

JOHN FERGUSSON (1834-1907)

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This article is one in a series 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

The Reverend John Fergusson took up the study of mosses in 1866, and discovered *Anomodon attenuatus*, *Cynodontium fallax* and *Grimmia elatior* (all three mosses being very rare and new to Britain) in Angus (Forfarshire) in 1868, *Mielichhoferia elongata* in the same county in about 1870, and *Grimmia ungeri* and *G. montana* (as *G. alpestris*) near Ballater, South Aberdeenshire in 1870 and 1872 respectively. He may also have been the person who found the exceedingly rare *Encalypta brevicollis* in Angus in 1871. He also apparently collected *Andreaea crassinervia* near Loch Dubh, Lochnagar, south Aberdeenshire. The voucher is at New York, but the provenance of Fergusson's specimen is doubted. Fergusson also found *Andreaea frigida* on Ben Macdhu in the Cairngorms in 1873.

Of liverworts he added *Cephalozia pleniceps*, *Fossombronina wondraczekii*, *Harpanthus flotovianus*, *Jamesoniella autumnalis*, *Jungermannia atrovirens*, and *Marsupella sprucei* to Scotland's known bryoflora.

He wrote 'Mosses indigenous to Forfarshire not included in the Flora of Forfarshire' in *Transactions of the Botanical Society of Edinburgh* (1869/70, x, 245) in which he listed between a hundred and two hundred species new to the county, and 'Mosses and Lichens of the county' (pages 190-193 in the second volume of A.J. Warden's *Angus or Forfarshire, the land and people, descriptive and historical*, 1881). Fergusson carried on an extensive correspondence with other leading British bryologists such as Wilson and Hunt, and at one time contemplated preparing a manual of British mosses.

Fergusson was also interested in fungi, and organised a fungus show at Aberdeen in 1874, which helped to stimulate founding of the Scottish Cryptogamic Society in the following year.

Fergusson's letters are at the Natural History Museum in London. His plants are at Oxford, and some of his bryophytes are at Cardiff. 250 of his bryophytes are at Dundee City Museum and Art Gallery. He exchanged material with E.M. Holmes, J.A. Wheldon,

John Sim (whose herbarium contained numerous gatherings sent to him by Fergusson), and the American botanist Isaac Comly Martindale (1842-1893). However, many of his plants were lost in a fire that destroyed most of his “unique collection of the plants of the north-east of Scotland” (see Brebner, J., (1912). ‘The Flora of Forfarshire’, pages 597-610 in *British Association Handbook*. Dundee).

Family background and biography

John Fergusson was born on July 29th 1834 at Kerrow, Glen Shee, Angus (Forfarshire), a son of Donald Fergusson (1791/3->1871) and Mary (*née* MacGregor), who married at Kirkmichael, Perthshire in 1826. John had an elder sister, Margaret (1830-1892) and a younger brother, Fergus (1843/4-?1877).

In 1841 and 1851 the family was farming near Kirkmichael with Donald’s elder brother John Fergusson (1786/8->1871), his wife Jane (or Janet or Jean, *née* Lamb, c.1807->1861) and their two sons Donald (born 1827) and Robert (born 1829). In 1851, Donald senior held 40 acres, and John senior was described in the Census Return as a grazier and shepherd. The two elderly brothers, John and Donald were still living in Glenshee in 1871, and their sons continued to farm in the district after that.

John junior was educated at Glenshee School, Dundee High School, and then became a student at the University of St. Andrews in 1850/1 from where he went to Aberdeen University. He was licensed by Meigle presbytery in 1858, and became assistant at St. John’s parish, Dundee. In 1860 he was ordained to become minister at Glenprosen, Angus. In 1861 he was living at Inchmill, and minister of Glenprosen Chapel near Kirriemuir. In 1869 he became minister of New Pitsligo, Aberdeenshire. In 1875 he moved to Fern, Angus (not Fearn in East Ross-shire), and was still in post there at the time of his death. John did not marry, and his unmarried sister Margaret was living with him in 1871, 1881 and 1891.

Fergusson died in Edinburgh on August 6th, 1907.

Acknowledgement

I thank Moira Mackenzie, librarian at St. Andrew’s University for information that she provided.