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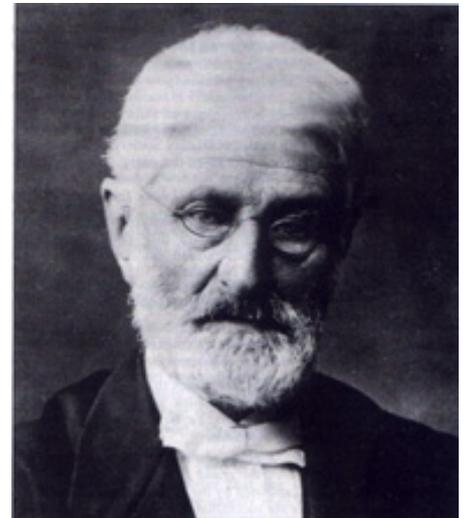
TRANSCRIPTION

A version of this Biography first appeared on the Hull University Herbarium website.

Joseph Hesselgrave Thompson

Joseph's herbarium

The preliminary cataloguing of the Hull University Herbarium (**HLU**) revealed a dozen or so of Joseph Thompson's specimens but not enough to warrant specific mention (Middleton & Middleton 2007). At that time it was noted that around 4000 specimens had no collector attributed, although it was assumed that the great majority of these would be from John Fraser's personal herbarium. A subsequent detailed examination of the unattributed specimens has revealed that the handwriting and style of labelling is sufficiently distinct to assign 942 specimens from **HLU** to Joseph Thompson making him the fourth most represented collector of the 300 or so contributors to the herbarium. In the light of this discovery, a brief examination of some of John Fraser's uncatalogued European material has revealed a significant body of Thompson's material, covering over five decades of his life.



The entry in Desmond and Ellwood's Dictionary of British and Irish botanists and horticulturalists (1994) is rather terse "*Plants at Glasgow Univ., Worcester Museum.*"

Origins

Because the initial source, and main interest, has been Joseph's herbarium, it is very easy to fall into the trap of regarding the man as solely a botanist. Although it is obvious that the study of plants was one of his lifelong passions, he was driven by many others, some of which had a strong influence on his botanical collecting. It is only by paying due regard to his life as a whole that his herbarium can be interpreted in a meaningful way.

Joseph Hesselgrave Thompson was born in Sculcoates on 21st April 1811 although both his baptismal record and the entry of his death at Stourbridge show that he was actually called Joseph Hasselgrave Thompson. It is of little consequence and Hesselgrave seems to have been the variant that he used consistently throughout his life and obviously preferred. At that time of his birth Sculcoates was a distinct administrative area in the East Riding of Yorkshire, although his family lived in what would now be regarded as the very centre of the City of Hull.

Joseph was the second son of Samuel and Mary Thompson. His father, Samuel, was born in late 1769 and had married Mary French in Sculcoates on 22nd October 1806. Mary (1776-1833) was the daughter of Joseph French (born 1737), a professional gardener also of Sculcoates, and it is from this maternal grandmother that Joseph acquired his middle name. She had been born Sarah Haslegrave and married Joseph French as Sarah Hesselgrave in Sculcoates on 3rd January 1769, providing a third and fourth variant on the name. In 18th century trade directories Joseph French is described as a Seedsman & Nurseryman and by 1791 as a Land Surveyor (Gibson 2009). Joseph French gardened an area of 12 acres, on the northern boundary of the embryonic city of Hull, which had originally belonged to the Charterhouse Hospital. By 1788 he had relinquished the lease and the area, which long continued to be known as French's Gardens, was developed as housing for the expanding town. Mason Street, soon to be the home of the Thompson Family, was constructed along the southern boundary of this plot of land (Gibson 2009).

Early records of the family are sparse but an 1807 Poll Book describes a Samuel Thompson of Sculcoates as a "Gentleman". Samuel and Mary's first born was Irene in 1807, followed by Samuel Sheppard (or Shepherd as he later preferred) in 1809. Joseph Hesselgrave was next in 1811 followed by Elizabeth Ann in 1815 and finally William French in 1819. In the earlier baptismal registers Samuel Thompson senior is referred to as a merchant's clerk but latterly he is termed a "gentleman". Samuel senior was clearly involved in commerce and an advertisement in the Hull packet for 1 July 1800 makes reference to an auction, mainly of animal hides and skins, to be sold at the "*warehouse of Mr Samuel Thompson, in the High street, near the Custom-House Bank*". As early as 1815 his address is given as the newly built Mason Street.

The "**Hull Packet**" records that Joseph's mother, Mary, died on 20th February 1833; very shortly before Samuel Shepherd Thompson was admitted as an Attorney in the Easter term of that year. For the first clear record of the family we have to wait until the 1841 census which shows that they were living at 8 Mason Street, Sculcoates. Samuel Thompson senior, described as a Book Keeper, was the head, brother Samuel was a Solicitor, no profession is given for sister Elizabeth, and young William is a Merchant's Clerk. Sister Irene is living a short distance away in Princess Street with her aunt Sarah French. Irene was a teacher at her aunt's school, an establishment which press advertisements indicate had been founded by Sarah and one or more of her sisters in 1790. A notice concerning Miss French's school in the "Hull Packet" in 1834 makes specific mention of her niece Miss Irene Thompson, particularly extolling her skills in the "*... pleasing and easily acquired art of ORIENTAL TINTING, specimens of which she will be most happy to show to any Lady who will favour them with a call.*" The Thompson family's link with education seems to have been strong and lasting, Irene taking charge of the school on her aunt's death in 1850 and continuing until her own death in 1871 when it was taken over by another relative, Miss Blanche Chaplin. The philosophical approach of sister Irene seems to accord with those shown through life by Joseph and is well demonstrated by an excerpt from her 1864 advertisement in the Hull Packet "*... the system and rules adopted in her school have now stood the test of more than 70 years, and she trusts these good old rules, aided by the various improvements of modern times, will continue to entitle her to a share of that patronage which is her constant endeavour to merit.*"

