

JOHN BISHOP DUNCAN (1869-1953)

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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

JBD 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).