

## AUGUSTIN LEY (1842-1911)

Mark Lawley

email: [m.lawley@virgin.net](mailto: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/>

### *Bryological career*

Ley added *Oxyrrhynchium schleicheri* to the British list, this moss having being hitherto confused with *O. hians*.

Ley co-authored *A Flora of Herefordshire* (1889), in which he was solely responsible for a detailed annotated list of mosses, and he also wrote papers for the *Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club* of 1905, listing additions to Herefordshire's known bryoflora since 1889.

Ley discovered innumerable species of bryophytes new to his home county of Herefordshire and neighbouring shires. Around his home near Ross-on-Wye in south Herefordshire, he found the Carboniferous Limestone of the Doward particularly rewarding, with *Bryum canariense* in Lord's Wood (as well as at Sellack and Little Birch) and *B. torquescens* on the Great Doward. Other plants from the Doward and surrounding land included *Dicranum scottianum*, *Eurhynchium striatulum*, *Entosthodon muhlenbergii*, *Grimmia orbicularis*, *Gymnostomum calcareum*, *Pleurochaete squarrosa*, *Rhytidium rugosum*, *Scorpiurium circinatum*, *Seligeria acutifolia* and *S. pusilla*.

From the Woolhope hills south-east of Hereford and nearby Shucknall Hill he discovered *Aloina ambigua* and *A. rigida* (Shucknall), *Bryum torquescens* (Shucknall), *Entosthodon muhlenbergii* (Backbury Hill), *Microbryum floerkeanum* on Shucknall Hill, *Pottiopsis caespitosa* on Common Hill and on Shucknall Hill, *Pterygoneurum ovatum* (Shucknall), and *Weissia multicapsularis* on Common Hill.

The hills of south-west Herefordshire on the Welsh border also drew Ley, and there he found *Bryum mildeanum* in the upper Grwyne valley in 1903, *Encalypta ciliata* on the Black Mountain, *Plagiopus oederianus* on the Red Daren in the Olchon valley, and *Weissia squarrosa* at Cwm-y-oy in 1874.

Other notable discoveries from Herefordshire included *Bryum uliginosum* at Pontrilas, *Myrinia pulvinata* (River Wye at Clifford), *Orthotrichum obtusifolium* (Hentland, Pencombe and Perrystone) and *Thuidium recognitum* (Hope Mansel).

Like most other bryologists of his generation who were active before MacVicar's *Student's Handbook of British Hepatics* appeared in 1912, Ley paid more attention to mosses than liverworts, but he did find *Apometzgeria pubescens* on The Doward in 1884. *Riccia cavernosa* at Sellack in 1889, and *Sphaerocarpos texanus* at King's Caple in 1872.

His herbarium is at Birmingham University, with additional plants at Oxford, Bolton, and Belfast.

### *Family background*

Augustin Ley was born at Hereford on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1842, the second son of Reverend William Henry Ley (c.1815-1887) and Mary Prichard (d.1844), a daughter of Dr. James Cowles Prichard (1786-1848) of Bristol.

Augustin's mother's family boasted several individuals who became sufficiently prominent to merit entries in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, including James Cowles Prichard himself. Dr. Prichard was born at Ross-on-Wye, the eldest child of Thomas Prichard (1765-1843) and Mary (*née* Lewis, 1763-1799). Both of James's parents came from well-established Quaker families in Herefordshire, and one of James's great-uncles was very wealthy. Cowles was the surname of James's paternal grandmother.

James converted to the Anglican Church while a student at Cambridge. He became well known for his pioneering work in anthropology and mental illness, and published several books including *Physical History of Mankind* (1813), *On the Different Forms of Insanity in Relation to Jurisprudence* (1842) and *The Natural History of Man* (1843).

Dr Prichard's wife was born Anna Maria Estlin (b.1788), the daughter of John Prior Estlin (1747-1817) who was a prominent Unitarian minister and schoolmaster at Bristol. Anna's brother, John Bishop Estlin (1785-1855) became a pioneering ophthalmic surgeon who married Margaret Bagehot in 1817. Margaret was a member of the Bagehot family of Langport, Somerset, which also spawned Walter Bagehot (1826-1877) the political commentator, economist and journalist. After Anna died, James Cowles Prichard married Emma Henrietta Ley in 1841, so the marriage of Augustin Ley's parents was another union between the Ley and Prichard families.

James Cowles Prichard's second son, Augustin Prichard (1818-1898), took over his father's practice in Bristol, was interested in botany (he contributed to E.H. Swete's *Flora Bristolensis* (1854)), and helped to guide his young nephew's early steps in natural history. Augustin Prichard married Mary Siballah (or Sibella) Ley, who was born at Maker, near Torpoint, Plymouth in 1818-9 – a third union between the Leys and Prichards. Mary Ley was very likely a sister of William Henry Ley.

Another odd coincidence occurs with Augustin Prichard's son, Edgar Prichard, who married Eleanor Openshaw, whose father came from Bury in Lancashire: Herefordshire's premier bryologist in succession to Ley, Charles Herbert Binstead, had a brother who also married an Openshaw girl whose father was born in Bury.