By 1833 Joseph was acting as tutor to the sons of Hynman Raddish Allenby of Kenwick House, near Louth. This information is conveniently provided by a report in the Hull Packet which records that, while walking from Louth to Kenwick, Joseph was robbed of his purse, which contained sixpence, his hat, gloves and a book. The tutees in question were Henry Hynman Allenby (12) and Hynman Allenby (11). He seems to have continued as a tutor to the Allenby brothers for some time, and he is recorded as delivering a well received address on the "moral and physical effects of ardent spirits" to the Temperance Society in Louth in March of 1835. It is likely that Joseph remained here until the youngest no longer needed instruction – Hynman was admitted to Corpus Christi College in Cambridge in 1839, matriculating in the Michaelmas term of 1840. Whether Joseph was tutoring the boys in botany is not known but we do know that as a boy Hynman's famous son, Field Marshal Edmund Hynman Allenby, 1st Viscount Allenby of Megiddo, "loved nature and developed a keen knowledge of flora and fauna, a passion that would remain with him all his life" (Hughes 2004).

His specimens give some idea of his movements during this stage of his life, possibly showing holiday destinations. Three specimens collected in July of 1836 are from The Trossachs in Scotland, 1837 has specimens from south Wales in June and north Wales later in the summer,

and Snowdonia in 1839. 1839 seems restricted to East Yorkshire with June and July of 1840 being spent in Nottinghamshire.

Joseph's connection with his family in Hull can only be guessed at although his herbarium indicates that he maintained some contact throughout his life. Of almost a thousand Thompson specimens in the Hull University Herbarium only a hand-full are unquestionably from Eastern Yorkshire. The most significant of these is a specimen of *Epipactis palustris* – the Marsh Helleborine, from Cottingham, a village just a few miles to the west of Hull. Although the specimen can only be attributed to Thompson by the handwriting, the collection date of 1834 is amongst his earliest and is at a time when he may reasonably have been expected to be in the area. In September of 1839 there are two specimens collected on the Yorkshire coast at Dane's Dyke (near Bridlington) and Scarborough. And in the Summer of 1841 a specimen of the Welled Thistle, *Carduus crispus*, from Ridgemont. Ridgemont may be the Holderness farm of the prominent Quaker family of Joseph Stickney, who the opinionated, aspiring cleric would have much to discuss. Like his maternal grandfather, the Stickneys of Ridgemont were also well known as land surveyors. There is then a gap of 45 years before his final eastern Yorkshire specimen – the lowly Swine-cress, *Coronopus squamatus*, collected on the Holderness coast at Withernsea on 11th October 1886. The census records show that William French Thompson, Joseph's younger brother, was definitely living in this small seaside town in 1891, so this specimen clearly demonstrates continuing family contact almost up to the time of Joseph's death.

Oxford University and his ordination

Joseph entered Magdalene College, Oxford in 1840 and remained there until he graduated with a BA, fourth class honours in 1845. This rather meagre result is surprising as through his later life he seems to have been well regarded as a classical scholar (Barnsley 200). There are several specimens collected during his years as an undergraduate demonstrating that his botanical interests were already well formed and it was not something that he needed to study – botany being an essential subject for anyone wishing to qualify in medicine rather than theology. A specimen of *Carduus crispus* collected in 1841 is labelled Ridgemont. If this is from Ridgemont farm near Burstwick in East Yorkshire it demonstrates that he was spending some of his vacation with his family. It is also significant that Ridgemont was the family home of the Stickney family, well known Land Surveyors and Quakers. His first non-British specimens were collected during this period of his life, *Fumaria parviflora* from the Père la Chaise cemetery, Paris in July 1842. There are two specimens from Down Hall, Essex, in August 1842, perhaps hinting at a visit to some friend there. In September of the same year he journeyed through Switzerland collecting specimens from Tete Noir, Chillon and St Bernard. The summer of 1843 was less adventurous with a trip to the Isle of Wight. 1844 included a protracted trip to Scotland which seems to have started in June and covered all of July. Holidays in 1845 seem to have been to Devon and the following year, Wales.

On his graduation in 1845 he was ordained a deacon (18th May) and was appointed curate at St Nicolas' Church, Worcester where he remained for the next ten years. The following year he was ordained as a priest by the Bishop of Worcester on 7th June 1846. The incumbent at this time was the noted musician William Henry Havergal, an honorary Dean of Worcester Cathedral. Joseph's time here was not without controversy as noted in Havergal's DNB entry which records a dispute between them that became "... a matter of public notice" (Boase, rev. Brown 2004). It is possible that this represents friction over a parish incident which occurred at the time. In 1849 Mr William Laslett, MP for Worcester, had made a donation of £2500 for the enlargement and improvement of seating in St Nicholas's Church. Initially the gift was accepted to great acclamation but by 1852 it remained unspent and the donor called for its return. The incident caused some friction within the vestry and the money seems to have been relinquished. Around this time a pamphlet was circulated - "*Your Rector and your Curate: a letter to the parishioners of St Nicholas, Worcester. A defence of the curate, Joseph Hesselgrave Thompson, against the charges of the rector, William Henry Havergal*". The chief author of this was George Woodyatt Hastings (1825-1917) who became MP for East Worcestershire in 1880. Interestingly, George Hastings was expelled from office in 1892 over the misappropriation of £20k from a trust fund that he administered ... The pamphlet documents the dismissal of Joseph as curate of St Nicholas' and shows the dissatisfaction of Rev Havergal with his general attitude.

