

EDWARD WILLIAMS (1762-1833)

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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/>

Family background and biography

Edward Williams was born at Leighton, Shropshire, and baptised there on September 8th 1762, the eldest son and second child of Edward Williams (1730/31-1824) and Barbara Letitia (formerly Corbet, *née* Mytton, 1732-1796). Over the next few years, Edward and Barbara had three more sons and four more daughters.

Barbara was the daughter of Mary Elizabeth (*née* Davenport, c.1705-1740), herself the daughter of Henry Davenport (born 1677) of Davenport House, Worfield, near Bridgnorth, Shropshire and of John Mytton (1690-1754) of Halston Hall near Oswestry. A later John Mytton (1796-1838) was dubbed “Mad Jack” Mytton because of his reckless life-style and profligate squandering of the family’s fortunes.

Arabella Mytton, who was born at Halston to Richard Mytton at or near the beginning of the 18th century married David Pennant, and their son Thomas (1726-1798) was the famous naturalist. Thus, Edward Williams was distantly related to Pennant.

The Myttons also intermarried with the Devereux family of Forden, Meifod and other places either side of the Welsh border around Welshpool.

Barbara’s first husband was John Corbet (c.1710-1759), a widower of Sundorn Castle near Shrewsbury. They married in 1750, and Barbara bore him five children, of whom John (1751-1817) became Sheriff of Shropshire in 1793, Andrew (1753-1824) became a Lt. Colonel in the army, and Mary Elizabeth married Sir John Kynaston Powell, Bt. in 1778.

Barbara married Edward Williams, gentleman of Leighton in about 1760, the year after her first husband died. Their first two children were baptised at Leighton in 1761 and 1762, but the next two were baptised at Sheinton (just across the River Severn from Leighton) in 1763 and 1765, after which five more children were baptised at Leighton, where Edward was church-warden in 1774.

The family lived at Leighton until 1778, when Edward bought real estate at Eaton Mascott, a few miles closer to Shrewsbury. He continued to live there until his death in 1824. Edward Williams (the father) was a man of considerable property and wealth; a note accompanying his draft will of about 1800 at Shropshire Archives in Shrewsbury (ref: D3651/D/46/1/403) assesses the value of his estate at £12,800 gross and £7,800 after allowing for debts.

By 1778, however, Edward the son was in his penultimate year at Repton School in Derbyshire, from where he went up to Pembroke College at Oxford, where he was tutored by Dr. Adams. Dr. Adams also held the living of St. Chads, Shrewsbury for 43 years. Edward graduated B.A. in 1783, and in that year he was awarded a fellowship at All Souls College, a position he held until 1818.

He was ordained in 1786, and his half-brother John Corbet gave him the perpetual curacies of Uffington and Battlefield near Shrewsbury. In 1817, All Souls College presented him with the rectory of Chelsfield in Kent, a living he retained – along with his two curacies – until his death.

Williams did not live at Chelsfield, Battlefield or Uffington, but at Eaton Mascott (which is about six miles from Uffington) until his father died in 1824. The family's house at Eaton Mascott then passed to a younger brother, and Edward moved to Glansevern Lodge, Coton Hill, on the Berwick road out of Shrewsbury, from where he served his two cures, and also the pastoral cares of the inhabitants of nearby Harlescott. He established and managed a subscription school at Battlefield, which drew pupils from many surrounding villages, and he also founded a Sunday school there.

Williams died a bachelor at Glansevern Lodge on January 3rd, 1833, and was buried under a flat stone near the chancel wall of the church at Battlefield. The contents of his house were sold by auction....

Botanical career

Williams was an accomplished antiquarian and botanist who knew Shropshire and its flora well. He spent much time travelling round the county, recording and drawing architectural and archaeological artefacts, and doubtless botanised as he went. He discovered Six-stamened Waterwort (*Elatine hexandra*) new to Britain at Bomere Pool in 1798, and prepared a manuscript catalogue of Salopian plants, which passed into the hands of Lord Berwick at Attingham Hall after Williams's death. In 1839, Lord Berwick permitted William Allport Leighton (1805-1889) to make a copy of the catalogue, but unfortunately this happened a little too late for Leighton to be able to fully assimilate Williams's records into his own *Flora of Shropshire* (1841).

Leighton's copy of Williams's catalogue now resides at the Record Office at Shrewsbury, and in addition to vascular plants, also mentions 117 mosses and 23 liverworts.

Williams's bryological discoveries include *Ricciocarpos natans* from Eaton Pool at Eaton Mascott in 1802.

Williams also studied lichens, and a paper on 'Shropshire lichens' was published posthumously in the 1868 issue of *Annual Magazine of Natural History*, 1: 183-188.

His plants are at Merseyside County Museum in Liverpool.