

## Recently discovered portraits of two 19<sup>th</sup> century Loch Lomondside naturalists

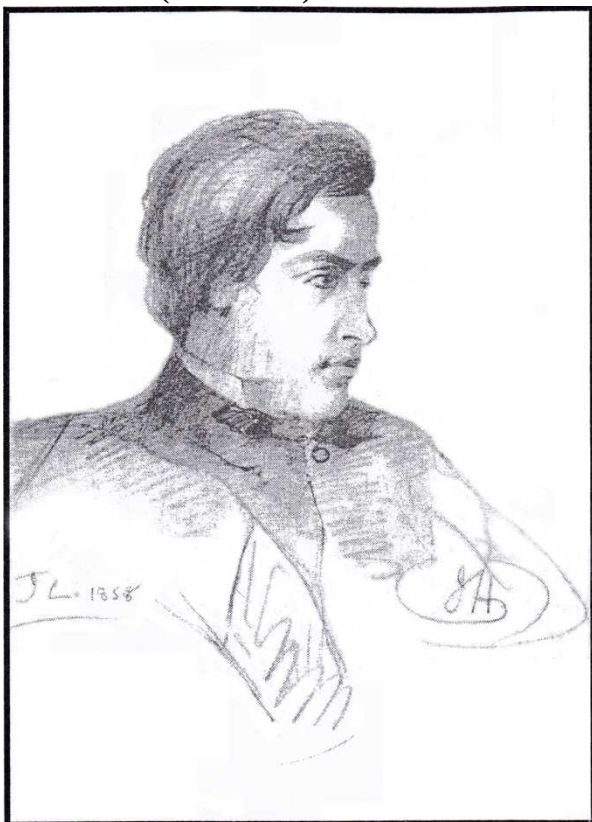
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### INTRODUCTION

Portraits of most 19<sup>th</sup> century naturalists in the west of Scotland are few and far between, especially for the periods when they were at their most active in the field. Two such portraits have recently come to the writer's attention - a botanist and a zoologist having particular associations with Loch Lomondside. Both came up with an especially noteworthy record for the area - a unique cruciate form of a common fern and a previously undescribed hybrid between two game birds.

### JAMES COSH (1838-1900)



**Fig. 1.** Sketch of James Cosh as a young man drawn by his brother-in-law, Joseph Henderson, who in later life achieved fame as a seascape painter.

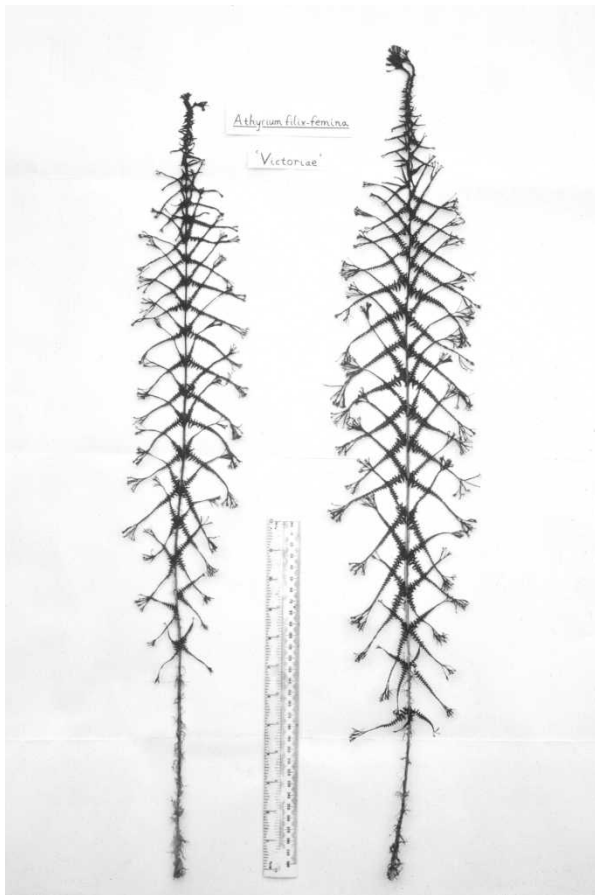
In 1847 and at the age of nine years old, James Cosh came to east Loch Lomondside when his father took employment as a carpenter on the Duke of

Montrose's estate. There the Cosh family made their home in one of a row of small cottages at the Smithy of Buchanan. After presumably attending the parish school at Milton of Buchanan, James entered Glasgow University on a scholarship to study Latin and Greek, graduating Master of Arts in 1861. Later the same year he enrolled as a theological student at the Reformed Presbyterian Divinity Hall in Glasgow in order to prepare for the ministry. The accompanying pencil sketch of James Cosh (Fig. 1) was drawn while he was still a student at the University.

