

Reverend John Edward Vize, 1831-1916

by Brian Stevenson, Kentucky, USA

John Vize was a classic example of a Victorian English scientist, being an educated man with sufficient spare time and energy to investigate the workings of the world around him. Vize was an ordained Anglican minister. Throughout much of his life, he involved himself with the local scientific community wherever he was stationed. Vize's studies emphasized fungi, particularly those which required a microscope for investigation. However, surviving slides and other historical records indicate a broad range of interests. He also wrote extensively about the history of Forden, Wales, where he spent several decades as Vicar.



Figure 1. A selection of microscope slides by J.E. Vize. Although he is best known for his research on fungi, Vize mounted a wide variety of objects.



Figure 2. A labeled shipping box from Vize, presumably used to deliver a slide order to a customer. His handwritten list inside the lid describes 15 botanical specimens. The box has a cloth hinge, and was held shut with a nail.



Figure 3. An undated cdv photograph of J.E. Vize. Used for nonprofit, educational purposes, the original source is not known.

John Edward was born in St. Mary-le-Bone (Marylebone), London, on 7 March 1831. He was the first child of John and Matilda (nee Lucy) Vize. The son was christened shortly after his birth, at St. Mary's, and again 1832 at his mother's home town in Warwickshire, presumably for the benefit of Matilda's family. The Vizes were moderately well-off, benefiting from inheritances off both sides of the family. At the time of young John's birth, his father was a bookseller and operator of a circulating library. John senior's business failed in 1832, and he turned to teaching school. When young John was 6, his mother died of tuberculosis, as did also his newborn baby brother. John senior died in 1840, also from tuberculosis, orphaning 9 year-old John Edward and his two younger siblings. However, they had inherited substantial sums from their grandparents, and the 1841 census reported that they had "*independent means*". They apparently lived for several more years with an uncle's family in Hackney, London. John initially began to work as an accountant, then switched to the clergy.

John took a position as Curate in Bath, Somerset, by 1854, although he was not yet formally qualified. In 1855, he married Hannah Louisa Ashley, who was 13 years his senior. They then moved to Dublin, Ireland, where John earned his Bachelor of Divinity at Trinity College in 1857. During his studies, he served as the Curate of Bray, in County Wicklow. He was ordained in 1858 and became Vicar of Bray in 1859. The couple had a son, Thomas, while in Dublin. Three more children were born in Bray, although only one, Clara, survived infancy.

By 1861, Vize had taken a position in Corsham, Wiltshire, not far from Hannah's home of Bath. John completed a Masters of Divinity at Oxford University in 1863. This is the "M.A." to which Vize refers on many of his slide labels. In 1864, he was appointed to the Parish of Bath.

Vize was next posted as Vicar of St Mary's in Hulme (modern day south Manchester), in 1866. It was here that Vize began making a significant mark in microscopy. He was an active, curious member of the Microscopical and Natural History Section of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society. For example, on February 25, 1867, he *"exhibited and described the hairs of a foreign Lepidopterous caterpillar. He said the specimen had remained for many years in spirit, and no record had been preserved with it; it was evidently not British, but he had hitherto been unable to identify it with any described foreign species in books to which he had access. The body was covered with very large compound hairs which gave the entire creature the appearance of a tuft of moss, and might possibly serve for its protection by the likeness to a vegetable growth. The unusual and peculiar development of these hairs suggested a microscopical examination of them, and the result had been interesting as showing that, whether or not the entire mass of the compound hairs serve for protection by concealment, the complex structure of their points, which are capable of protrusion and have each a bag or gland at their base contained within the tubular branch from which they project, fits them to act as most efficient weapons of offence"*.

Also in 1867, he was a founding member of Manchester's Leeuwenhoek Microscopical Club. Vize served as the first president of this elite group of seven microscopists. Further details on that Club may be read in the biography of John Boyd on this site. Vize resigned his presidency in late 1868, in anticipation of his moving to Wales.

