

William Edward Nicholson (1866 – 1945)

William Edward Nicholson, one of several leading British bryologists of the early 20th century, was born in Lewes, Sussex, on 24 March 1866, the eldest child of Edward Andrews Nicholson, a solicitor, and Emily Louisa (née Baker). He had four siblings: a brother Herbert and three younger sisters, Amy, Jessie and Edith. He went to school at Marlborough at the age of eleven but contracted pneumonia and left early, completing his education with a private tutor. After studying law in London he joined his father's practice in Lewes and was an active partner in the firm until 1930.

Lewes and the district west to Hurstpierpoint was a hub of enthusiasm for cryptogamic botany in the 19th century, with connections to the local wealthy landowner and lichenologist William Borrer (1755–1862) of Hurstpierpoint. William Mitten (1819–1906), a chemist and druggist who also lived at Hurstpierpoint, helped and encouraged Nicholson's interest in bryophytes. From about 1890 Nicholson spent much of his spare time on liverworts – in his study, in the field or growing in his glasshouse – and his account of the hepatics of Sussex was published in the *Hastings and East Sussex Naturalist* in 1911. An entomologist until his middle years, he had an admirable collection of butterflies and moths, and he was also secretary of the Sussex Archaeological Society for fourteen years.

Nicholson was still living with his parents in 1901 when he was 35, but fifteen years later he married Eleanor (Nellie) Catherine Calvert (born 1877) in her hometown of Portsmouth. Her father the Reverend Calvert Parker Calvert and his family had lived in Lewes during the late 1870s and early 1880s, and William and Catherine may have known each other as youngsters there. Nicholson was 50 and Eleanor over 40 years of age when they married, and there were no children of the marriage. He served with the local volunteers during the First World War, was for many years chairman of the Lewes Gas Company and was instrumental in the founding of Victoria Hospital.

He loved travelling, and made many trips in Britain and abroad with his bryologist friend Hugh Neville Dixon (1861–1944) to such places as Lapland, Austria, Portugal and Sicily. Dixon corresponded with New Zealand bryologist George Osborne King Sainsbury (1880–1957) and in 1929 published *Studies in the Bryology of New Zealand*, with special reference to the herbarium of Robert Brown of Christchurch. Nicholson was president of the British Bryological Society in 1929–30. In his later years a heart condition restricted his ability to explore on foot or by bicycle, but he continued to get around the countryside in a car until the outbreak of the Second World War. In 1940 he moved to Cornwall, and he died at Mullion on 13 February 1945.

Liverworts were Nicholson's primary interest, and he added numerous species to the British list. In 1949 New Zealand bryologist Amy Hodgson (1888–1983) honoured him in the new name *Frullania nicholsonii* for a predominantly North Island species. The genus is named after Leonardo Frullani of Florence, director of the Royal Finance Company and contemporary of Guiseppe Raddi (1770–1829), who first established it in 1818.



Bryophyte and fern community, Ruapehu, 2018

Frullania nicholsonii

Species of *Frullania* are widespread throughout the world, and the 20 species in New Zealand are common, conspicuous and often epiphytic. They usually grow on bark, occasionally on dry rock, but never on the ground. The small leaves are seldom more than 1 mm diameter, but the dense habit and distinctive colour make the plants quite conspicuous. *Frullania nicholsonii* forms dense dark brown or purplish brown mats up to 10 cm diameter, with irregularly branched individual stems up to 5 cm long. The ovate leaf is convex dorsally, with slightly incurved margins, and overlaps the stem dorsally. Although more common in the North Island, it has been found as far south as Otago.