He moved, briefly to Halesowen with Archdeacon Hone, before taking the parish of Cradley in 1856 where he was to remain until his death in 1889. It was during his period at Cradley that he developed a great taste for foreign travel, often absenting himself from his parish for long periods and leaving his pastoral duties in the hands of a curate.

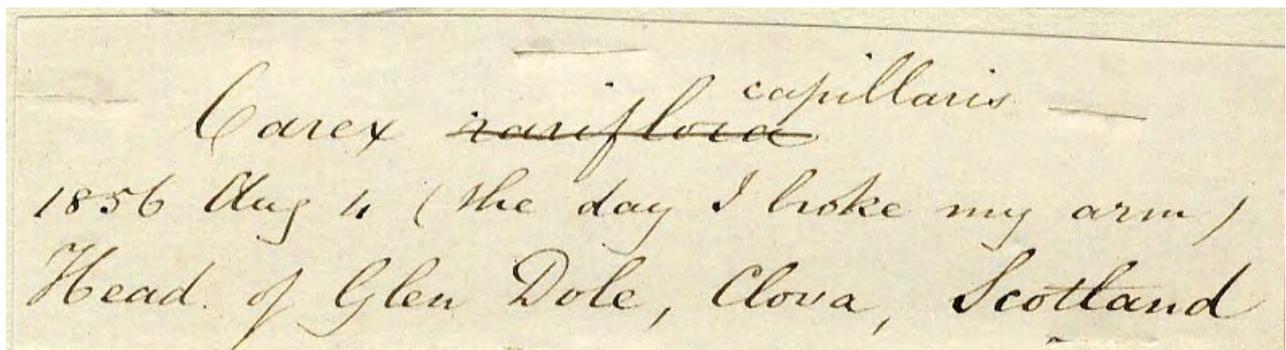
Parish Life

Joseph Thompson was installed as the vicar of Cradley Chapel in 1855 (it was not to be known as St Peter's church until 1898, well after his death) where he was to remain for the rest of his life. Cradley Chapel had originally been built by a group of dissenters but was incorporated into the Church of England in 1799. By the time Joseph arrived Cradley was a highly industrial area noted for its iron work particularly the manufacture of chain. The desolate environment can be visualised from the description provided by Edwin Lees (1867)

"The parish of Cradley lies east of Stourbridge and comes so much within the shadows and smoke of the Black Country as to be almost out of the limits of botanical observation. Yet one of our most enthusiastic botanical members the Rev JH Thompson is Incumbent of Cradley and it might have been hoped that some of his favourite flowers would have found him out. But there is no resisting manufactures and smoke and Flora retreats disgusted from the vicinity of iron works and the dismalities that surround a nail making population. I have asked my friend to furnish me with a record of the plants of his parish but he can only give me the statistics of his day and night schools for there are no plants he says worthy of notice to record. Even the Lichens Mr Thompson tells me will not grow upon the trees at Cradley and their bark brings a lower price in consequence nor has he ever been able to detect even an Opegrapha. All is blackness and ashes like the vicinity of a volcano and the river Stour that runs sullenly through the parish has no flowers on its bank to tempt the stay of a poet for a single moment and not a strain save that of a creaking whimsey has been heard there since the days when Shenstone tuned his rural lays at the once admired Leasowes. Yet time has been and within legal memory too when there was something of natural beauty within the bounds of Cradley and the fire and smut issuing from furnaces and chimneys had not killed or contaminated all the floral loveliness of the country."

Cradley Chapel did not have an associated vicarage and Joseph spent his entire incumbency in lodgings or a rented cottage near the church. Although this appears unusual it obviously suited him well, possibly allowing him to expend more of his stipend on botanical and geological pursuits. It is recorded that although land in Cradley Heath for a vicarage had been given by Lord Lytton, Thompson would never consent to the building of such (Gough 1937, Barnsley 2000). The incumbent of Cradley had to wait until 1899 for a purpose-built vicarage. The 1861 census (Worcestershire, Cradley 7.4) shows that he was lodging at Colley Gate House, Cradley, with the widow Sarah Horner (54), *Proprietor of Houses*, her daughter Sarah (20) and a servant.

During the summer of 1856 Joseph made a trip to Clova, Glen Phee and Glen Dole. His first specimens from this trip were collected on 28th July but on 4th August he suffered a broken arm. He actually thought fit to record the accident for posterity on the label of a specimen of *Carex capillaris*.



Carex ~~variflora~~ capillaris
1856 Aug 4 (the day I broke my arm)
Head. of Glen Dole, Clova, Scotland

This would be a serious matter at the time but he seems to have been well enough to collect a specimen of *Cerastium diffusum* in St Andrews five days later in the company of Edwin Lees and Mr Ingram.

The next year, presumably now fully recovered, Joseph undertook a census of his parishioners. This 1857 census records family relationships along with church affiliations and regularity of attendance. By a fortunate series of events, the notebook in which he recorded this survey has been preserved and has now been published (Bradley & Blunt 2004). This provides a valuable resource for family history study as details not reported in the National Census are recorded. In his characteristically titled "Speculum Gregis" (A mirror to the flock), Thompson goes into even more personal detail with some parishioners, adding coded notes – often in Greek – indicating drunkenness or even immorality. The survey was clearly intended for personal use and is a clear indication that he took his duties as vicar very seriously, something that was later called into question by some parishioners. He made a repeat of this survey in 1863, also now published (Bradley & Blunt 2004) but it is, unfortunately, incomplete. It may be that the second survey was never finished or that a further notebook containing the data did not survive.

