

EDWARD MORELL HOLMES (1843-1930)

Mark Lawley
email: m.lawley@virgin.net

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

Holmes specialized in lichens and marine algae, but was also a keen bryologist. He found *Acaulon triquetrum* on the Isle of Portland, Dorset in 1890, and *Didymodon cordatus* new to Britain at Saunton, Devon in 1903.

His first published paper was about the lichens of Devon and Cornwall in 1872. He contributed accurate and detailed accounts of cryptogams to several *Victoria County Histories* (Surrey, 1902; Bedfordshire, 1904; Cornwall, 1906; Devon, 1906; Somerset, 1906; and Kent, 1908), as well as the accounts of lichens for the volumes on Buckinghamshire (1905) and Berkshire (1906), and his unpublished manuscript describing the lichens of Dorset (written in about 1906) is at the Natural History Museum in London.

Holmes also wrote (with the journalist Peter Gray (1818-1899)) *British Fungi, Lichens and Mosses Including Scale Mosses and Liverworts* (1886, 2nd edition 1907), as well as hundreds of notes and articles for *Journal of Botany*, *Journal of the Linnaean Society*, and *Pharmaceutical Journal*.

His mosses are at Cambridge, and his liverworts are at the National Museum and Gallery of Wales in Cardiff. His lichens are in individual glass-topped boxes at Nottingham (with other material that he collected dispersed in many other herbaria elsewhere in Britain), and his algae are at Birmingham. His letters are at Kew and the Linnaean Society, and the Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine Library in London also has letters and manuscripts.

Family background and biography

Edward Morell Holmes was born in Wycombe, Berkshire, the second of six children born to Henry Frederick Holmes (1815-1906), Congregational minister, and his first wife Jane (*née* Waldo, 1812/3-1881/2). Several Morells were non-conformist ministers, including John Morell (1775-1840) and John Daniel Morell (1816-1891) who are described in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

Henry Frederick Holmes was born in Stoke Newington, Middlesex; Jane Waldo was born in Berriton, Hampshire. They married in Hackney in 1840, and their first child, Henry Robert Oliver, was born in Wendover, Buckinghamshire in 1841. At the time of the 1841 census Henry and Jane were living in Pound Street, Wendover, but by 1851 had moved to Cavendish Villa, near Aylesbury Road, Wendover. After Edward arrived in 1843, Alfred Reginald was born in 1846, Ernest Oliver in 1847, Serena Jane in 1850, and Emma Louisa in 1854. All the children were born in Wendover, except Emma who was born in Boston, Lincolnshire.

By 1861, Edward was living with (and presumably an assistant to) Thomas Vicary, a chemist in Plymouth. Holmes registered as a pharmaceutical chemist in December 1862, and was still in Plymouth, working as a chemist in 1871. However, in 1872 he became curator of the Pharmaceutical Society's museum at 17, Bloomsbury Square, London, a post that he held for fifty years until 1922. Between 1873 and 1876 Holmes also lectured in botany at the Westminster Hospital School, and from 1887 until 1890 he was Lecturer in Materia Medica at the Pharmaceutical Society.

In 1881 Holmes was living at 30, Arthur Road, Islington, Finsbury, London with his younger sister Emma, but in 1882 he married Catherine Appleford (born 1841/2), daughter of Frederick Joshua Appleford (1816-1882), clerk to an East India merchant in 1851, and Eleanor (*née* Thompson 1818/23-1885). They had no children. In 1891 the couple were living at Bradbourne Dene, Bradbourne Road, Sevenoaks, Kent; by 1901 they had moved to Rushorn, Virie Court, Sevenoaks.

Holmes was "a rapid and indefatigable walker, his quick sight detecting plants as he was racing along at five miles an hour", but in 1921 he was knocked down by a car, and had to have part of one leg amputated, for which he was subsequently awarded £1,000 in the King's Bench Division. With his work in the field much restricted, Holmes advertised his services as a "consulting botanist and pharmacognosist" from his home at Sevenoaks, where he was "open to give expert botanical assistance, on business terms, to merchants and others". The Pharmaceutical Society retained Holmes as Emeritus Curator of their museum from 1922 until his death.

Edward Holmes died in Sevenoaks on September 10th 1930.