, the famous engineer who invented the first steam-engine, and who paid Gardiner two guineas for each of sixteen volumes of dried plants, with the gift of an extra five guineas to mark his pleasure at receiving the volumes.

In 1843 Gardiner married Elizabeth Ross Smith (died May 26th, 1850). Their first child, William was born on December 29<sup>th</sup> that year, but died “of nervous fever” on January 9<sup>th</sup> 1844. A second son, James Edward Smith Gardiner was born in 1845. The family lived at Spence’s Close, Overgate, Dundee. James was orphaned at the age of eight when his father William died aged 43 at Dundee on June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1852. William died of typhus fever and was buried alongside his wife Elizabeth in The Howff burial ground in the centre of Dundee.

James Edward Smith was a railway porter at Leith in 1871, but after marrying Isabella Graham in 1872 he became a salmon-fisher at Montrose and had two children. However,

Isabella died in 1874, and James committed suicide in 1879, leaving two orphans aged five and seven.

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