

ALEXANDER CHARLES NICHOLSON

(1856-1940)



Grandstand Oswestry Old Racecourse
BBC Shropshire

Born Hoylake cum West Kirby 1856

Died Hoylake cum West Kirby 1940

Alexander Charles Nicholson (1856-1940) FGS

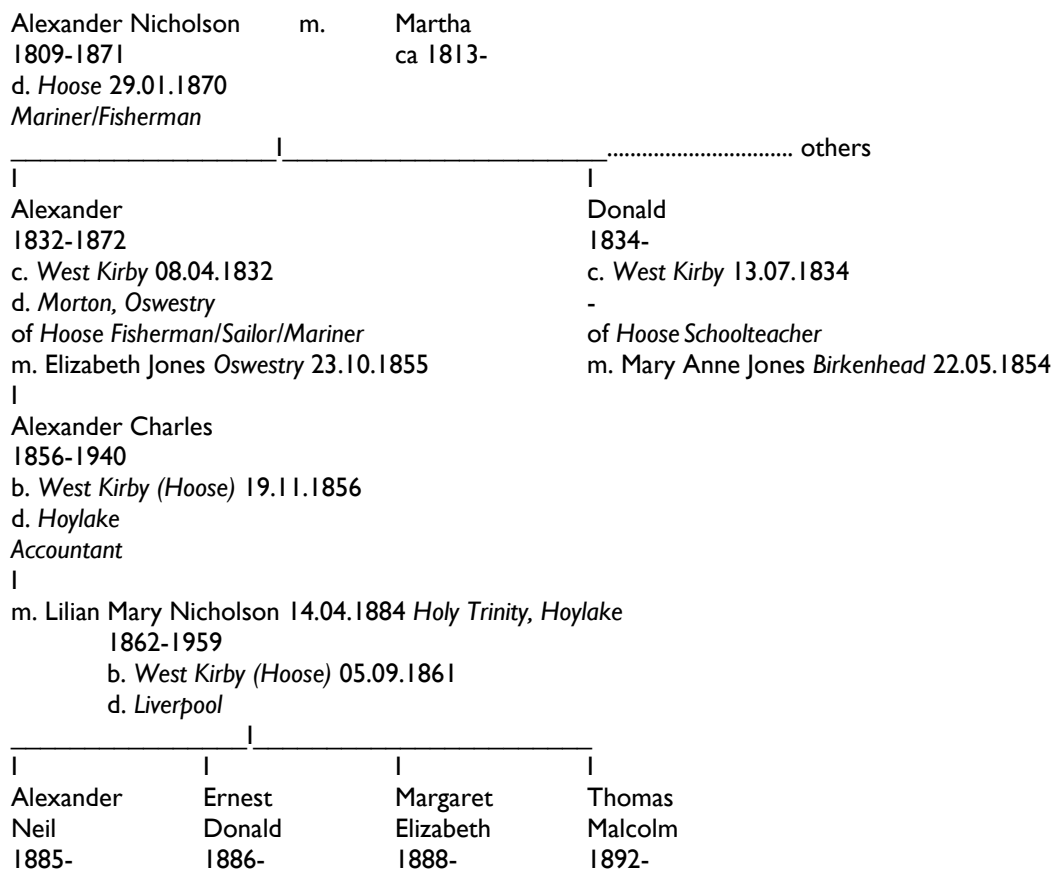
I. Introduction

Alexander Charles Nicholson is the epitome of the small country market town professional who takes up geology and fossil hunting as a hobby, gathers information of sufficient interest to have a paper read at the Geological Society and is thus invited to become a member of the Society thereby adding the initials FGS to his name. He was also fortunate to have what was almost his own private quarry within easy reach of his home town of Oswestry in Shropshire.

Nicholson was born on the Wirral peninsula at West Kirby, Hoylake in 1856. The Nicholson family were fishermen/mariners living at Hoose on the Wirral - the township later became Hoylake cum West Kirby. His father Alexander Nicholson (1832-1872), who is variously mentioned as a fisherman/sailor/mariner, married an Elizabeth Jones of Oswestry in 1855 – he died in Oswestry. The 1861 census finds Alexander Charles living with his cousins in Oswestry at the home of his uncle Donald Nicholson, a National Schoolmaster. He was presumably schooled locally and, by 1881 he was a clerk accountant to an estate agent in Oswestry living in Peel Terrace. By 1901 he is labelled as a 'land agent incorporated accountant' having married cousin Lilian Mary Nicholson at the Holy Trinity Church in Hoylake on the 14th April 1884. He retired to Hoylake where he was living in 1911 thus further cementing the family connection between Oswestry and Hoylake. He was still living in Hoylake for the 1939 Register but died the next year. Lilian Mary lived on until 1959, she died in Liverpool.

