

JOHN THOMAS WATTISON

FGS FRES

(1884-1979)



**Born Hanley, 23 June 1884
Died Burslam, 12 January 1974**

**Including the
WALKER COLLEGE COLLECTION**

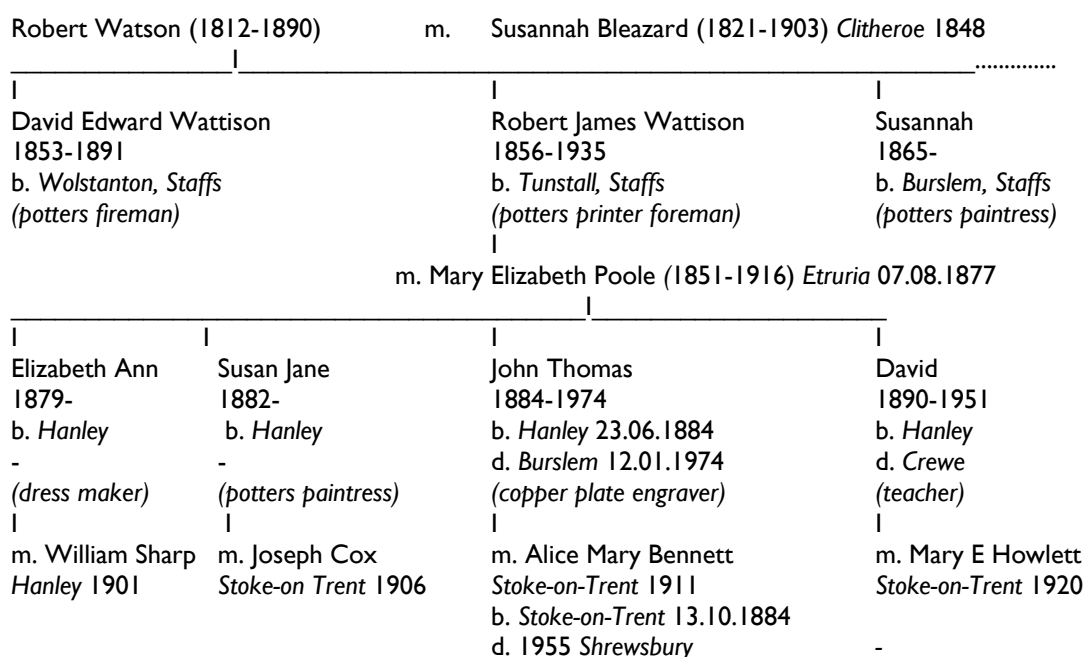
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1. Introduction

John Thomas Wattison was born on the 23rd June 1884 to a Stoke-on-Trent family. He trained as an engraver in the pottery industry and for many years worked as a potter in Portugal. He returned to England in 1936 initially setting up a shop in Shrewsbury but finally returning to his home town. During this period he built up an enviable reputation in the fields of both fossils and lepidoptera. His fossil collections have been left to various museums including the Lapworth Museum at the University of Birmingham (some 20,000 specimens) and the Natural History Museum in Kensington. He also authored the standard guide to the butterflies of Portugal. When living in Shropshire he became an active member of the Caradoc and Severn Valley Field Club where he led many a fossil expedition; he also took over the position of Recorder for Entomology from Major William Pendlebury.

2. Family

Wattison's father, Robert James Wattison (1856-1935), was born in Tunstall, Staffordshire and was employed as a 'potters printers foreman' while living in Hanley (1891) and in Burslem (1901). He married Mary E. Poole in Etruria in 1877. They had four children of which John Thomas was the third born. Wattison's uncle, David Edward Wattison (1853-1891) was a potter's fireman and aunt Susannah (1865-) was a paintress. An abridged family tree is given below:



John Thomas Wattison married Alice Mary Bennett in Stoke-on-Trent in 1911. The couple had one son, Alec Wattison born in Wolstanton, Staffs in 1912.

Wattison's sister, Susan Jane, married a Joseph Cox in 1906. Their son, Malcolm D Cox, was also a fossil collector and a student of Lepidoptera. Mentored by John Thomas his collection of fossils was donated to the Stoke Museum in 1980 - see the Geological Curator Newsletter 1984.

