

James Dalton (1764 – 1843)

The British bryologist James Dalton was born at York on 14 November 1764. His father Captain John Dalton, an only child in a long line of military officers, is recorded in history as the defender of Trichinopoly, a garrison in southern India, which was finally relieved in the autumn of 1753 after several months of "treachery within and overwhelming numbers of assailants without". Resigning on the grounds of ill health the following year, he returned to England at the age of 28, "having amassed a fortune and a fair share of military fame". At Ripon, on 7 March 1756, he married Isabella, the second daughter of Sir John Wray, 12th Baronet of Glentworth, Lincolnshire and Sleningford, Yorkshire. James was the third son in their family of three sons and three daughters.

While his two brothers took up military careers, James Dalton bucked the trend. After graduating from Cambridge in 1787 he became rector of Cosgrove (1789) and of Catterick (1791). In 1794 he married Maria, the second daughter of the Reverend Edmund Gibson, vicar of Bishop Stortford (they were to have five daughters and three sons) and finally he was rector of Croft from 1805 until his death on 2 January 1843.

James Dalton was a close friend of the Hooker family, and godfather to the young Joseph Dalton Hooker who was named after him. Dalton was also a friend of Hooker's father-in-law Dawson Turner, who confided to fellow botanist William Borrer that Dalton, "being born to affluence ... has habits not the most compatible with industry, in short, a man used to all the luxuries of a sumptuous table, to a life of perfect ease, and to having fourteen servants and almost as many horses constantly at his command".

William Jackson Hooker and Thomas Taylor named the bryophyte genus *Daltonia* in his honour in their *Muscologia Britannica*, which they dedicated to him in 1818: "With much pleasure we here offer our tribute of affectionate regard to our valued friend, the Rev. James Dalton, by whose muscological communications we have frequently profited during the collection of the materials for the present volume."

Dalton collected lichens, mosses and the genus *Carex*, he contributed to *English Botany* and Turner and Dillwyn's *Botanist's Guide through England and Wales*, and discovered in Britain the Rannoch-rush *Scheuchzeria palustris*. His grandson and namesake, who died in 1862, collected in North Yorkshire also.

Daltonia splachnoides

Daltonia is a moss genus of more than 30 species with a widespread but disjunct distribution in mainly tropical areas, especially in high elevation forests. *Daltonia splachnoides* (the epithet a confusing reference to another northern hemisphere genus) is the only species recognised in New Zealand. Plants are small to medium-sized, lustrous, yellow-green to gold, forming tufts on small branches or twigs, occasionally on tree trunks or fern fronds. The fringed calyptra is a highly diagnostic feature. In New Zealand *Daltonia splachnoides* is most often seen in moist but exposed scrubland or forest margins. It is very rare in the British Isles.

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