Vize became Vicar of Forden, Montgomeryshire, Wales in 1869. He also served as Chaplain for the Forden Union Workhouse. Son Thomas was placed at a boarding school in Gloucestershire, while daughter Clara stayed with her maiden aunts, who ran a school for girls.

John's fascination with fungi was evidently well established by the time he reached Forden. In 1871, he sent his old colleagues in Manchester a slide of *Xenodochus carbonarius*: *"Mr. Vize reported that this rare fungus occurs near Welshpool, in a railway cutting, with a south-westerly aspect, well sheltered by a hill and a wood. The first appearance on the leaves of Sanguisorba officinalis, L., was noticed in the middle of May, when the Lecythea-form was in perfection, but the stems and other portions of the Burnet were greatly distorted by it. A month afterwards the magnificent vermilion-coloured spores were well sprinkled over the leaves, the form of which was unaltered. In the middle of July the intensely black brand spores made their appearance, many of which had twenty or more articulations, and were plentifully scattered over the leaves in tufts. Mr. Vize stated that he had not watched the transition state from the Uredo to brand-spores, but he hoped to do so if opportunity offered"*.

Within a few years of that donation and report, Vize began sharing his microscope slides nationwide. In 1877, the Royal Microscopical Society's *Monthly Microscopical Journal* reported, *"A recent number of 'Grevillea' contains the following notice, which may be of interest to some of our readers. 'For many years the want has been widely felt of some one with a practical knowledge of fungi, and withal expert in their manipulation, who could prepare for those who were unable to do it for themselves, mycological slides. We have often been applied to during the past to indicate such a person, if he could be found, and the application has been fruitless. This, however, is no longer the case, for we have had the opportunity of examining some of the microscopical preparations of fungi which have been produced by the Rev. J.E. Vize, of Forden Vicarage, Welshpool, and do not hesitate to recommend them to any of our readers who may be in search of such aids to study. It may be observed that no small advantage results from the manipulator being himself a mycologist, consequently the preparations are scientifically and accurately named, to say nothing of the neat and business-like manner in which the mechanical work of manipulation is performed. Here, then, is an excellent opportunity for anyone to possess themselves of illustrations of the principal genera of microscopical fungi, any such a series being manufactured to order. We are also further informed that anyone who is desirous of doing*

so may have their own material mounted, so that nothing more remains to be desired, except it be a reasonable and economical scale of charges, which, in this instance also, will be found entirely to their satisfaction. We can only hope that such invaluable aids to the study of fungi will not be neglected, and that Mr. Vize's unique and artistic preparations will find a place in every microscopical cabinet, whether specially devoted to mycological subjects or not'."

A. 1884

Fungi, Lichens, Algæ, Moss
Hepaticæ, Ferns,

Showing STRUCTURE, FRUCTIFICATION

Also Diatoms as Microscopical Slides,
2½/ per 2 dozen. Apply to

Rev. J. E. VIZE, Forden Vicara

WELSHPOOL.

B. 1888

WANTED, Annals and Magazine of Natural History; books on spiders, sponges, gorgonias, etc., or material. In exchange I will give other books, very superior microscopical slides, etc.
—Rev. J. E. Vize, Forden Vicarage, Welshpool.

C. 1889

WANTED, animal parasites, mounted or unmounted, for mounted slides of various kinds, animal or vegetable.—The Rev. J. E. Vize, Forden Vicarage, Welshpool.

D. 1889

LECTURES, Popular and Scientific, on Natural History.—The Rev. J. E. VIZE, M.A., F.R.M.S., is prepared to Lecture on Subjects of Botany, Zoology, the Microscope, &c., Illustrated with Diagrams, and Lantern Slides.—Apply to the VICAR OF FORDEN, Welshpool.

E. 1893

WANTED, the nests, cells of bees, and a few specimens of the bees themselves; also lantern-slides of animals and vegetables, in return for my microscopical slides. Apply to the Rev. J. E. Vize, Forden Vicarage, Welshpool.

