

EDMUND FREDERIC WARBURG (1908-1966)

Mark Lawley
email: 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/>

Botanical career

Warburg first became interested in botany as a result of his father's interest in the subject, and was further stimulated by T.G. Tutin and fellow students at Cambridge, including Paul Richards and Eustace Jones.

He joined the British Bryological Society in 1945, and was elected president for 1962-3. He edited the third edition of the *Census Catalogue of British Mosses* (1963), and planned but did not produce a new British Moss Flora with A.C. Crundwell.

Warburg found the following species new to Britain: *Molendoa warburgii* (Outer Hebrides, 1946), *Schistidium atrofusum* and *Weissia controversa* var. *wimmeriana* in East Inverness-shire in 1951, *Syntrichia virescens* in Yorkshire (1958), *Platygyrium repens* in Oxfordshire in 1962 (with A.R. Perry), and *Seligeria oelandica* in County Sligo, Ireland (1962) with A.C. Crundwell.

Warburg co-authored *Flora of the British Isles* (1952, 2nd edition 1962), which was the first comprehensive vascular plant Flora of the British Isles for over seventy years, and to which Warburg contributed much new material, for example in the account of roses.

His plants are at the Natural History Museum in London, and in the university's herbarium at Oxford.

Family background and biography

Edmund Frederic Warburg was born in London on March 22nd 1908, the eldest of four sons of Sir Oscar Emanuel Warburg (1876-1937), a businessman and chairman of London County Council in 1925-6, and Catherine Widdrington (*née* Byrne, 1879).

The Warburgs were Jews, and Oscar's parents were Frederic Elias Warburg (1832-1899), a foreign export merchant, and Emma Jane (*née* Raphael, 1844/5). Frederic Elias Warburg was born in Gothenburg, Sweden, a son of Samuel Warburg (1800-1881) and

Emma (*née* Gluckstadt, 1809-1880). In 1881, Frederic and Emma lived in Hastings, Sussex.

Relatives included the systematist Otto Warburg (1859-1938) and the plant physiologist Otto Heinrich Warburg (1883-1970) who invented the Warburg manometer and was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1931 for his contributions to biochemistry.

Catherine Byrne was a daughter of Sir Edmund Widdrington Byrne (1844-1904), barrister, judge, and Member of Parliament for Walthamstow, Essex in the 1890s, and Henrietta Johnstone (*née* Gulland, 1850/1). In 1881 the Byrnes lived at Upper Tootings, Ayncombe House, Streatham, Surrey. In 1901 they were at Salcombe, Devon. Edmund Byrne was a son of Edmund Byrne (born 1820/1), solicitor, and Mary Elizabeth (*née* Cowell). Henrietta's parents were James Gulland (born 1806/7) of Newton, Wemys, Fife, and Lucy (*née* Perfect, 1814/5).

Edmund Frederic's early years were spent at the family home, Boidier, Headley, near Epsom in Surrey. He was educated at Marlborough College between 1921 and 1927, whence he went to Trinity College, Cambridge to study mathematics, but soon transferring to natural sciences, and studying with T.G. Tutin. After graduating, he studied for a Ph.D. in the developing field of cytotaxonomy, and then took a research fellowship at Trinity in 1933. Later in the 1930s, he joined the staff of Bedford College, London, but in 1941 he started interpreting aerial photographs for the Royal Air Force at Medmenham in Buckinghamshire. In moments of leisure at Medmenham he began to study mosses, and went out looking for mosses with Paul Richards when on leave at Cambridge.

In 1948 Warburg took up a post in the Department of Botany at Oxford as curator of the Druce herbarium, where he remained for the rest of his life, being appointed Reader in Plant Taxonomy and a Fellow of New College in 1964.

In 1948 Warburg married Primrose Churchman (*née* Barratt 1908), daughter of Gilbert Barratt (born 1882) and Eliza R. Ridgeway of Melton, Suffolk, Primrose Barratt having previously married into the Churchman family of Melton that made cigarettes. Edmund and Primrose had two sons and a daughter, and lived at Yarnell's Hill, near Oxford.

Warburg died on June 9th 1966.