

## GEORGE STABLER (1839-1910)

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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*

Like his friend Richard Spruce, Stabler was particularly interested in liverworts; he added *Marsupella stableri* and *Plagiochila exigua* to the British bryoflora. In addition, Stabler first reported *Anastrophyllum hellerianum* as a British species after it had been found by John Michie, a former pupil of his, who had become Commissioner (or Factor) for the royal estate at Balmoral, Aberdeenshire. Stabler visited Michie in 1884 and refound *A. hellerianum*, as well as *A. donnianum*, *A. saxicola* (second British record), *Lophozia longiflora* and *Marsupella stableri* (both first Scottish records).

Stabler was a close friend of his Levens neighbour James Martindale Barnes (1814-1890), who collected mosses and edited W.J. Linton's *Ferns of the English Lake District* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1878). Another botanical friend and neighbour of Stabler's was the lichenologist Joseph Anthony Martindale (1837-1914), who was a witness at Stabler's wedding in 1869. The three men botanised regularly in the English Lake District.

Stabler's herbarium is at Kendal Museum, and is being catalogued (2008). Kendal Museum also has two bound volumes containing the specimens referred to in Stabler's eight papers on 'The Hepaticae and Musci of Westmorland', which appeared in *The Naturalist* in the 1880s and 1890s. His letters are in the William Wilson correspondence at the Natural History Museum in London.

### *Family background and biography*

George Stabler was born on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1839 at Crayke, north Yorkshire. He was a son of James Stabler (1813/4-1893) and Elizabeth (*née* Stewart? 1815/6). James Stabler was a shoemaker, and born in Crayke. Elizabeth came from Henderskelf, Yorkshire. After George, James and Elizabeth had two daughters: Hannah (1842-1917) and Mary (born 1845).

George was taught at Welburn by Richard Spruce (1782-?1851), father of Richard Spruce the botanist, and possibly also for a brief period by Richard the son, with whom George

was friendly all his life. After training at St. John's College, York, George became a schoolmaster at Levens in Westmorland from 1860 until 1899, and where he passed his retirement. His sister Hannah also came to work as a schoolmistress in Levens from late 1868 until at least 1906.

George married Sarah Wilson (1847-1923) in 1869. Sarah was born in Heversham, a village near Levens. Her grandfather was John Wilson, who farmed 110 acres in 1851 and was also victualler of the Royal Oak Inn in Levens. Sarah taught at the infants' school in Levens for a while in the 1860s with Hannah Stabler before leaving to marry George. George and Sarah had five children: James (born 1870), Harold (1872-1945), Edgar (1874), Oswald (1876) and Bertha Elizabeth (1878-1917). Harold Stabler trained in woodwork and art, and became a prominent artistic designer. He married the sculptress Phoebe Gertrude McCleish (died 1955, sister of the textile and ceramic designer Minnie McCleish) in 1906, but none of George and Sarah's five children had children themselves.

George Stabler's health concerned him as early as 1874, when he was in a "weak state of health". By 1881, the sight in his left eye was bothering him, and in May 1895 he sustained a serious accident to his left eye, which necessitated its removal a week later. His incapacity led to the appointment of an assistant master at the school, and in December 1899 he became obliged to retire following development of iritis in his right eye. Stabler's loss of sight in later life also prevented him from pursuing his bryological interests. Even so, he managed to play cricket for Levens until at least 1890.

Stabler died at Levens on January 4<sup>th</sup> 1910.

### *Acknowledgment*

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