

JOHN SIM (1824-1901)

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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

John Sim was a highly accomplished but little remembered botanist, with a particular interest in liverworts. He collected especially in north-eastern Scotland, and added *Cephalozia leucantha*, *Cephaloziella massalongi*, *Frullania fragilifolia*, *Kurzia trichocladus*, *Lophozia longidens*, *Marsupella adusta* and *M. sparsifolia* to the known Scottish flora.

He visited Shetland in 1878, finding *Sphagnum lindbergii* at its only low-altitude locality in Britain at Saxavord on Unst, and described his adventures on Shetland in a series of articles in *The Daily Free Press*, an Aberdeen newspaper.

Sims's bryophytes are held at the Department of Botany, Aberdeen University. His herbarium of several hundred Scottish gatherings (mainly Kincardineshire and Aberdeenshire) also contained many plants collected from Angus and Perthshire by the Reverend John Fergusson.

Family background and biography

John Sim was the second child of four born to James Sim (born 1795/6), a gardener, and Agnes (*née* Craighead, 1792), daughter of Thomas Craighead and Elspet (*née* Murdoch). John's siblings were Margaret (born 1822), Thomas (1825/6), and James (1828). All four children were born in Old Machar, Aberdeen.

In 1841, the family were living at Pulmuir, Old Machar. James probably died during the following decade, for in 1851 Agnes was farming 60 acres at Northfield, Old Machar, and employed six labourers.

John married Isabella Thomson Robertson (born 1823), daughter of Thomas Robertson and Isabel (*née* Keith) at Ellon, Aberdeenshire in 1857. By 1861 John and Isabella had taken on the ground at Northfield (which by that time had increased to 70 acres). John described himself as a farmer and gardener.

Sometime during the next ten years, John and his family moved to Gateside, Strachan, Kincardineshire, where they farmed 140 acres and employed three men and a boy in 1871, and six men and one woman in 1881.

By 1891, John had moved to Temple Croft, Arbuthnott, Kincardineshire, and described himself as a florist and fruit-grower. In 1901, shortly before he died, he was living at Nessback, East Petercutter, Aberdeenshire.

John and Isabella had five children: Thomas Robertson (1858-1938), Agnes Craighead (b.1860), Mary Lyon (b.1862), James and his twin brother John (b.1865). Thomas became a well-known and respected gardener and botanist in his own right, particularly after emigrating to South Africa. He wrote 'The Bryophyta of South Africa' (*Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa*) in 1926, and numerous other botanical works. James became a forestry officer, and his son James Taylor Robertson Sim (1903-1968) became an agronomist.