The couple had four children; Alexander Neil born Oswestry 1885, Ernest Donald born Hoylake 1886, Margaret Elizabeth born Oswestry 1889 and Thomas Malcolm born Oswestry 1892.

The Nicholson Family Tree



2. The Nicholson Fossils

This small collection of bivalves and gastropods were all gathered from a sand pit sited within the Old Race Course some 2 miles to the west of Oswestry by a small farm, 'The Gloppa', at Cynr-y-Bwch. The figure of eight race course was opened in the 18th century with a last race taking place in 1858. The sand pit was owned by Liverpool Corporation Vyrnwy Waterworks, it was opened in 1888 for the supply of material to filter beds in Oswestry.

Of interest was the level at which the fossils were found at ca. 1100ft. Nicholson's paper focuses on this elevated level comparing it to similar glacial drifts or 'eskers' such as that found at Moel Tryfaen and Prestwich's Patch. At the presentation of his paper the President thought that Nicholson's '*careful collection of his facts, and the avoidance of theory regarding them*', had provided valuable additional material for the discussion of the vexed question of Glacial submergence – were the fossils deposited by floating ice, which required the assumption that the land was covered by the sea, or by the action of glaciers, a debate still ongoing in the United Kingdom at the time of Nicholson's paper.

The Collection



The collection consists of some 30 common bivalves and gastropods not all of which were included in Nicholson's paper – there he listed nearly 60 species, including varieties, and compared these to the finds at Moel Tryfan (Shone) and to species then living in Liverpool Bay.

The collection is listed below under the Adlib numbering shyms: G.1977/xxxx. A catalogue of the Nicholson fossils, as they were displayed at the Shrewsbury Museum, is held in the Shropshire Archives.

0241	Biv.	Gari feroensis (Chemnitz)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0242	Biv.	Mytilus edulis (Lin.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0243	Gast.	Boreotrophon truncatus (Strom.)	?
0244	Biv.	Macoma balthica (Lin.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0245	Biv.	Cardium edule (Lin.)	Pritchard's sand-pits
0246	Biv.	Cyprina islandica (Lin.)	?
0247	Gast.	Neptunea antique (Lin.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0248	Biv.	Astarte compressa (Mont.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0249	Gast.	Nucella lapillus (Lin.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0250	Biv.	Cardium echinatum (Lin.)	?
0251	Gast.	Aporrhais pes-pelicans (Lin.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0252	Biv.	Lutraria elliptica (Lam.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0253	Gast.	Ocenebra erinacea (Lin.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0254	Biv.	Ostrea edulis (Lin.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0256	Scap.	Dentalium entale (Lin.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0257	Biv.	Astarte sulcata (da Costa)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0258	Gast.	Turritella communis (Lam.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0259	Gast.	Sipho gracilis (da Costa)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0261	Biv.	Cardium edule (Lin.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0262	Biv.	Aequipecten opercularis (Lin.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0263	Biv.	Mya truncata (Lin.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0264	Gast.	Bela turricula (Mont.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0265	Biv.	Callista chione (Lin.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0266	Gast.	Buccinum undatum (Lin.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0267	Gast.	Littorina littorea (Lin.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0270	Biv.	Cardium edule (Lin.)	Pritchard's sand-pits
0271	Biv.	Anomia ehippium (Lin.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0272	Biv.	Dosinia lupinus (Lin.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0273	Gast.	Nasa reticulata (Lin.)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0274	Biv.	Astarte borealis (Chemnitz)	Gloppa, Oswestry
0275	Biv.	Spisula solida (Lin.)	Gloppa, Oswestry

Sources

John B. (2014) *The Shelly sands and gravels at Moel Tryfaen* brian-mountainman.blogspot.com

Catt J A et al (2006) *Quaternary ice sheets and their legacy* in P J Brenchley *The Geology of England and Wales Chapter 17* Geological Society of London.

Shone W (1878) *On the Glacial Deposits of West Cheshire, together with Lists of the Fauna found in the Drift of Cheshire and adjoining Counties* Quarterly Journal Geological Society **34** 394.

Nicholson A C (1892) *High-level Glacial Gravels, Gloppa, Cyn-y-Bwch, near Oswestry* Quarterly Journal Geological Society **48** 86-95.

Shropshire Archives *Catalogue of recent molluscs contained in museum case collected from the glacial gravels of Gloppa near Oswestry by Mr A. C. Nicholson* XLS 21065.

Dr J. A. Gosling
October 2018