Figure 4. Some advertisements and exchange offers from J.E. Vize.

In addition to affording him the time to study fungi, Vize's position also allowed him to travel to London with some frequency. He was present at the May 1, 1878 meeting of the Royal Microscopical Society, and participated in a discussion of fungi on plant leaves. The minutes of the meeting make it clear that he was regarded as an expert in the field. Vize was elected Fellow of the RMS in 1879. Rare slide labels from Vize describe him as "Rev. J.E. Vize, F.R.M.S.", and probably date from around the time of his election. Most slides bear the description "John E. Vize, M.A." which, from their relative abundance, were probably in use both before and after Vize's election. To answer Brian Bracegirdle's question in *Microscopical Mounts and Mounters* (which was perhaps asked tongue-in-cheek), all known slides from Vize date from after he took his holy orders.

Vize traveled to Liverpool for a February 26, 1880 presentation of the Chester Society of Natural Science on "*the fungus of diphtheria*," (since recognized to be a bacterium). He was also recorded as attending the May 2, 1882, meeting of the Birmingham Natural History and Microscopical Society, where he "*read a paper on English Wheat, in which he traced its growth, and the enemies, animal and vegetable, which it has to contend with. He also spoke of the different sorts of wheat, and of the different ways in which the grain can be treated to obtain the various kinds of flour. He advocated strongly the use of semolina flour. The paper was illustrated by specimens of wheat, and the fungi which attack it, and by drawings on the black board*".

Daughter Clara returned to live with her parents prior to 1881. She remained with them for the rest of their lives, and never married. She served as John's scientific assistant, being particularly helpful as he aged and his eyesight failed. Clara also had a reputation for hard drinking, and was often found sleeping in the ditches of Forden, having passed out on her way home.

Beginning in 1882, Vize published a three-part history, "*The Parish of Forden*". This was serially presented across the next two years in *Collections of Historical and Archaeological Relating to Montgomeryshire*. Naturally, the first part of the series included a detailed list of flowering plants, fungi, lichens, etc. found in the area. This was compiled by his son, Thomas. In the same journal, Vize also published an article on "*The History of the Forden Union Graveyard*".

Thomas followed in his father's scientific footsteps, apparently favoring botany (Figure 5). Among other activities, he helped start a science club in Cirenchester during 1881. Shortly thereafter, Thomas moved to South Africa, and died there in 1887 at the age of 30.

ANTHERS, dry, unmounted, of *Fritillaria meleagris*, *Lathraea squamaria*, *Scilla nutans*, and several others: also trifid stigmas of fritillaria. Botanical slides wanted.—T. C. Vize, Cotteswold School.

CIRENCESTER MICROSCOPICAL AND NATURALIST SOCIETY.—We are glad to notice that a new society has been formed as above. The society already numbers twenty members, under the presidency of E. J. E. Creese, F.R.M.S; Mr. T. C. Vize, son of the Rev. J. E. Vize, the well-known mycologist, is hon. sec.

THE EXTINCTION OF RARE PLANTS.—Having read the remarks by Mr. T. G. Harris on the above subject, I should like to back him up in any plans for the furtherance of the protection of plants. But while deploring these wholesale depredations, I would also point out that some safety and reliance may be placed in the ignorance of these rapacious vendors of plants, for some few weeks ago an advertisement appeared in the "Bazaar" offering the rare man-orchis (*Aceras anthropophora*) at a very low price per dozen. On the arrival of a dozen they were nothing else than the common tway-blade (*Listera ovata*). At the same time, some movement is necessary to prevent extinction of rarities, and I think that if some head botanist will undertake to receive suggestions and advice from others, some satisfactory result may be attained, either by the formation of some society or the individual efforts of every botanist in his own locality.—T. C. Vize.

Figure 5. An exchange offer, a letter and an editorial note regarding John's son, Thomas. All from 1881 issues of 'Hardwicke's Science-Gossip'.