It was during James Cosh's residence in Glasgow that he gravitated towards the short-lived Glasgow Naturalists Society 1858-1866 formed by students at Anderson's College (now the University of Strathclyde). He was acknowledged for contributing a number of fern records from the vicinity of his Buchanan home for a 'List of localities for ferns around Glasgow and its Watering Places' which appeared in Volume 4 of the Society's manuscript magazine (Anon, 1863). Not mentioned in the above account however, is Cosh's discovery in 1861 of an extraordinary form of lady fern *Athyrium filix-femina*, the probable reason for the omission being that this variety was not given a name by leading authority Thomas Moore until after the magazine article appeared. Moore pronounced the variety to be a queen amongst lady ferns and dubbed it 'Victoriae' accordingly (Sadler, 1864). Also known locally as the Buchanan Fern, every one of its pinnae (side branches) is divided into two and the pair set at right angles, which, together with their opposite partners on the other side of the rachis (stem), form a diagonal cross. Apart from the lattice-work effect created by the overlapping pinnae, each one of the divided branches is completed by a pendulous tassel at its tip (Fig. 2).

Britain at the time of James Cosh's discovery was in the grip of 'Pteridomania' or 'fern fever', with professional and amateur collectors alike scouring the countryside for the most choice specimens (Allen, 1969). Understandable under the circumstances, Cosh did not allow his outstanding find to remain *in situ* for very long. In fact it was dug up the very next day. The root-stock was divided, half being taken for safe keeping to the Duke of Montrose's fern garden at nearby Buchanan Castle (Druery, 1910). In cultivation the plant thrived, being admired by excursionists from the Andersonian Naturalists Society of Glasgow when they visited the castle grounds in August 1898 (Ross, 1900). At some point in time a portion of the original root-stock of *A.f.f.* 'Victoriae' was transferred from the Buchanan Castle fern garden to the Duke and Duchess of Montrose's summer home at Brodick Castle on the Isle of Arran (Eyre-Todd,

1930). To this day a magnificent clump of the fern can still be seen growing there beside the bottom gate to the walled garden (Mitchell, 1991; Fig. 3).



**Fig. 2.** Herbarium examples of the Buchanan Fern *A.f.f.* 'Victoriae'.



**Fig. 3.** Although the fernery at Buchanan Castle no longer exists, *A.f.f.* 'Victoriae' can still be seen in the walled garden at Brodick Castle on the Isle of Arran.

Where James Cosh disappeared to after his student days in Glasgow were over has puzzled UK fern historians for years. The mystery was eventually solved when his biography was published in Australia in 1991. It is now known that within a few months of being licensed by the Presbytery of Paisley in October 1865, the newly qualified Reverend Cosh had married and set sail for the the

other side of the world. After four years of enduring all manner of privations as a missionary to the New Hebrides islands in the south Pacific, a breakdown in his wife Janet's health brought on by the tropical climate forced a move of the Cosh family to New Zealand. There James was employed in a temporary ministerial post for a year before taking over a church at Balmain in New South Wales, Australia. Once established, he rose steadily through the ecclesiastical ranks to be elected Moderator of the Federal Assembly of Presbyterian Churches throughout the whole of Australasia. In recognition of his achievement, an honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred on him by the University of Glasgow in 1892. James's progress in Australian academic life was no less impressive, culminating in 1899 with his appointment to the chair of Oriental and Polynesian Languages at the University of Sydney (Denne, 1991).

Despite the demands of dual careers, James Cosh still seemed to find the time to pursue his interest in the natural world. Family correspondence shows that he was sending specimens of Antipodean ferns to his brother Stephen back in Scotland. Victorian naturalist families frequently inter-married (Allen, 1976), the in-laws of Cosh's third son Jack – the explorer James Calvert and wildlife writer/illustrator Louisa Atkinson – were both botanists of note. The botanical baton was passed in turn to James Cosh's grand-daughter, Janet Louise Cosh (1901-1989), who made a detailed study of the flowers and ferns of the Southern Highlands of New South Wales. Today, her extensive plant collection from the region is divided between herbariums at the University of Wollongong and the Fitzroy Falls Visitor Centre in Morton National Park (Clarke & Haynes, 2012).

