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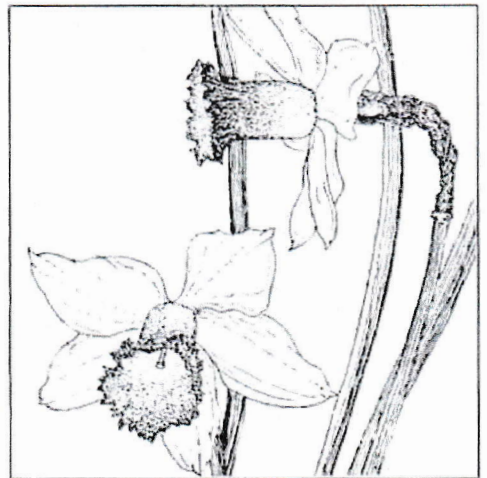
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The Backhouse Family

Bankers and Horticulturists

The Backhouses were a Quaker family, and several of them became highly regarded naturalists and horticulturists. James Backhouse (1721- 1798), founded the Backhouse Bank in Darlington, Co. Durham in 1774, with his sons Jonathan (1747-1826) and James (1757-1804). Jonathan Backhouse afforested the poorer land on his estates at Weardale in Co. Durham, an undertaking that was continued by three of his four sons.

Jonathan (1779-1842), (better known as a supporter of the Stockton-Darlington Railway), Edward (1781-1860), (founder of the Backhouse Bank in Sunderland) and William (1779-1844) were all awarded medals by the Royal Society of Arts for their enterprise.



However, William Backhouse was not just a forester, being well known as a botanist in the north of England. He had close contact with Nathaniel John Winch (1768-1838), the Newcastle-based botanist, to whom he forwarded a list of rare Durham plants in February 1805. William was particularly interested in British grasses and cultivated specimens sent to him by friends and correspondents. He died suddenly at a Friends Meeting in Darlington in June 1844. Sadly Backhouse's herbarium, considered of real scientific merit, was destroyed by fire when on loan to J. G. Baker, in 1865.

William Backhouse senior had two sons and three daughters. The eldest son, **William Backhouse II (1807-1869)**, continued the family interest in botany, became a competent entomologist, ornithologist, geologist and meteorologist, and developed a number of new

varieties of *Narcissus*. William junior worked in the branch of the Backhouse Bank established in Newcastle in 1825 and he became a founder member of The Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle upon Tyne in 1829. A competent entomologist, William made extensive notes on Lepidoptera captured on the Backhouse estates in Durham and his fascination with meteorology is revealed in diaries devoted to daily temperature and weather reports, and in requests from correspondents for readings from his 'Weather Gauge'. Surviving water-colour drawings of local coastal sections, and extensive transcriptions, indicate his knowledge of geology. He had a collection of stuffed birds, and showed promise as an artist, producing water-colours, engravings and pencil drawings of a variety of subjects. When William returned to the Darlington Bank, he lived at St. John's Hall, near Wolsingham, Co. Durham and here he began his major horticultural work, the development of new varieties of *Narcissus*. Following his death in 1869 his daffodil collection was purchased by Peter Barr and used in association with that of Edward Leeds (1802-1877) to establish a classification system for narcissi.

Three of William's four sons from his second marriage, (to Katherine Aldam (1815-1868) in 1843), Charles, Henry and Robert, kept up the family interest in daffodils. Charles James Backhouse (b. 1848) continued to live at St. John's, whilst Henry Backhouse (1849-1936) reared daffodils in Darlington from 1895-1907 and in Bournemouth from 1907-1925. William Backhouse II's youngest son, Robert Ormston Backhouse (1854-1940) married Sarah Elizabeth Dodgson in 1884, and two years later moved to Sutton Court, Sutton St. Nicholas, Hereford. Continuing the family interest in narcissi, Mrs. R. O. Backhouse (1857-1921) achieved national fame, being awarded the Royal Horticultural Society's Barr Cup in 1916. In 1923 Robert astounded the horticultural world with the first pink-cupped, white perianthed daffodil which he named 'Mrs. R. O. Backhouse'. His son, William Ormston Backhouse (1885-1962), worked for a period of five years at the Cambridge Plant Breeding Station and the John Innes Institute, but left Britain to become a geneticist for the Argentine Government. He established a number of wheat-breeding stations in Argentina, then moved to Patagonia, where he reared pigs, grew apples and other fruits and started intensive honey production. W. O. Backhouse obtained narcissi from his parents, and in South America continued the family tradition set by his grandfather. He specialised in red-trumpeted daffodils, and on his return to England and Sutton Court in 1945, continued to develop these varieties.