Augustin Ley's father, William Henry, was also born at Maker, son of the Reverend Thomas Hunt Ley, who was in turn the son of John Ley, and apparently descended from John Ley (died 1775), gentleman of Trehill, near Exeter.

Numerous male Leys became clergymen in Devon and Cornwall during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, but after a short career at his college in Oxford, William Henry became headmaster of the Cathedral School at Hereford. He resigned that position around the time of Augustin's birth, and was instituted to the living at Sellack vicarage near Ross, which was combined with the neighbouring parish of Kings Caple immediately across the River Wye.

### *Biography*

Augustin and his elder brother William Clement were educated at home instead of school. Their father not only taught them but also passed on his love of natural history, and the two boys were collecting and pressing wild flowers at an early age, encouraged also by their maternal uncle Augustin Prichard (1818-1898) of Bristol.

During his teenage years, Augustin Ley probably met the Reverend William Henry Purchas (1823-1903) when Purchas visited the county from time to time. Purchas was a native of Ross, and stimulated the botanical ambitions and adventures of the recently established Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club in the 1850s and '60s, but spent his working career outside Herefordshire. Another local botanist, Burton Mounsher Watkins (1816-1892, a Relieving Officer, or Victorian social worker) took interest in bryophytes as well as vascular plants, as did the Reverend James Frederick Crouch (1809-1888) of Pembridge, Herefordshire.

William Henry Ley's confidence in his own ability to teach was justified as Augustin followed his brother to Oxford. William Clement Ley was ordained and eventually became rector of Little Ashby in Leicestershire. Thus, he and his brother were a third generation in a direct line of Leys who become priests.

While at Oxford, Ley met and became friends with Henry Boswell (1837-1897), who was in trade in the town, and spent his hours of leisure botanising in the countryside around Oxford. Boswell was an accomplished bryologist, and very likely stimulated Ley's bryological career.

Augustin was at Oxford from 1862 until 1865, and after being ordained a priest became curate at Buxton in Derbyshire from 1867 until 1871. After that, Augustin returned to Sellack in order to assist his father with his duties at Kings Caple, and lived in his home

county for the rest of his life. He remained at Sellack until 1878, when he married and took up duties as vicar of St. Weonards, about six miles west of Ross.

Augustin's wife was born Sarah Lucy Du Buisson in 1855, a daughter of Edmund Du Buisson (1821-1875, vicar of Breinton near Hereford from 1854 until his death) and Charlotte Anne Dunning Ley, daughter of Thomas Ley, rector of Rame near Torpoint, Plymouth. Was this the same Thomas (Hunt) Ley who was curate at nearby Maker, and father of William Henry? Thus, the Leys and Du Buissons were already related, and Augustin and Lucy were cousins. The Du Buissons were originally Huguenots, who had made their fortune from dyeing and printing fabrics in London. They owned Glynhir, an estate at Llandybie in Carmarthenshire, where Augustin botanised on several occasions, and where the British Bryological Society stayed during their Summer Meeting in 2002.

The marriage of Augustin and Lucy was short, for Lucy caught a chill when they returned to England from their honeymoon on the Continent. Despite the best efforts of Henry Graves Bull, the Hereford physician and mainstay of the local Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club's "forays among the funguses", Lucy's chill deteriorated into pneumonia, and she died on April 16<sup>th</sup> 1878, only two and a half months after the wedding. The "Du Buisson diaries", begun by Sarah Lucy Du Buisson before she married, and continued by Augustin Ley for about 18 months after her death are at the Record Office in Hereford. After his wife died, Augustin immersed himself in his clerical duties and pastoral cares, and found further solace in botany. For the next thirty years Ley ransacked Herefordshire and neighbouring counties on the Welsh border for plants, all the while recording, collecting, and discovering many uncommon species.

Ley also travelled further afield when on holiday, for example to Norway in 1863 and 1873, the Alps, France and the Riviera. In Scotland, he went to the Cairngorms in 1874, Angus (Forfarshire) in 1876, and also explored in Argyllshire.

In 1885 he returned to Sellack in order to assist his ailing father with his duties there, and when William died in 1887 Augustin became vicar of Sellack and Kings Caple, remaining in post until he retired in 1908.

Ley welcomed Charles Herbert Binstead (1862-1941) to Herefordshire in 1890. Binstead was destined to match Ley's expertise in field-bryology. Ley would also have become acquainted with Eleonora Armitage (1865-1961), who lived near Ley just outside Ross, and became the only founding lady member of the Moss Exchange Club in 1896. Ley, though, never joined the MEC, probably because by then his eyesight had begun to deteriorate. In later years he tended to concentrate on the "difficult" genera of flowering plants, such as *Rubus* and *Rosa*, *Hieracium* and *Sorbus*.

Augustin's mother had died in 1844, after which William Henry remarried in 1870, and Augustin shared a roof with his step-mother Gertrude (*née* Gee, who was only three or four years older than Augustin himself) from the time of his father's death until his own death 24 years later.

Ley died on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1911 at Brampton Lodge, Netherton, Brampton Abbots, near Ross.

*Acknowledgment*

I thank Tacy Rickard for information supplied.