Vize continued his relationship with the microscopists of Manchester, periodically being acknowledged for donations to their slide cabinet. He was also a member of other societies, such as the Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club of Herefordshire. An 1889 article on the Woolhope Club noted that Vize's knowledge of microscopic fungi was "*almost inexhaustible*" (Figure 6).

FUNGUS FORAYS IN THE FOREST OF DEAN.

By Dr. A. J. H. CRESPI.

THE WOOLHOPE CLUB, under the fostering care of the late Dr. Bull of Hereford, was one of the most important field clubs in the kingdom. It has not been so prosperous since his death, and the attendance at its gatherings has fallen off. Last year, too, at its annual reunion, it had to face the pinch of severe cold. It met on October 1st at Hereford, and next day adjourned to the Speech House, in the Forest of Dean, for two days' work; later in the week meeting at Holme Lacey, and at Pontrilas. The season in Herefordshire was not good for fungi, and the mycologists, who came together from all parts of the country, were disappointed, especially as in Cumberland, in North Shropshire, and near London, more particularly in Epping Forest, the luxuriance and abundance of fungi had been remarkable. At the Fungus Foray in Epping Forest, September 8th, 1888, more than one hundred and forty species were found, of which twenty were new to the forest, and five had never before been recorded in Great Britain. The cold damp summer was unfavourable to the fungus crop, especially on the elevated and bleak hills of the Forest of Dean, always cool, and often much colder than the more genial and sheltered districts near. Few societies make a speciality of

fungi, but the Woolhope does, and its meetings are generally enlivened by the presence of Dr. Cooke, one of our greatest living authorities, and of the Rev. John Vize, of Forden, whose knowledge of the microscopic species—a most difficult and extensive study—is almost inexhaustible. Mr. Vize has the rare honour of finding that his hearers are sometimes disappointed that his papers are not longer, and he is asked to go more fully into his subject next time.

in the highest favour by the general public.

The best method of getting information on this most difficult subject, which cannot be learnt from books, would be to attend lectures on fungi from some practical man. I can imagine the excellent and popular address which such a lecturer as the Rev. John Vize would give; and in such a way, and in it alone, could reliable information be conveyed that would be of service to learners. Scientific mycologists rather pride themselves, it seems to me, on ignoring the utility of fungi as food, and think it a degradation of their subject; but, after all, usefulness ought to play an important part in all scientific pursuits, and the public would be led to see the beauty and value of the study of fungi did some obvious advantage attend it. This year the Woolhope will meet at Hereford on the last day of September, and will then go on to Ludlow to pass a couple of days there in the midst of delightful country. I am sure that the conscientious and able honorary secretary, Mr. H. C. Moore, formerly of the Bombay Engineers, and now of 26, Broad Street, Hereford, would gladly take the names of candidates for the membership of this venerable and excellent Field Club. Membership is, I believe, a matter of half-a-guinea subscription, which entitles to a copy of the annual transactions, so that, should no meeting be attended, the money is well laid out. May this year's reunion be larger, and favoured with warmer weather than the last one, which, however, had exceptional cold to face, and was in marked contrast to the sultry rambles which we enjoyed in 1886.

Wimborne.

Figure 6. *On the Woolhope Club and J.E. Vize, from Hardwicke's Science-Gossip, 1889.*

John Vize retired from his vicarage around 1910. Hannah had been ill for the past decade, and John's eyesight was failing. They, and Clara, moved to Bristol. Hannah died in 1912, and John died in 1916, at the age of 85.

As a final note, we could all benefit from emulating early scientists such as Reverend Vize. While it is commonly assumed that one must now be a professional scientist to study anything worthwhile, that is not true. The vast majority of modern scientific research focuses on humans, such as diseases of humans and crops, agricultural insect pests, etc. That omits the vast majority of organisms on earth, most of which are barely known to science. There is still ample room for amateur scientists to conduct significant studies and publish their results.

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This and other essays on early microscopy can also be read at <http://microscopist.net>

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