

Robert James Shuttleworth (1810 – 1874)

Robert James Shuttleworth was born in February 1810 at Dawlish, a small town on the southeast coast of Devonshire, England. He was the eldest son of James Shuttleworth of Barton Lodge, Preston, Lancashire. His mother, Anna Maria Shuttleworth, daughter of the Reverend Richard Henry Roper, dean of Clones, died of tuberculosis a few months after his birth. Robert was cared for by his mother's relatives, and after his father married again in 1815 and settled in Switzerland, he was sent to a school at Geneva. There he imbibed his love of natural history from the botanist Nicolas Charles Seringe, keeper of the de Candolle herbarium, and made a serious study of the plants in the nearby mountains.

Not quite 18, he went to Germany and spent a winter at Saxe-Weimar, where he enjoyed court life and came to know the renowned German scholar and writer, Goethe. He also spent time at Frankfurt and Heidelberg before his father recalled him to Solothurn, where the family was then living. During the 1830 summer he continued his interest in botany, and made a considerable collection in Jura. From autumn that year until the end of 1832 he studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh, performing hospital duty during a cholera epidemic, and making a vacation tour of the Highlands. In January 1833 he was appointed a captain in the Duke of Lancaster's regiment, but the following winter he returned to Solothurn, where he married Susette, daughter of the Count de Sury of Soleure, and settled at Berne. They had a daughter who died when seven years old, and a son, Henry.

Shuttleworth collected on the mountains of Grimsel and the Oberland, and studied the red snow and other freshwater algae until weakening eyesight

forced him to give up microscope work. In 1835 he purchased the herbarium and library of Joseph August Schultes of Zurich, and between 1840 and 1850 his close friendship with Jean de Charpentier of Bex inspired a zeal for conchology. Spending money freely on his research, Shuttleworth sent a collector to Corsica, the Canaries and Porto Rico, and supported travellers in Central and South America, buying their collections of shells, plants and seeds and building up an extensive and valuable annotated herbarium. His frequent winters in the French Riviera to relieve gout, his scouring of the botany-rich Var and Alpes-Maritimes and his meticulous attention to detail, led to *Catalogue des Plantes de Provence*, which was published posthumously at Parmiers in 1889. As well as his "Account of a Botanical Excursion in the Alps of Valais" in *Jardine's Magazine of Zoology and Botany* for 1835, at least eighteen papers, mostly on molluscs and some with lithographic plates, were published in ensuing years.

In 1866 his son Henry, aged 22, a promising medical student at Cambridge and London, died at his summer home near Berne. Grief-stricken, Shuttleworth moved to Hyères on the south coast of France, and gave up scientific work. He died on 18 April 1874. An original member of the Botanical Society of Edinburgh in 1836, he was elected a fellow of the Linnean Society in 1856, and was also an associate of the Zoological Society and of the Lyceum of New York. The University of Basle conferred on him a doctor's degree for his service to science. *Asplenium shuttleworthianum*, a fern found in several Pacific Islands, including the Kermadec group, was named in his honour by the German botanist and physician Gustav Kunze.

Asplenium shuttleworthianum

Asplenium, spleenwort, is named for its supposed medicinal use for illness of the spleen, due to the elongated spleen-shaped sori on the backs of the fronds. It is a very large genus of about 700 species of widely varying form. *Asplenium shuttleworthianum* is found on several Pacific Islands, including the Kermadec group, where it is uncommon except on North Meyer and South Meyer islands, growing in crevices of coastal cliffs and under coastal scrub. It is distinguished by its very short sori confined to the slightly expanded tips of the ultimate segments. Although sometimes available from nurseries, it is difficult to grow in cultivation.