The character of Joseph Thompson was captured well in some of Gough's "Black Country Stories", first published in the Dudley Herald during the 1930s. These claim their origins in a Cradley resident who was a child at the time of Thompson's incumbency. In general the anecdotes paint a picture of a rather brusque and opinionated man who was no respecter of rank. Church attendance does seem to have suffered because of his forthright manner and it is said that he "*emptied the church and filled the chapels*". An intriguing snippet records his nick-name as "Tommy-Two-Sticks", alluding to the pair of walking sticks he required in later life after some (unspecified) accident. Norman Bird, the original custodian of the notebooks, however, ascribes the epithet to Joseph's impressive height of 6' 3" coupled with disproportionately thin legs.

A great source of controversy during his incumbency of Cradley was the amount of time he spent away from the parish. In 1862 an anonymous letter to the Brierley Hill Advertiser complains that:

"The Incumbent of Cradley has left his Church for eight weeks, and his parishioners are anxious to know when he is likely to return. He was six months from his Parish at different times in 1861, and bids fair to do so this year."

Although his travels seem to have been motivated primarily by his botanical and geological interests it is important not to underestimate the role of his evangelical zeal. His public lectures delivered on his return record the preaching of (not always well received) sermons and the distribution of printed gospels throughout Europe. On the positive side in 1867 Thompson himself had to acknowledge that –

"I left him [the curate Rev Thomas Gregg] in sole charge of the parish on my continental tour. On my return after five or six weeks, I was astonished to find that the congregation had increased to such an extent that they were obliged to get forms from the schoolrooms to place in the aisles to accommodate the people." **County Express** 1867.2.9
(Barnsley 2000)

Local and National Societies

When Joseph moved from Oxford to Worcester in 1845 the Worcestershire Natural History Society had been in existence for twelve years. This society had been founded with the express intention of establishing a museum in the City of Worcester and to promote the cause of natural history with public lectures and classes. The founding of this society is generally attributed to Sir Charles Hastings, later to found the British Medical Association, but it seems that he may have been a figurehead and the idea had originated with John Evans, William Holl and Edwin Lees. Mary Munslow Jones in "The lookers-out of Worcestershire" (1908) quotes Thompson as having been told, while still at Oxford, that "the man for him to become acquainted with when he came to

Worcestershire, was a man with the name of Edwin Lees, who had done more for the natural history of the county than any man living". He certainly heeded this advice and it is very clear from Lees references to Thompson in his later writings, that they became close friends and spent much time botanising in one-another's company.

Whether Joseph Thompson was ever a member of the Worcestershire Natural History Society cannot be ascertained but he was certainly an early member of The Worcestershire Naturalists' Club founded in 1847 by Edwin Lees, William Mathews and Professor James Buckman. The early records of the club are scant and when the **Transactions** for this early period were published, fifty years later, the earliest field excursion for which records could be found was that of a trip to Bredon Hill in 1850. Fortunately there is mention in Ronald Jeffrey's diary of the Club's fifth excursion on 17th August 1848, starting from Lower Arley. In this Jeffrey states "The morning being unfavourable, only Mr. Geo. Matthews (sic), Mr Thompson and myself met" demonstrating that Joseph was a very early and active member.

Joseph appears regularly in the reports of the Worcestershire Naturalists' Club field meetings and was clearly a respected member. He served as president of the Club 1879-1880. The writings of Edwin Lees reveal that it was here that Joseph made some strong friendships which were to continue for the rest of his life. In his "Botany of Worcestershire" (1867) Lees singles out four individuals for particular praise.

"the following friends have given effectual aid in filling up the columns of the other districts especially I may mention Mr W Mathews jr., the Rev JH Thompson, Mr T Baxter of the Cathedral School Worcester and Mr Thomas Westcome, all most accurate observers."



The name of JHT occurs many times in the book, sometimes prefixed "my friend". Specimens collected by Edwin Lees, William Mathews, Thomas Baxter and Thomas Westcombe are to be found in HLU. Apart from botany, another common bond seems to be their interest in geology; Lees, Mathews and Baxter were Fellows of the Geological Society. On 27th November 1869 a special meeting of the Society was held to honour Edwin Lees, who was approaching his 70th birthday. After a field meeting in the vicinity of Worcester an evening meal was arranged to present Lees with a specially commissioned portrait. The meeting was well attended by local notaries and visitors from other societies. Of particular interest to this story is the speech given by Thompson which gives details of an expedition to Europe the two men had recently undertaken (1866). Thompson was clearly playing to an appreciative audience but does reveal interesting facts about the character of the two botanists. He recounts that they had undertaken an expedition to compare the British flora with that of various European countries. They had found themselves in Zermatt, Switzerland and had made an ascent over the Alpine pass of St

Theodule. Lees, Thompson and their guide, roped together for safety, passed over the glacier reaching 11000 feet before spending the night in a rough chalet on the mountain top. It was to be five or six days before they returned to their Zermatt hotel via Italy and Turin. For two mature men, well past their first flush of youth, this shows great spirit; there are several botanical souvenirs of this expedition in the **HLU** European herbarium. Whether they had been accompanied by William Mathews on this expedition is not clear. Mathews was a noted mountaineer and founder member of the Alpine Club of London in 1857.

