

HUGH DAVIES (1739-1821)

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

Davies's most important publication is *Welsh Botany* (1813), the first part of which is the first detailed flora of a Welsh county (Anglesey).

Davies was a friend of Thomas Pennant (1726-1798), corresponding with him at least as early as his time at Lan-faes and Penmon in the later 1760s and early 1770s, and toured the Isle of Man with him in 1774, returning there alone the following year. He provided information about the natural history of North Wales for publications by Pennant, as well as William Hudson's *Flora Anglica* (2nd edition, 1788), Smith and Sowerby's *English Botany* (1790-1814), and Turner and Dillwyn's *The Botanist's Guide through England and Wales* (1805).

Davies's herbarium is at the Natural History Museum in London, and the National Museum and Gallery of Wales, Cardiff has 192 of his specimens (of which 154 are bryophytes) collected between 1790 and 1809. The National Library of Wales has his manuscripts, with some papers at the University College Library at Bangor.

Family background and biography

[A likeness of Davies appears in *Y Casglwr* (Haf, 1999, page 8) and is reproduced in *The Botanists and Mountain Guides of Snowdonia*, 2nd ed., (Jones, D., 2007)]

Hugh Davies was born at Llandyfrydog, Anglesey on April 3rd, 1739, the youngest of six children of the Reverend Lewis Davies (died 1748-50), rector, and his wife Mary (*née* Knight). Lewis Davies became rector of Llandyfrydog in February 1722/3. Mary was a daughter of Joshua Knight (1651/3-1694/5) of Caernarfon and Jane (*née* Owen, daughter of Hugh Owen of Gilfach, Penmorfa, Caernarfonshire, and Jane (*née* Glynn). Hugh Owen was descended from Einion Ap Adda of Cefungoed/Cefumelgoed. Jane Glynn was descended from Cilmin Droed-Dhu of Lleuar, Clynnog, who died some time after 819 A.D.

Hugh had several older siblings: John (born about 1724), Robert (born 1728), Ann (born 1730), Lewis (born 1731), and Margaret (born about 1734). Of these, only Ann and Margaret survived childhood. Ann married Owen Owen (1721/2-1760) in 1753; one of their sons - also Owen Owen (1754-1833) – became a surgeon in Beaumaris, having followed Ann and Hugh's maternal uncle, Thomas Knight (1685/6-1760, physician of Caernarfon) into the medical profession. Margaret married John Higgon, who came from Pembrokeshire. In the late 17th century, the Higgons were mainly associated with Spittle and Haverfordwest, but a branch had settled at Treddafydd Ucha in the parish of Llanychlwydog in the upper Gwaun valley. A John Higgon became officer of excise at Beaumaris, and later moved to Caernarfon. This brought the Higgon family into contact with the Prichards of Dinam Hall, the Knights of Caernarfon, and the Davies family of Llandyfrydog, Anglesey. Hugh Davies's family background of rectors, physicians and customs officers indicates that he came from a comfortably placed stratum of the middle class.

Lewis Davies died while Hugh was still young, but Hugh nevertheless completed his education at the free grammar school in Beaumaris, and then at Oxford (1757-1762). He took holy orders, being ordained deacon in 1763, and priest in 1764.

He worked on Anglesey from 1763 until 1787: as curate at Llangefni (1763-66), Llan-faes and Penmon (1766-75), and Penmynydd (1775-78). While at Llan-faes and Penmon he also held the post of usher at his old school in Beaumaris. In 1778 he was inducted as rector of Llandegfan with Beaumaris.

About 1787-9 he left Anglesey in order to take up his longest-lasting post as rector of Aber, Caernarvonshire. He left Aber in about 1801 on account of a nervous condition, but did not resign his benefice there until 1816.