The banker James Backhouse (1757-1804) married Mary Dearman of Thorne, Yorkshire. Their sons Thomas Backhouse (1792-1845) and James established the Backhouse plant nursery in York. James

Backhouse 1 (1794- 1869) is arguably the most famous of all the Backhouse naturalists. He was educated in Leeds, but on his return to Darlington he began to explore nearby Teesdale with the lead miner John Binks (1766-1817), who is credited with the discovery of many of the rare plants in Teesdale. Binks, the Newcastle botanist Nathaniel John Winch, and William Hooker (1785- 1865) were all major influences on James Backhouse, as indeed were his uncle Edward Robson (1763—1813) and his cousin William Backhouse (1779-1844).

James Backhouse and his brother Thomas purchased the York nursery of John and George Telford in 1815, and made it a great success. However, James was an active missionary, and on 3 September 1831, in the company of George Washington Walker (1800-1859), he boarded the *Science*, bound for Australia. He stayed in the country until 1838, carrying out missionary duties and humanitarian work, but also collecting plants and seeds which he sent back to the York nursery and to Hooker in Glasgow. On the return journey he visited Mauritius en route for South Africa, where he stayed until December 1840, finally arriving back in York on 21 February 1841. Backhouse described his travels in two books, his *Narrative of a visit to the Australian Colonies* (1843) and *Narrative of a visit to the Mauritius and South Africa* (1844), both illustrated with engravings by Edward Backhouse (1808-1879) of Sunderland, from original sketches by the author. Hooker and William Harvey (1811-1866) recognised the value of Backhouse's botanical observations, naming a Myrtle *Backhousia* in 1845.

Throughout his Australian journey Backhouse had been in correspondence with his son James Backhouse II (1825-1890). From 1843 father and son explored Upper Teesdale and other mountainous areas of Britain and Europe in search of alpine plants. They jointly directed the growth of the York nursery from 1845 on the death of Thomas Backhouse, supervising its move to a 100 acre site at Holdgate, York in 1853. James Backhouse II wrote a *Monograph of the British Hieracia* (1856) and in the pages of *The Phytologist* recorded his botanical discoveries in Teesdale and other mountainous areas of Britain.

James Backhouse II was also a keen archaeologist and geologist; he explored the caves of Teesdale in search of archaeological material and with his son, James Backhouse III (1861-1945) formed a small private museum. The Teesdale Cave was excavated by the James Backhouses II and III between 1878 and 1888; these explorations are described in James III's *Upper Teesdale Past and Present* (1896). He had close connections with the Yorkshire Museum, York, being an active member of the Yorkshire

Philosophical Society, and an Honorary Curator of Zoology; the museum holds James Backhouse III's collection of cave material and some 4,000 bird skins. James III is best known as an ornithologist and as the author of the *Handbook of European Birds* (1890). In 1891 he formed a new company, Backhouse Nurseries (York) Ltd., which faced considerable competition from other plantsmen. Most of the land was sold in 1921 and the nursery finally ceased trading in 1955.

Edward Backhouse (1808-1879) was the son of Edward Backhouse (1781-1860), founder of the Sunderland branch of the Backhouse Bank. A philanthropist, artist, pioneer photographer and historian, he is best known for *Early Church History* and other religious works. Fascinated by natural history, he built significant zoological, botanical, archaeological and ethnographic collections which were transferred to Sunderland Museum in 1907. Edward Backhouse's nephew Thomas William Backhouse (1842- 1919) of West Hendon House, Sunderland, built an observatory there. His recordings of the weather and movements of the stars gave him considerable standing as a meteorologist and astronomer. He began to compile his 'Astronomical Journal' in 1858, which eventually extended to 36 volumes, and published a series of 14 maps of stars, accompanied by *A Catalogue of 9842 Stars Visible to the Naked Eye* (1911); the star maps were completed after his death. Thomas Backhouse's accurate meteorological observations were uninterrupted from 1857-1919, and his work was recognised by the Royal Meteorological Society, who appointed him as Vice-President in 1918 and 1919.

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