Joseph Thompson was among the founder members of the Dudley and Midland Geological and Scientific Society (DMGSS) when it was re-established in 1862, a revival of the defunct Dudley Geological Society which had been founded 20 years earlier, and the columns of the Birmingham Daily Post provide a window into the activities of this body. It is interesting to note that Archdeacon Hone, Joseph's parish priest in Halesowen, was also an active member and in 1865 is recorded as chairing the proceedings following a field visit to the Cradley area. In 1863 both Joseph Thompson and John Fraser were elected to the committee of this society. Joseph was clearly a respected member, chairing the AGM in 1871 and serving as president (1873 - 1874). His active association with the DMGSS was to continue until his death.

The Society was to be based in the new Mechanics' Institute and when the foundation stone was laid on November 28th 1862 among the exhibition staged were "... specimens from Naples" displayed by Rev J H Thompson (Dr Fraser had contributed "Botanical specimens"). Both Thompson and Fraser attended the Annual General Meeting of the Society on 24th May 1864. This was a somewhat controversial meeting which proposed an increase in subscriptions - Thompson spoke in favour of limiting the increase to half a guinea but admitted that "... he had agreed to come in with the proposition for the guinea subscription, yet he had changed his opinions after hearing the discussion, and he thought that 10s 6d would be best." - He was obviously not a man of fixed opinions. On January 22nd 1864 Joseph exhibited "Botanical specimens collected in central France" at a meeting of the DMGSS. At the same meeting were "... specimens of British plants, sent by Dr Fraser;" suggesting that the latter did not actually attend the meeting. In August of the same year Joseph addressed the Society on his recent visit to Northern Italy and the Tyroll. He singled out *Ranunculus glacialis* for particular mention, a plant he had encountered on the glacial ice at 9000 feet. This can be verified by the three specimens in **HLU** collected on 28th July from the "Pass of the Stelvio", carefully annotated with the same altitude.



In 1865 both Thompson and Fraser represented the DMGSS at a field meeting of the South Staffordshire Association of Church Schoolmasters, addressing the delegates on the botanical features of the Dudley district. At the 1872 annual general meeting, Thompson and Fraser were both included on the list of the vice-presidents of the Society. Joseph "... whose geological and kindred tastes admirably fit him for the position ..." was elected as president of the Society at the AGM of 1873. At the 1875 excursion to Ankerdine Hill and Knightsford Bridge, Thompson is recorded as addressing the party "... on the botany of the district, and spoke most regretfully of the destruction of many rare plants, such as *Allosorus crispus*, *Asplenium viride*, and many others. He then gave a list of the scarce plants now to be met with, and exhibited a number he had obtained." (Birmingham Daily Post) He seems to have remained an active member of the DMGSS until his death in 1889; the then president, Mr Horace Pearse, and three other members of the Society attending his funeral.

Thompson became a member of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) in 1864. The BAAS had been founded as early as 1831 but the debate between Huxley and Wilberforce on Darwinian evolution at the Oxford meeting of 1860 will have done much to raise the profile of the Society in the realms of Geology and Natural History. His membership was, no doubt, prompted by the fact that the Society was to meet in Birmingham the following year and as a committee member of the DMGSS he would want to be fully involved in the proceedings. The Society's meeting was a major event for Birmingham with the City fathers sparing little to make a favourable impression on the many delegates. The role he played in this meeting is lost

to history but the absence of his name from the extensive reports in the Birmingham Post suggests that it was minor. His connections with the British Association were to continue; at his death it was noted that he was a member of their General Council.

In 1863 Dr John Fraser of Wolverhampton became a member of the Worcestershire Naturalists' Club. It seems likely that he was introduced to the Club by Joseph Thompson. The two men were close friends, sharing a common interest in botany and geology. As early members of the DMGSS they would have come into contact a year or so earlier.

Joseph the man

Joseph Thompson was clearly a complex man. His brusque manner seems to have stirred some people to anger and he clearly offended many. On the other hand he made firm friends in like-minded people, particularly John Fraser and Edwin Lees. Fraser's views on Thompson are unrecorded but in his published works Lees makes references to Joseph as "my friend" and even "my amiable friend".

Physically he must have been robust. His "Tommy-two-sticks" nick-name belies a man who was active until the end of his life. The labels from some of his specimens show that he was an active mountaineer – "Summit of Plomb du Cantal, Auvergne", "Top of Mt Pilatus, Lucerne", etc. It would be interesting to further investigate his association with William Mathews, the pioneering Alpinist who he clearly knew well. Little more than six months before he died he had spent a month botanising in the Pyrenees with John Fraser.

Although often accused of neglecting his parishioners in Cradley, he was a man with strong and deeply held religious convictions. One of the motives for his foreign travel was certainly to spread the Thompson version of Christianity. He preached this Protestant message in France and Spain and was not abashed by the hostile response that it sometimes provoked from the authorities. He is on the record as having used his expeditions to distribute religious tracts and further the aims of his Trinitarian Bible Society.

Throughout his life he seems to have been a great believer in the importance of education. In his early home life it would have been a matter of daily concern; his aunts' long-established school, which his sister Irene was to take over in 1850, was very close to the Mason Street home. The little that we do know of his pre-university days also shows that he had worked as a private tutor in Lincolnshire for several years. At the 4th annual meeting of the South Staffordshire Association for the Promotion of Adult Education and Evening Schools, West Bromwich 1863, Thompson was present as a representative of the Cradley Literary and Scientific Society. Joseph seems to have been personally involved in the running of a night school in his early days at Cradley. The following excerpt from *Trades in the Wolverhampton District* by F D Longe (Parliamentary Papers 1864) attests to this

There are one or two night schools in the nailing district, East Worcestershire, close to South Staffordshire, that I have visited. The nail girls, who work very late, often till 10 P.m., about Dudley and Stourbridge. are very glad, when they can, to -come and be taught at night. One clergyman in that district, Rev. J. H. Thompson, of Cradley, who has an excellent night school, writes to me as follows on the subject :—

" The nailing business, which is bad for the mind if not for the health, does not prevent those who are willing to stir themselves, from getting to school at 6 o'clock, though other nailing girls work an hour or two later, and even still later towards the latter part of the week."

