

David Lillie (1854–1940)

This is one in a series of articles by **Mark Lawley** 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 online at <http://britishbryologicalsociety.org.uk/>



◀ Reverend David Lillie. Courtesy Reverend Alastair Gray, minister of Watten and Bower

David Lillie explored north-east Scotland, searching for bryophytes far from his bryological contemporaries, and would have met other bryologists rarely, if at all. He discovered *Barbilophozia atlantica*, *Lophozia* (= *Leiocolea*) *gillmanii*, and *Tayloria tenuis* new to Britain, and *Phaeoceros laevis* new to Scotland. He also found *Dicranum elongatum* on Unst in 1907, where it has not been seen since. Lillie was also knowledgeable about lichens. His herbarium is at Glasgow University, with additional specimens at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh.

Lillie joined the Moss Exchange Club in 1899, and acted as distributor of gatherings to members in 1914 and 1918.

Family background and biography

Lillie was born at Wick, Caithness, on 18 October 1854, the twelfth and youngest child of the Reverend William Lillie (1801–1875), minister of Wick Parish Church, and Isabella (née Milne,

ca 1807–1858). William was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity by Aberdeen University in 1858, and remained minister at Wick until his death.

William was born on 13 October 1801, a son of John Lillie, farmer of Crossgight, New Deer, Aberdeenshire, and Elizabeth (née Lendrum). John and Elizabeth married in Peterhead, and William was born either in Peterhead or in the village of New Pitsligo, Tyrie, Aberdeenshire. He was educated at New Pitsligo and then at King's College, Aberdeen University. After graduating MA in 1820, he became a schoolmaster at Ellon, Aberdeenshire, in 1824, where he met and married Isabella in 1831. Isabella Milne was a native of Ellon, where her father, Thomas Milne (1773–1857) was a farmer and merchant, trading in groceries and spirits.

William and Isabella's first seven children were born at Ellon. Thereafter the family moved to Wick in 1844, where four younger children were born, and William became the first minister

after the Disruption of the previous year. There, William further advanced his reputation as a man of probity, labouring in diverse communal affairs such as education, as well as those of his ministry. In 1858 the University of Aberdeen conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity, in recognition of his learning, ability, and services to the Church.

Of David's eleven elder siblings, William (1832–1852) died in Greenland, Ann (1833–1838) and Sophia (1835–1836) died young, Thomas (1836–1873) died in San Francisco, John (1838–1878) was a land-surveyor at Elgin, Morayshire in 1861, and died in California, Alexander (1840–1875) graduated from Aberdeen University in 1859; James (1842–1891) became minister at Castle Douglas, Dumfriesshire and subsequently senior chaplain at St Andrew's Church, Calcutta, dying at sea during a voyage back to Britain. Robert Innes was the eldest sibling to be born at Wick (in 1845), followed by George (1849–1929, who became an inspector

for the poor at Lybster, and married Agnes Brown (ca 1850–1914), daughter of George Brown, farmer of Watten), then Mary Jane (Jean, 1851–1916, who married James or John Mowat, bank agent of Lybster, Caithness in 1870; their son James Dugald Lillie Mowat was killed in action in 1915), and Adamina (1851–1852) who died in infancy. David's elder brother George was probably the person of that name who collected vascular plants in Caithness between the 1890s and 1920s.

David Lillie was educated at Pulteneydown Academy, Wick Parish School and Aberdeen University, where he graduated MA in 1874 and BD in 1877. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Aberdeen on 2 May 1892.

At the time of the 1871 Census, he was staying in Ellon with his maiden aunts Ann and Jane Milne. In 1881 he was a minister without charge and living at 25 Fife Street, Mortlach, Banffshire.

On 1 November 1889 he married Frances Margaret Brown (1855–1931), the youngest

child of George Brown (1808/9–1881), a farmer of Watten, and his wife Mary (née Purves, ca 1812). George and Mary both came from the Borders. George was christened at Norham, Northumberland, and was a native of Twizel, on the Northumberland side of the River Tweed. He moved to Caithness in about 1828, becoming a merchant at Stafford Place, Wick, in company with Thomas Purves senior, brother of his future bride. In 1835 George Brown took the tenancy of the farm of Mains of Watten, which he made one of the finest and best cultivated in Scotland. In 1851, George Brown was farming 865 acres, with the help of 46 labourers. He was well regarded as a breeder of sheep, and in later years was assisted by one of his sons, also George, who became well known for practical experiments in agriculture. George Brown senior was also a Justice of the Peace.

Mary Purves was born at Abbey St Bathans, near Duns, Berwickshire. She may have been related to the noted preacher James Purves (1734–1795), who merits an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and whose uncle lived at Duns. George Lillie, David's elder brother, married Agnes Brown, Frances's elder sister.

David and Frances had five children, of whom the two eldest were born at Eday, Orkney, where David had become assistant minister in 1889. Helen (1890–1977) became a medical doctor (MA MB ChB) and in 1925 married Professor John Garrett (1888–1948), Principal of Murray College, Sialkot, India (now in Pakistan), which had been established by the Church of Scotland in 1889. David and Frances's second child was Isobel Milne (1892–1973) who graduated MA and BSc and was living in Yorkshire in 1940, followed by Mary Purves (1893–1995) who was

born at Latheron, Caithness and also graduated MA. She nursed David in his final years. David and Frances's fourth child Adziel (1894–1976) was born at Watten, where David had become minister in 1892 and was to remain in post for 46 years; she became a missionary in Africa, and was in India in 1940. Isobel, Mary and Adziel did not marry. David and Frances's youngest child, William, was born at Watten in 1899. He was educated at the Miller Institute in Thurso, and then at Aberdeen University, where he graduated MA in 1921, and took a degree in Pedagogy at London in 1922. Later that year he joined his elder sister Helen at Murray College, Sialkot, India, where he was appointed Missionary Professor. He returned to Britain in order to be ordained priest at Glasgow in 1931, taking his degree of Bachelor of Divinity there in 1938. However, he did not return permanently from the Punjab until 1946, where he bryologized on holidays in the Himalayas with his colleague and brother-in-law John Garrett. William became Doctor of Divinity at Aberdeen in 1948, and lectured there in Biblical Studies until his retirement in 1969.

David Lillie retired from the ministry in November 1938, and moved to Swiney, Lybster, where he died on 21 February 1940.

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