

Frances Stackhouse Acton (1794-1881)

Born: Elton Hall 7 July 1794
Died: Acton Scott 24 January 1881

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1. Introduction

Frances Stackhouse Acton (nee Knight) was born on the 7th July 1794 at Elton Hall in Herefordshire. Her father Thomas Andrew Knight was a well known horticulturist and botanist and the brother of classicist Richard Payne Knight of Downton Castle - the Thomas Knight family moved to Downton Castle in 1808. Frances Knight married 43 year old Thomas Henry Pendarves Stackhouse the son of John Stackhouse (1742-1819) - another botanist with interests in algae and mycology - at Downton Church on the 28th October 1812. The couple moved to Acton Scott Hall on the death of Stackhouse's mother when they took the name of Stackhouse Acton. They had one daughter, Frances who was born in 1812 but died at the age of 17 in 1830. Thomas Henry died in 1835 leaving Frances to pursue her many activities until her death in 1881.



'Fanny' Knight was encouraged by her botanist father to take up her own interests. Among her attributes were a proficiency in botanical drawing, an interest in archaeological excavations - a Roman villa was discovered in the grounds of Acton Scott Hall - and an interest in historical buildings - both in the painting of and the repair of the building. She took a particular interest in the maintenance of Stokesay Castle where she persuaded the owner to allow her to supervise the restoration of the castle. She compiled a collection of her father's papers and wrote an account of her early life in 1873 at the request of her sisters (Bedford County Records Office and also authored *The Castle and Mansions of Shropshire*.

Thomas Andrew Knight (Soloman Cole 1806-1893) Collection Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew



Her younger sister Charlotte (ca.1801-1842) was also a practising horticulturalist winning in 1817 a silver medal at the Horticultural Society for her *Waterloo Cherry*. She married Sir William Edward Rouse Boughton in 1824 and took residence at Downton Castle. The Rouse Boughtons were active members of the Ludlow Natural History Society.

Charlotte Knight
Court Magazine 1834

2. Frances Acton Scott as a Fossil Hunter

To the above list of 'Fanny's' interest must be added geology and fossils. She donated specimens not only to the Ludlow Natural Historical Society but also to the Royal Geological Society of Cornwall, this latter owing to her links with the Stackhouse family property Acton Castle, located at Stackhouse Cove in Cornwall. Frances was an early member of the Ludlow society becoming a subscriber in 1836 and remained a member until at least 1871. She donated some 30 specimens to the Society. A selection taken from the 1928 La Touche catalogue is given below.

Ordovician

C/b/15	Ogygia Buchii Brongn.	Builth
C/c/37	Orthis (Harknessella) vespertilio Sow.	Acton Scott
C/c/74	Phacops (Chasmops) macrourus Sjagran <i>figured Salter, Mon. Brit. Tril. Pl.? fig. 18</i>	Acton Scott

Silurian

D/e/3	Favosites (Paleofavosites) alveolaris Lonsd.	Aymestry
D/e/6	Favosites Hisinggeri M. Edw.	Wenlock Edge
D/e/9	Haliolites interstinctus Wahl.	Aymestry

D/e/19	(Rhynchonella) Neristina didyma Dalm.	Caer Caradoc
D/e/35	(Rhynchonella) Dayia navicula Sow.	Caer Caradoc
D/e/47	Hellerophon (Bucaniopsis) expanus Sow.	Caer Caradoc
D/e/53	Euomphalus (Euomphalopterus) alatus His.	-

Old Red Sandstone

E/a/20	Cephalapsis sp.	Pontrilas
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Carboniferous

F/c/11	Llepidodendron sp.	Leebotwood
F/c/17	Neuroopteris rarinervis Bunbury	Leebotwood

The above fossils were passed on to the Natural History Museum in the 1947. A few specimens remain at Ludlow including:

G.00146	Lingula lewisi Sow.	-
G.00152-156	Dayia nariocula Sow.	Caer Caradoc

(Numbering as in the W. J. Norton Inventory of 1963 held at the Ludlow Museum Resource Centre.)

This is a fairly wide-spread collection area. Of interest is the listing of fossils found at Acton Scott by other members of the Society including Humphry Salwey, Alfred Marston and Robert Lightbody – suggesting that they were regular visitors?

Dr J. A. Gosling
July 2018

Sources

Wikipedia Frances Stackhouse Acton.

Findmypast findmypast.co.uk

La Touche T H D (1928) *Catalogue of the Palaeozoic Fossils in the Museum of the Ludlow Natural History Society* Typrscript, Ludlow Museum Resource Centre.

Obituary: Gardeners Chronicle.

Publications

Stackhouse Acton Frances (1841) *A selection from the physiological and horticultural papers* Longman, Orme, Brown.

Stackhouse Acton Frances (1868) *The Castles & Old Mansions of Shropshire*, Leake & Evans.

Appendix 1 The Knight Family

Richard Knight 1693-1765 of Croft Castle & Bringewood Iron Works