" The girls are very anxious to get their parents in the mind to let them attend school. They wash and change their dress at tea time, and this is good for them, to say nothing of school influence."

It appears, then, that in places where there is a good night school, and a clergyman or school manager of influence gives attention to the subject, girls can be brought to attend

it, and so escape the bad effects of late work over the nailing forges two or three nights in the week, but it is the exception where this is the case.

With the exception of the information gathered from the labels of Thompson's specimens, most of what is known of his travels comes from reports of public lectures. Reports of his talks to various bodies frequently appeared in the local press which give the impression of a comfortable and confident public speaker and perhaps something of a showman. The report of his 1860 address to the Cradley Mechanics' Institute about his recent visit to Switzerland, as printed in the Brierley Advertiser, states that "*the vicar's ascent - and especially his descent - of Mount Rigi were very humorously described*" (Barnsley 2000). His address to the Worcestershire Naturalists' Club on the occasion of Edwin Lees approaching 70th birthday in 1869 gave a similarly humorous account of a descent from the Alpine pass of St Theodule.

In view of his standing as a respected and knowledgeable naturalist, educationalist and enthusiastic public speaker it is rather surprising that he seems to have left little published material. Many of his important botanical discoveries were left to be published second hand by Edwin Lees and William Mathews. A notable exception to this seems to be a note on the genus *Lepidium* in Worcestershire, which was published in the Phytologist, 1853.

His death

Joseph's death on Thursday 18th April 1889 seems to have been rather sudden and somewhat unexpected. He had been in reasonably good health and only the previous year had spent a month in the Pyrenees with Dr John Fraser. The event was exceptional enough to warrant an inquest on the following Saturday, and was reported in detail by the Birmingham Post on Monday 22nd April.

Although performing his normal duties in the previous week, he had complained of some weakness, attributing some of this to the dismal nature of the weather. Rev Thompson took toast and coffee at 7.15 am and was last seen alive at 8 o'clock on Thursday morning when his housekeeper, Mrs Shuck, took him warm water. When he did not emerge for his breakfast Mrs Shuck became concerned and called for help to see what was wrong. At 10am Mr Shuck and the local schoolmaster, Mr Jaquiss, knocked on his door but received no response. On entering the room they found him cold on the floor, wrapped in a towel and wearing only a single slipper. Dr Thompson, a local doctor, was called but found life extinct and considered that he had died about two hours previously. It was considered that Joseph had died from heart failure due to extreme weakness and a verdict of death from natural causes was recorded. John Fraser was present at the inquest.

Joseph was buried in Cradley on the afternoon of Monday 22nd April 1889. The Birmingham post reported that there were a great number of parishioners present and the school-children formed part of the gathering about the grave. His 70 year old brother, William French Thompson, and a nephew - presumably William's son Joseph French Thompson, who would now be 26 - are recorded as attending the service. His close friend Dr John Fraser of Wolverhampton was present along with several members of the Dudley and Midland Geological Society - Horace Pearse (president), E. B. Marten and G. F. Bland. No mention is made of representatives of the Worcestershire Naturalists' Club; both Thomas Baxter and, more recently, Edwin Lees had pre-deceased Joseph but Thomas Westcombe and William Mathews were still alive. It is significant that he chose to be buried in the churchyard rather than the church precinct, demonstrating a degree of humility in his character. Although Thompson seems to have pursued a frugal life-style, his main extravagance being a taste for foreign travel, in his will he left £3000 to the Church Missionary Society. His passing was also noted the following month at the annual meeting of the Trinitarian Bible Society, a group founded in 1831 for the "*... circulation of Protestant or uncorrupted versions of the Word of God*", and it was noted that Joseph had always been "*... a welcome friend amongst them, especially at their Christmas gatherings (Hear, hear)*".

It was widely reported at the time that his botanical collection was to be bequeathed to the Worcestershire Naturalists' Club and indeed the Worcester Museum still holds a large, apparently uncatalogued, number of his specimens. What is not clear is how a thousand or so of his British

specimens, the great majority of which do not bear his name, came to be in the Hull University Herbarium (**HU**). His European specimens certainly came to Hull with the Fraser collection as many are still unmounted and interleaved with those of John Fraser in their original packaging cut from 19th century copies of *The Times*. The most likely explanation is that it was John Fraser who sorted through Thompson's material after his death and kept a significant number for his own herbarium before passing the remainder to the Worcester Club. Undoubtedly some specimens were passed to Fraser during Thompson's lifetime as Joseph was a prolific collector with his duplicates appearing in other herbaria – e.g. Rev. W H Painter. It would, however, be expected that these specimens would be annotated with Thompson's name. If a significant number of Thompson's specimens were transferred post mortem to Fraser's herbarium it may also explain the significant number of early specimens from Baxter, Lees, Westcombe and Mathews that are to be found in Fraser's herbarium. Although Fraser was a respected member of the Worcestershire Naturalists' Club he did not join until 1863 and, with the exception of William Mathews, only a small proportion of these collectors' specimens postdate this.