### **JAMES LUMSDEN (1851-1911)**

In contrast to James Cosh's humble beginnings, James Lumsden was born at the privileged end of the social scale. His father, Sir James Lumsden, was a prominent Glasgow businessman who served as Lord Provost of the City 1866-69 (Irving, 1879). Young James was brought up in Glasgow's fashionable West End, the family's summer residence at Arden House (Fig. 4) well situated on the south-west shore of Loch Lomond. He would seem to have developed an interest in wildlife early in life, for while still in his teens he was elected a full member of the Natural History Society of Glasgow. At society meetings James Lumsden was able to rub shoulders with some of the leading zoologists in the west of Scotland, who undoubtedly influenced him as to the importance of making a permanent record of his observations. The outcome was that he set about compiling annotated check-lists of Loch Lomondside's birds and mammals, both of which appeared in the *Proceedings* of the Society (Mitchell, 1998).



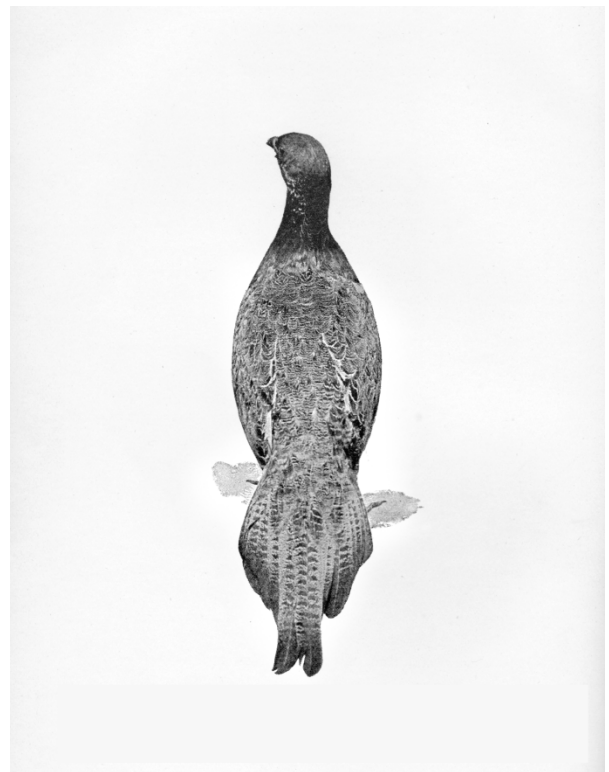
**Fig. 4.** Arden House on Loch Lomondside at the time James Lumsden inherited the estate.

On succeeding to the Arden Estate in 1879, he felt able to retire from business life in order to devote more time to countryside pursuits. A keen field sportsman (Fig. 5), like many other country gentlemen of the period James began to build-up a collection of stuffed birds representative of the district. Ahead of his contemporaries in one respect however, he pioneered the use of binoculars rather than the gun in field ornithology (Lumsden, 1887). The old maxim 'what's hit is history, what's missed is mystery' was slowly giving way to an acceptable alternative of a detailed description of the living bird.



**Fig. 5.** For this *carte de visite*, as a field sportsman James Lumsden chose to be photographed in his Norfolk shooting jacket instead of the more usual formal attire.

To update his original bird and mammal check-lists, Lumsden entered into correspondence with other Loch Lomondside proprietors, gamekeepers, boatmen, etc. with a view to securing additional records which might otherwise be overlooked. By 1895 and in collaboration with Alfred Brown (Secretary of the Loch Lomond Angling Association), James Lumsden was in a position to publish *A Guide to the Natural History of Loch Lomond and Neighbourhood*. Included in the *Guide* are photographs of a cross between a pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* and a capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*, a male shot on the Arden estate in November 1890 (Lumsden & Brown, 1895; Fig. 6). A full description of this first ever recorded hybrid between the two species appeared in *The Scottish Naturalist* (Eagle Clarke, 1891).



**Fig. 6.** One of the two photographs of the Arden pheasant x capercaillie hybrid, which appeared in Lumsden's & Brown's 1895 Loch Lomondside 'Guide'.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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