

Bryophytes in SO77

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This ancient semi-natural forest on the county's southern border with Worcestershire cloaks rather acidic Carboniferous marls, sandstones and breccias on the plateaux. These rocks themselves overlie sandstones and shales of Middle Coal Measure Carboniferous age which are exposed particularly where streams have cut into the younger rocks. The forest's botany mirrors its geology, with oak, birch, and a calcifugous ground-flora on the flat, higher ground, but on the slopes and in the valleys draining down to Dowles Brook a much more diverse bryoflora feeds off salts and minerals derived from bands of coal and occasional tuffs of limestone.

Moreover, although formerly much coppiced for charcoal-burning, Wyre has never been clear-felled, so still harbours liverworts which can only survive in the humidity provided by a continuous shade of trees. *Jamesoniella autumnalis*, for example, was reported in 1969 from Skeys Wood (SO 7777), which, although in Worcestershire, is nevertheless part of the vice-county of Shropshire. In the early years of the 20th century John Bishop Duncan (1869-1953), then a clerk at the Midland Bank in Bewdley and a field-bryologist of national standing, would have caught the train to the forest on a line which has long since become defunct, and alighted on a platform now reclaimed by nature. He discovered the *Jamesoniella* in the Shropshire part of Wyre, as well as several other liverworts also constrained by their craving for moisture to westerly districts of Britain, and remarkable for occurring this far east: *Bazzania trilobata*, *Blepharostoma trichophyllum*, *Metzgeria conjugata*, *Plagiochila spinulosa*, *Saccogyna viticulosa*, *Tritomaria exsectiformis* and *T. quinqueidentata*. Of these species, only *Bazzania trilobata* and *Saccogyna* have been reported from Shropshire's Wyre since Duncan found them. Do the others still occur? Of mosses, Duncan found *Bryoerythrophyllum ferruginascens* (a normally montane species not found in Shropshire before or since), *Loeskeobryum (Hylocomium) brevirostre*, and *Seligeria recurvata*. His 1906 record of *Philonotis arnellii* was repeated 20 years later by W.B. Grove, but *Antitrichia curtispindula* has much decreased in Britain, and is probably extinct in Shropshire.

Duncan, who was President of the British Bryological Society in 1937-38 and the society's Recorder for mosses for many years, remains the only prominent bryologist ever to have repeatedly recorded in Wyre. Of occasional incursionists, J.E. Bagnall reported *Fossombronia caespitiformis* and *Jungermannia sphaerocarpa* in 1892, Binstead found *Plagiothecium latebricola* in 1903, the BBS spent a day in the Worcestershire part of the forest

in 1959 and 2004, and S.W. Greene and M.C. Clark wrote a paper about the forest's bryoflora in 1962. *Lejeunea lamacerina* occurs by the Dowles Brook and in Skeys Wood. Skeys Wood also contains *Heterocladium heteropterum* var. *heteropterum*, *Hookeria lucens*, *Microlejeunea ulicina* and *Saccogyna viticulosa*. Baveney Brook (SO 7076) and environs is also interesting, with *Dicranum fuscescens*, *Didymodon spadiceus*, *Fissidens osmundoides*, *Hookeria lucens*, *Rhynchostegiella teneriffae* and the liverwort *Riccardia palmata*.

Hardcore used for constructing the numerous forestry tracks offers a modern, additional, fairly base-rich, unshaded, ephemeral habitat which Duncan would not have had the opportunity to examine, but much of the forest has changed relatively little in the last century since charcoal-burning ceased. Several herb-rich meadows and orchards (for example, near Bell Coppice, SO 7175) may also be bryologically interesting, and discovery of *Fissidens rufulus* in the Shropshire part of Wyre during 2005 and *Riccardia palmata*, *Dicranum fuscescens* and *Pohlia drummondii* in 2007 suggest that more remains to be discovered.

JOHN BISHOP DUNCAN (1869-1953)

Bryological career

JBD was collecting mosses by 1885, and joined the Moss Exchange Club (the forerunner of the British Bryological Society) in 1901, and was Treasurer of the BBS from 1925 to 1945 and President in 1937-38. He edited the second edition of the Moss Census Catalogue in 1926, and added the mosses *Plagiothecium piliferum* and *Octodiceras fontanum* to the British list, the latter first coming to notice from the River Severn at Bewdley.

His bryophytes are at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh, with others at the National Museum and Gallery of Wales in Cardiff, and some plants at Oxford.

Family background and biography

JBD was born in Edinburgh in 1869, the eldest child of John Duncan (born c. 1839), who was a son of John Duncan (born c. 1815), schoolmaster and carter, and Marion (née Taylor, c. 1811). JBD's mother was born Margaret Tyrie Bishop in about 1842, a daughter of John Bishop (born 1812/3), a grocer, and Margaret (née Tyrie). Both the Duncan and Bishop families lived in Dalkeith in the mid-19th century. John and Margaret had three children: JBD, then Margaret Tyrie (born c. 1876), and Peter (born c. 1880). Peter was a law clerk in 1901.

About 1871, John Duncan took his family to live in Moffat, where he was rector of and taught at the academy. It seems very likely that the Duncans would have known the Macvicar family, for John Gibson Macvicar (1800-1884) who was Symers Macvicar's (1857-1932) father was rector at Moffat. Perhaps one family enthused the other about the delights of bryology.

After spending his childhood in Moffat, John Bishop Duncan became a bank clerk. At first he worked in Moffat, then at Kelso, Stratford-upon-Avon, and Birmingham (where he lived at the time of the 1891 Census), and later in Bewdley, Worcestershire (he was there by 1901, and lived in Park Lane, Bewdley in 1912).

Duncan remained a bachelor, and retired from the Midland Bank at Bewdley to Berwick-upon-Tweed in 1923, where he lived in Summerhill Terrace, just along from John Bishop (a nephew of his mother's) and his wife. He was still living there in 1947, but had moved to North Road by the following year. For many years he was troubled with rheumatism, which tormented him until his death in 1953.

John Bishop's father (John Bishop Sr.) established a confectionery business at Marygate, Berwick-upon-Tweed in 1867. John Bishop Jr. (the eldest son) entered the family business when his father died in the 1870s, and when John Towers (a brother-in-law of John Bishop Sr.) retired in 1899, John Bishop Jr. took his brother Thomas into partnership in the business, which retained the name of Towers and Bishop. I assume that the John Bishop who died in the 1870s was a son of the Dalkeith grocer present at the wedding of Margaret Tyrie Bishop and John Duncan in 1868 (and therefore was also the bride's brother), but do not certainly know that.

The presence and business interests of JBD's mother's relatives in Berwick were evidently the reasons for JBD retiring there. And perhaps, in view of John Bishop Jr.'s love of natural history, JBD acquired his interest in natural history from his mother's side of the family. He was also a keen fisherman and gardener, and enjoyed music.

Duncan died at 4, North Road, Berwick-upon-Tweed on January 4th, 1953, and bequeathed his herbarium to Ursula Duncan (who was not related to JBD).

SOME COMMON WYRE FOREST MOSSES 3 DECEMBER 2008, CHAMBERLINE WOOD



Hypnum cupressiforme Wyre Forest

Marcus Wooton



Barchytheicum rutabulum Wyre Forest

Marcus Wooton



Polytrichastrum (Polytrichum) formosum

Marcus Wooton