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF THE
REV. JOSEPH HESSELGRAVE THOMPSON, B.A
OF MAGDALEN COLLEGE, OXFORD,
AND FOR THIRTY-THREE YEARS THE MINISTER OF THIS CHURCH AND PARISH
HE ENTERED INTO REST, APRIL 18th, 1889, IN THE 78th YEAR OF HIS AGE.
(BORN APRIL 21ST, 1811)
This Tablet was erected by Parishioners and Friends to mark their esteem.

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The travels of JH Thompson as revealed by his herbarium

The following table presents a digest of Joseph Thompson's travels as revealed by specimens in the herbarium. It excludes places within the Worcestershire/Staffordshire/Herefordshire region.

1832	Surrey
1834	East Yorkshire
1836	Summer - Scotland
1837	Summer - Wales
1838	Late Summer - Wales
1839	Autumn - Eastern Yorkshire
1840	Summer - Nottinghamshire
1840	Late Summer - Scotland
1841	Oxford
1841	Summer - Lincolnshire
1842	Channel Islands
1842	Oxford
1842	Summer - Paris
1842	August - Essex
1842	September - Switzerland
1843	Oxford
1843	August - Isle of Wight
1844	Summer - Scottish Highlands
1845	Summer - Devon
1846	Summer - Wales
1847	Summer - Stonehenge Wiltshire
1848	September - Cornwall
1849	Summer - Surrey
1850	Summer - Yorkshire & Lake District
1851	June - Bristol/Weston
1851	Summer - Surrey
1851	Early Autumn - Thirsk
1852	Summer - Swansea
1853	Summer - Torquay
1853	Late Summer - North Wales
1853	Autumn - Yorkshire & Lakes
1854	Summer - Somerset
1854	Summer - Cornwall
1855	Late Summer - Lakes
1856	Summer - Clova
1857	Summer - Dorset
1857	Summer - Channel Islands
1858	Late Summer - Switzerland
1859	Summer - Surrey
1859	Summer - Isle of Wight
1862	Early Summer - Italy
1863	Summer - France
1863	Late Summer - Yorkshire/Lakes
1864	Summer - Tyroll
1865	Summer - Switzerland
1866	Summer - Switzerland
1867	Summer - Prague

1868	Summer - Salzburg
1869	Late Summer - Devon
1870	Early Summer - Spain
1871	Summer - Switzerland
1872	Summer - Italy
1873	Summer - Austria
1874	Early - Italy
1875	Summer - Germany
1877	Autumn - Prussia
1878	Late Summer - Skye
1879	Autumn - Austria
1880	Spring - Spain & Portugal
1881	Spring - France
1882	Spring - Spain
1884	Summer - France
1885	Summer - Somerset
1884	Spring - Spain
1885	Autumn - Eastern Highlands
1886	Summer - Spain
1886	Autumn - East Yorkshire
1887	Summer - North Lincolnshire
1888	Summer - Pyrenees

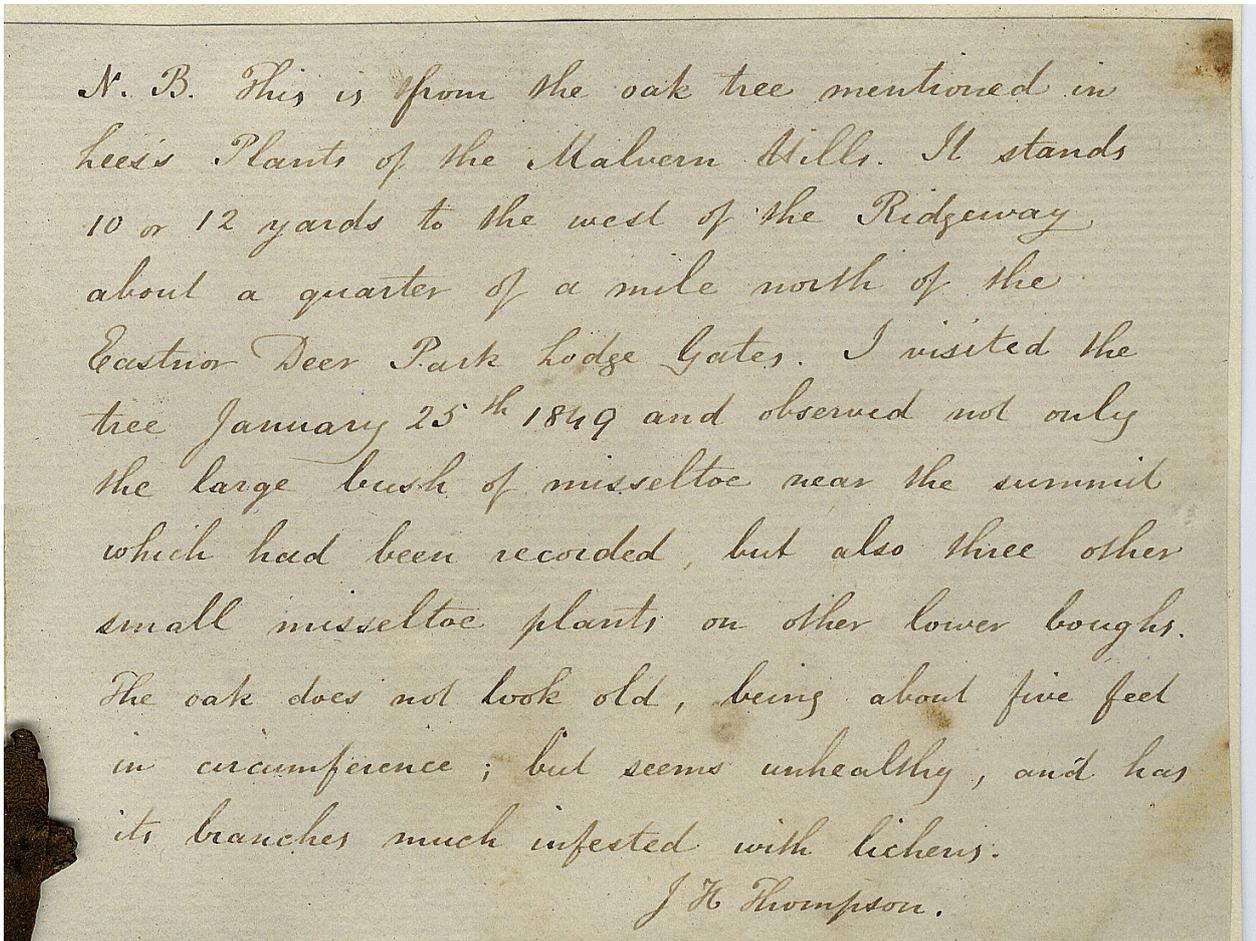
This table only represents what is known of his travels so far. Barnsley (2000) records that in June 1869 Thompson reported to a Church Missionary meeting