John Thomas led the family move to Portugal in 1915 sailing alone from Liverpool to Leixoes on the 4th September 1915. His wife Mary seemingly did not follow until after WWI in March 1920 when she left for Portugal with her husband. There is no record of the son Alec leaving the UK until 1927 when he started a regular annual trip, initially from school in 1927 and finally as a student in 1934. An account of Wattison's technique in the collecting of insects while in Portugal is given in Appendix 1.

On his return to the UK, Wattison acted as 'advisor' to the Shrewsbury Museum with regard to the Museum's fossil collection - he also reorganised the collection in preparation for its redeployment in Rowley's House. During his time as advisor a collection of mainly carboniferous fossils was gifted to the Shrewsbury Museum from the Walker College in Telford. On reviewing this collection Wattison recognised that it included specimens from the 'lost' Reynolds-Anstice Collection – the relevant specimens were passed on to the Natural History Museum. A listing of those fossils from the Walker Collection which remained in Shrewsbury, and are now held at Ludlow, is given below.

3. Career and Interests

An account of Wattison's life has been provided by his executor, E. A. Watkin, as background to that part of his collection now residing in his home town of Stoke-on-Trent. It reads as follows:

John Thomas Wattison, who was born 23rd June 1884 and died in his 90th year on 10th January 1974, was one of the last great amateur collectors in the geological world. He was a native of the Potteries, lived for 26 years in Portugal and, when he returned to England in 1936, spent the next 27 years at Shrewsbury before coming back, on retirement, to his native town. By profession he was involved in the pottery industry, first serving an apprenticeship as an engraver. In Portugal he was manager of a pottery in Oporto, and later, in Shrewsbury, he was in business as a pottery factor besides keeping a china and antique shop.

All this gives little idea of the man. He was a great lover of nature, with an immense store of accurate knowledge, more especially in the fields of entomology and palaeontology that he built up over years by his own patient efforts. In Portugal, whenever he had the time, he carried out arduous journeys into the hill country of the Oporto hinterland, where he steadily amassed a valuable collection of Ordovician trilobites, the greater part of which is now in the Natural History section of the British Museum. Butterflies also claimed a good deal of his boundless energy, and his book on Portuguese butterflies is still a standard work. While in Shrewsbury he organised a geological collection in the County Museum, and he made innumerable excursions into the South Shropshire countryside – on a bicycle until increasing age had its effect - searching out every fossiliferous locality and again accumulating a wonderful collection, the emphasis still on Ordovician trilobites though many other forms, mostly lower Palaeozoic, were also in evidence. In North Staffordshire and Derbyshire it was from the Carboniferous Limestone that he mainly collected, more especially the very fossiliferous reef limestone. But the value of his specimens owed much to his skill in developing them, using delicate instruments, to display their finest detail. The bulk of his fossil collection of many thousands of specimens he left to the geology department of Birmingham University.

Besides Fellowship of the Geological, Palaeontological and Entomological Societies he became a member of various bodies – e.g. the Geologists' Association (both Midlands and North Staffordshire Groups), the Caradoc and Severn Valley Field Club and the North Staffordshire Field Club – for all of whom he conducted most rewarding field meetings. In the field he gave freely of his knowledge and was untiring in helping with the identification of fossils. At home he kept open house to all geologists, but he had an especial regard for young students, to whom a room crammed with books and with cabinets full of his prized specimens gave unfailing delight.

His wife, nee Alice Mary Bennet, whom he married in 1911, aided him in all his activities. Unfortunately she lost her sight while they were living in Shrewsbury and she predeceased him by a number of years. They are survived by their only son, Dr A. Wattinson, of Anstruther Fife.

Don Steward, Assistant Keeper of Natural History, City Museum, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent).

