

= Richard Buxton ( botanist ) =

Richard Buxton ( 15 January 1786 ? 2 January 1865 ) was a British shoemaker and amateur botanist . Born in Prestwich , Lancashire , to a family who lived in humble circumstances , he taught himself to read , and learned the basic principles of botany . Although living as a pauper for most of his life , in 1849 he published *A Botanical Guide to the Flowering Plants , Ferns , Mosses and Algæ , Found Indigenous Within Sixteen Miles of Manchester* , which became one of the standard texts on the flora then commonly found in the Manchester area . According to his obituary in the *Journal of Botany , British and Foreign* , Buxton was one of " nature 's gentlemen " and " his true and correct pronunciation of scientific terms have caused many who heard him to believe he was an accomplished classical scholar " . He was acknowledged by the geologist Edward William Binney as " the most profound thinker of his class " .

= = Early life = =

The second of seven children , Richard Buxton was born on 15 January 1786 at Sedgley Hall Farm in the parish of Prestwich , near Manchester , Lancashire . His parents were John and Anne Buxton ( née Horton ) , both from Derbyshire . When he was two years old his family fell on hard times , left their farm and moved to Bond Street in Ancoats , Manchester . John Buxton worked as a labourer for the rest of his life .

Richard was a sickly child and his parents ' reduced circumstances meant that his education was somewhat sporadic . In his early years he wandered through the fields and brick yards where he lived , picking wildflowers . His favourites were Germander Speedwell , Creeping Tormentil and Common Chickweed . At the age of twelve he was apprenticed to a bat maker ( the maker of children 's small leather shoes ) named James Heap , in Port Street , Manchester . About 18 months later he went to work with James Hyde , with whom he stayed for a number of years .

= = Later life = =

At the age of 16 , Buxton was illiterate , but with the aid of *The Common Spelling Book* he taught himself to read . He was unable to understand or pronounce all words correctly and so procured a copy of *Jones Pronouncing Dictionary* . He read more books , such as *A History of England* and *Goldsmith 's History of Greece and Rome* . Reading occupied all his spare time , although when trade was good he had to work from 6 : 00 am until 9 : 00 pm . He earned about 14 to 15 shillings ( 70p @-@ 75p ) a week , a good wage for the time , but as cloth was superseding leather in making the tops of children shoes , this did not last .

When he was 18 , Buxton returned to work with his old master , James Heap , as a journeyman . Heap often took Buxton on country walks in his spare time . The two collected herbs for diet drinks , either for Heap 's use or to share with his neighbours . They often found plants of whose names they were ignorant , and so Buxton bought a copy of *Culpeper 's Complete Herbal* . However , as he found the supposedly medicinal properties of the plants fanciful and the descriptions inaccurate , he soon became dissatisfied with it . In 1808 he procured a copy of the superior *Meyrick 's Herbal* , from which he learned the first principles of the Linnaean system . Buxton soon outgrew this book , and began to borrow or buy as many books on botany as he could . Botanical practice at the time was to collect and dry plants , but as he disliked dead plants and preferred not to remove specimens that could be enjoyed by others , his botanical studies were confined to making observations .

From 1821 to 1826 the pressures of work took him away from his botanical rambles , but in spring 1826 he made more frequent excursions . In June that year he was " botanising " on Kersal Moor when he met John Horsefield , a handloom weaver from Whitefield , who was president of the *Prestwich Botanical Society* and president of the general botanical meetings held at a number of different places in Lancashire . Buxton had long wished to meet a man such as Horsefield , who was not merely a country herbalist but an excellent scientific botanist . At that time in Lancashire many amateur , working class , naturalists pursued their interests in their spare time , and a number of

local societies had been formed . Horsefield introduced him to other local botanists such as James Percival , Thomas Heywood and John Shaw with whom , during the summer of 1826 , he made a number of excursions to Mere Clough in Prestwich , Clifton Moss and Baguley Moor .

For several years , for a variety of reasons , Buxton 's study of botany fell by the wayside , but in 1833 he attended a botanical meeting in Prestwich , where he met his old acquaintances . He became a regular attendee at local botanical meetings , including one at Blackley , where he met James Crowther . They became firm friends and , in search of plants , explored Chorlton , Withington , Didsbury and many other regions of Lancashire , Cheshire , Derbyshire , Yorkshire and Wales .

In 1839 Buxton was invited to join the natural history class at the Manchester Mechanics ' Institute where he helped compile the *Flora Mancuniensis* ( 1840 ) along with Leo Hartley Grindon , George Crozier and James Crowther under the editorship of John Bland Wood . He became an acknowledged expert on mosses , and William Hooker , director of the Royal Botanic Gardens , Kew was so impressed with his skills that he hoped to employ him as a herbarium assistant . Although this never came about , Hooker gave Buxton a number of botanical books and , at some point , Buxton accepted the position of President of the Manchester Working Men 's Botanical Society .

In 1849 , aged 62 , he published a book : *A Botanical Guide to the Flowering Plants , Ferns , Mosses and Algæ , Found Indigenous Within Sixteen Miles of Manchester* , written with the help of other local botanists and geologist Edward William Binney . Peppered with snatches of poetry and including some autobiographical details , the book gives a complete description of all the plants then found in the area . It encourages other working @-@ class people to explore the " many delightful walks by pleasant streams and through green woods in summertime " and requests landowners " at least to preserve the old footpaths which cross their fields and woods if they should decline to allow fresh ones to be made " .

As Buxton 's trade fell into decline he tried to survive by working as a botanical collector and delivering newspapers , but eventually had to rely on a fund set up by Binney for ? the relief and encouragement of scientific men in humble life ? . This situation was compounded when the proceeds from the second edition of his book , published in 1859 , were less than anticipated because of competition from Grindon 's *Manchester Flora* published in the same year .

= = Death = =

Buxton died on 2 January 1865 at Limekiln Lane , Ardwick , aged 78 and was buried at St Mary 's , Prestwich , on 5 January . In his obituary in the *Manchester Courier* , an unnamed " eminent man of science " described him as " probably one of the best British botanists , so far as flowering plants are concerned , that Lancashire has produced " .