"I have seen four countries ... since this time last year - Ireland, Belgium, Austria and Spain ... I had the pleasure of officiating in a large, noble Protestant Church in that Popish city of Salzburg ... I had the honour of officiating in the first service held in the Protestant church in the great city of Seville. I was invited to preach the first sermon, but I thought that too great an honour, so I preached the second - and that in English as I do not know Spanish sufficiently well."

His specimens have only so far revealed his trip to Salzburg. As cataloguing of the European collections progresses it is expected that evidence for other trips will be uncovered.

Examples of Thompson's handwriting and labels

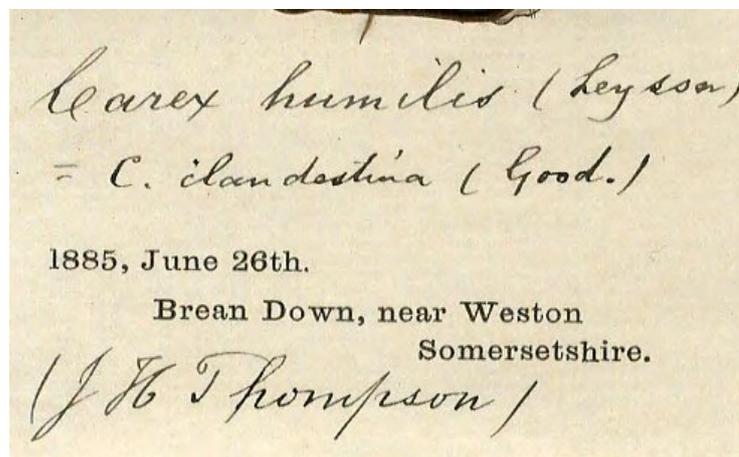
The finest example of Joseph Thompson's handwriting is provided by this note accompanying a specimen of Mistletoe, *Viscum album*.



N. B. This is from the oak tree mentioned in Lee's Plants of the Malvern Hills. It stands 10 or 12 yards to the west of the Ridgeway, about a quarter of a mile north of the Easton Deer Park Lodge Gates. I visited the tree January 25th 1849 and observed not only the large bush of mistletoe near the summit which had been recorded, but also three other small mistletoe plants on other lower boughs. The oak does not look old, being about five feet in circumference; but seems unhealthy, and has its branches much infested with lichens.

J. H. Thompson.

This rather distinctive and careful script is usually very easy to identify, particularly when compared to the hurried and often almost indecipherable hand of John Fraser. Another peculiarity of Thompson's labels is the way in which he presents the date. He almost invariably gives the year followed by the month and then the day. This is often enough to confirm him as the collector of specimens with printed labels and sparse annotation.



Carex humilis (Leysser)
= *C. clandestina* (Good.)

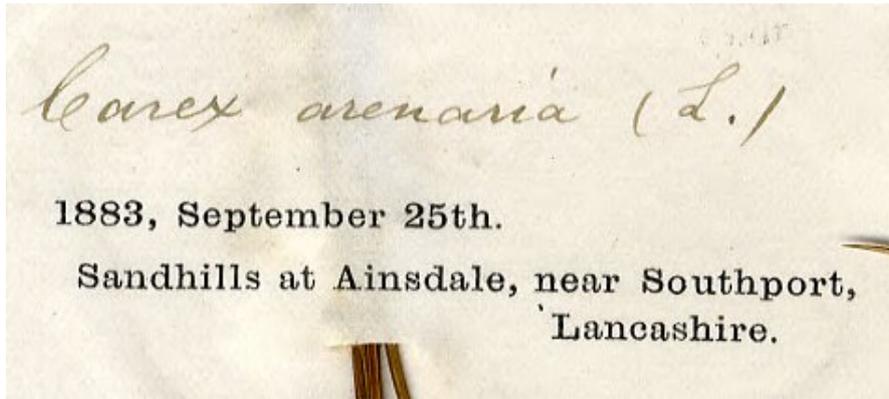
1885, June 26th.

Brean Down, near Weston
Somersetshire.

(J. H. Thompson)

He clearly had access to a small printing press as many of his labels are in this format – printed date and locality with space left to fill in the plant name. Other herbaria, e.g. Painter's material

at Aberystwyth, have Thompson's material with this type of label and it seems likely that he was a prolific collector and found it a convenient way of preparing material for circulation to friends.



The format is characteristic and only a small sample of handwriting is needed to confirm the identity of the collector.