

WILLIAM JACKSON HOOKER (1785-1865)

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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/>

Bryological career

Hooker's pivotal importance in the history of British and Irish bryology lies in his influence on other botanists, rather than in the bryophytes that he discovered himself. Nevertheless, he was a good field-bryologist, and found, for example, *Buxbaumia aphylla* new to Britain in 1805, *Andreaea nivalis* on Ben Nevis in 1808, and *Grimmia unicolor* in Glen Clova, Angus in the early 19th century.

He wrote *British Jungermanniae* (1812-16) and *Muscologia Britannica* with Thomas Taylor (1818), and also stimulated the botanical interests of many of his students at Glasgow University, where he was regius professor of botany from 1820 until 1841, after which he became director of Kew Gardens in London.

His herbarium, manuscripts and letters are at Kew, with further letters at the Natural History Museum and the Linnaean Society in London.

Family background and biography

The Hookers lie centrally placed in a remarkable network of families and individuals who were nationally prominent in numerous walks of life, including natural history.

William Jackson Hooker was born on July 6th, 1785 in Magdalen Street, Norwich, the second of two children born to Joseph Hooker (1754-1845), wool-stapler of Exeter and then Norwich. In Norwich, Joseph worked as a confidential clerk to the Baring brothers, trading in worsted and bombazine. In his hours of leisure he was an amateur botanist and keen gardener. An ancestor of Joseph's was the historian John Hooker (?1527-1601), who merits an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

William's mother, Lydia (*née* Vincent, 1759-1829) was a daughter of James Vincent, worsted manufacturer of Norwich. Joseph and Lydia's eldest son Joseph died in 1815.

[[William's early years](#)]

In 1815, William married Maria Sarah Turner (1797-1872), daughter of Dawson Turner (1775-1858), who was also a famous botanist, and Mary (*née* Palgrave, 1774-1850). Mary was a daughter of William Palgrave of Coltishall and Yarmouth, and sister to William Palgrave (1771-1838), whose son Thomas Palgrave (1804-1891) was also a keen bryologist. Maria Hooker (*née* Turner) collected mosses, and with her sister Elizabeth drew them for Hooker.

Dawson Turner was a banker at Yarmouth, and compiled a Flora of Irish mosses (*Muscologia Hibernicae Spicilegium*, 1804). His father, James (1743-1794) was a merchant banker, and brother to Joseph Turner (1745-1828) who was master of Pembroke College, Cambridge, and dean of Norwich. Their parents were the Reverend Francis Turner (1716-1790) and Sarah (*née* Dawson, 1718-1795). Sarah Dawson was a daughter of James Dawson (born 1685).

Dawson Turner's mother was born Elizabeth Cotman (1742-1819), daughter of John Cotman, merchant and mayor of Yarmouth. [He was.....] Edward Cotman (1759-1843/4, silk mercer and dealer in foreign lace at Norwich) married Ann Sell; their son John Sell Cotman (1782-1842) became a prominent draughtsman, painter, etcher and teacher, and formed close ties with Dawson Turner's family through the marriage of Elizabeth Cotman to Dawson's father, James Turner. Cotman's expertise as an artist was instrumental in the artistic development of Turner's daughter Maria Hooker and her sister Elizabeth and hence in the illustration of plants for Hooker.

Maria and William Jackson Hooker's son, Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817-1911) became a botanist like his father, and succeeded him as director of Kew Gardens. He married Frances Harriet Henslow (1825-1874), daughter of John Stevens Henslow (1796-1861, professor of botany at Cambridge) and brother of the botanist George Henslow (1835-1925). Frances's mother was born Harriet Jenyns (1797-1857), whose brother was the naturalist Leonard Jenyns (1800-1893). Harriet Henslow's first cousin was the scientist William Hyde Wollaston (1766-1828).

Joseph and Frances Hooker's eldest child, Harriet Ann (1854-1945) married the botanist Sir William Turner Thiselton-Dyer (1843-1928), who later succeeded Hooker as director at Kew.

Joseph Dalton Hooker's second wife was Hyacinth Jardine (*née* Symonds, 1842-1921), daughter of the Reverend William Samuel Symonds, geologist and rector of Pendock, Gloucestershire, and widow of Sir William Jardine (1800-1874), ornithologist.

Thus, the Hookers' botanical and familial connections within the sphere of British natural history surpass those of any other British family.

William Jackson Hooker died at Kew on August 12th, 1865. His wife Maria survived him.