The Wattison Fossils

The Adlib listings for the Wattison fossils under shyms: G.1977/xxxx give very limited information only – that in the Shrewsbury Collection relocation file gives more but the two listings can only be partially reconciled. The provisional fossil list given below will be replaced by a firm listing when the current (2018) Adlib review is complete.

shyms: G.1977/xxxx

0085	Gr.	?	?
1246	?	?	?
1420	?	?	Lower Farm, Snead
1421	Tr.	?	Onny River section
1431	Tr.	?	Mind
1477	Tr.	?	Stream S. of Desert
1668	?	?	Church Hill, Leintwardine
1684	Tr.	?	S. of Betton Farm
1788	Tr.	?	Mind
1789	Tr.	?	Stream, S. of Desert
1790/91	Tr.	?	Betton Dingle S. of Lyde
1899	?	?	Longdon Common, colliery waste tip
1903	?	?	Dolgoch Quarry nr Llynclys
1900	Crin.	?	Dolgoch Quarry nr Llynclys
1901	Br.	?	Dolgoch Quarry nr Llynclys
1902	Br.	?	Dolgoch Quarry nr Llynclys
1990	?	?	Betton Dingle, S. of Lyde
1992	Br.	?	N. of Rorrington
2025	Br.	?	N. of Rorrington
2121	Br.	?	Dolgoch Quarry, Llynclys
2172	Tr.	?	Quarry, E. Betton Farm
2225	Plant	?	Longdon Common, old mine tip

The following fossils were accessed into the Ludlow Collection by John Norton with the rider 'from the J. L. Wattison Collection'.

G. 11205	Tr.	Llaneus sp.	Portugal
G.11225	Tr.	Calymene tristani	Santa Yusto, Portugal
G.11253	Tr.	Dalmanites socialis	Covelo, Portugal
G.18688	Amm.	Dactyloceras commune	Whitby
G.18692	Amm.	Dactyloceras commune	Whitby
G.18704	Amm.	Dactyloceras commune	Whitby

The Walker College Collection



The Walker College, Oakengates
Photograph Gordon Cragg

The Walker College was established in 1892 as a Centre for Arts and Sciences by iron founder Charles Clement Walker. It was originally based in the Assembly Rooms, Oakengates. The college moved in 1926 to a purpose built Arts and Crafts building in Oakengates - today a suburb of Telford. The college has since merged at a new location with New College, Telford as the Telford College. The original building has been converted to flats.

A collection of fossils from the Coalbrookdale Middle Coal Measures was transferred from the Walker College mining school to the Shrewsbury Museum in 1952 at the time when Wattison was acting as advisor. Wattison supervised the transfer of the fossils and, although there was an absence of documentation or accompanying labels, Wattison was able to identify two arachnid holotypes. This enabled him to demonstrate that the specimens were part of the missing Reynolds-Anstice collection (see Hugh Torrens 1891/1982). Other specimens were identified as syntypes figured by Sir Joseph Prestwich. The fossils identified were passed on to the Natural History Museum in 1956. The remaining fossils consisted mainly of plant and fish fragments but included some Triassic reptile remains and footprints (*Rhynchosarus* from Grinshill) plus Jurassic fossils from the collection of H. Ikin of Prees Heath (see Henry/Harry Ikin in this series). The remnant fossils are now held at the Ludlow Museum Resource Centre. Again there is as yet no full listing of the Walker Collection fossils in Adlib – the listing given below is therefore based on the inventory in the Shrewsbury Collection relocation file.

GG

12.002-06	Br.	<i>Spirifer pennystonensis</i> (George)	The New Works, Wellington
31.006--9	Plant	?	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
31.010-11	Plant	?	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
31.015-16	Fern	<i>Alethopteris lonchita</i> (Schl)	?
32.013	Plant	?	Coalbrookdale
32.020	Plant	?	Coalbrookdale
31.025-28	Plant	?	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
32.023	Plant	?	Coalbrookdale
33.001	Plant	?	Coalbrookdale
33.004-05	Plant	?	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
33.007	Plant	?	Coalbrookdale
33.010	Plant		Coalbrookdale
33.017	?		?
34.001-03	?		?
34.006/7	Plant	Calamite cone	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
34.008	Plant	Calamite foliage	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
34.011/12	Plant	?	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
34.013-16	Plant	<i>Neuropteris atrophilia</i>	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
34.017/18	Plant	?	Coalbrookdale
34.024	Plant	<i>Asterophyllites</i> sp.	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
34.026	Plant	?	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
34.027	Plant	<i>Lepidodendron</i> sp.	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
34.028	Plant	Calamite foliage	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
43.008	Plant	<i>Lepidodendron</i> sp.	Coalmeasures, Coalbrookdale
45.001	Plant	<i>Annularia</i> sp.	Coalbrookdale
45.012	Plant	?	Coalbrookdale
45.015	?	?	?
45.017	?	?	?

45.020	Plant	Asterophyllites (single whorl)	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
45.023	Plant	Lepidendron sp.	New Mine Coalbrookdale
45.030	Fern	Spenoterid sp.	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
55.007-14	Spine	Gyracanthus formosus (Agass.)	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
55.015-20	Br.	Pugnax pleurodon	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
55.021	Fish	Megalichthys	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
55.023	Fish	Megalichthys	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
55.024/25	Fish	Megalichthys (scales)	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
55.026-27	Fish	Megalichthys	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
55.028	Fish	Megalichthys (head)	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
55.029-32	Fish	Megalichthys (jaw plates)	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
55.033	Fish	Megalichthys (jaw & teeth)	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
55.034	Fish	Megalichthys (jaw & teeth)	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
55.050	?	?	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
55.051	Fish	Megalichthys (scale)	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
55.052	Fish	Megalichthys (jaw & teeth)	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale
60.021/2	Fish	Megalichthys sp.	Pennystone Band, Coalbrookdale

Dr J. A. Gosling
November 2018

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Appendix Caradoc & Severn Valley Field Club; Transactions Vol. 10 1935-1938

Insect Collecting in Portugal

J L Wattison FRES FGS

Mr Wattison recently returned to this country after a residence of 26 years in Portugal, during which he devoted much attention to the geology and entomology of the country. He is the author of a standard work on 'The Butterflies of Portugal' (published by the University of Coimbra), and of monographs on Portuguese fossils and insects.

In the course of his talk Mr Wattison said that until a year or two ago travelling in Portugal was not easy. The roads in general were bad and if one left them the only way to get on was to walk or ride on horseback. The food, however, was good after one had become accustomed to it, but for many of the dishes one had to acquire a taste. Recently conditions had changed for the better. The main roads were now fairly good, and the hotels in towns were better than they used to be; but those among the mountains still left much to be desired. In the warm weather flies seemed to be everywhere; they would never be cleared away until sanitary conditions were greatly improved.

Geographically, Portugal was divided into two parts by the Sierras d'Estrela, and most of the northern part was mountainous, the ranges of the hills coming down to the coast. The coastal area was composed to a great extent of sand-dunes. Strong westerly winds blew the sand inland, laying waste most of the cultivated fields, unless they were protected on the sea side by pine woods, which had been planted in many places by the Government.

Describing his methods of collecting insects, Mr Wattison said that the most successful methods in Portugal were very different from those used in England. "Sugaring" was generally a complete failure. Light was undoubtedly the best method for moths. He had a part of the outside wall of his house white-washed, and then fixed up an electric lamp which was kept alight on almost every night of the year, except when wind or rain was too severe. In the garden were planted Buddleias and Heliotropes, which first attracted the moths, and they afterwards flew to the lighted wall, where they were easily captured. Buddleias always seemed to head the list of plants attractive to insects; a lilac-coloured variety was best for butterflies and moths, while a yellow variety attracted bees and flies in general. Heliotropes were a good second to Buddleias. Thistles were useful plants in the open, and an evil-smelling lily that grew in the mountains was a good place to search for Hymenoptera and Diptera. Hemiptera could be beaten out of most plants, along with Coleoptera and other orders.

Mr Wattison devoted the remainder of his talk to describing some of his insect-collecting expeditions, which often led him into primitive and out-of-the-way corners of the country, and related some of the curious experiences which befell him there. He illustrated his talk with a selection of specimens from his large collection (numbering thousands of specimens), which included not only butterflies and moths, but beetles, flies, dragon-flies, bees and wasps, and insects of all kinds, as well as scorpions, centipedes, and other members of the smaller fauna of Portugal.