

Letters: Ellen Hutchins and Dawson Turner - 1807

The original letters are held by the Wren Library of Trinity College Cambridge (seventy letters from Ellen Hutchins to Dawson Turner between 1807 and 1814) and the Library and Archives of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, London (fifty letters from Dawson Turner to Ellen Hutchins).

This is the first year of the correspondence, starting with the short note that Dawson Turner wrote that accompanied a box of plants sent as a thank you to Ellen Hutchins for specimens received from her via James Mackay.

The preparation of transcriptions of the full correspondence is a project of the Ellen Hutchins Festival, Bantry, Ireland. The 1807 letters were all transcribed by Michael Mitchell for his Occasional Paper, *Early Observations on the Flora of Southwest Ireland - selected letters of Ellen Hutchins and Dawson Turner 1807 - 1814* for the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin in 1999. This presentation of the text was made in 2024 by Madeline Hutchins for the Ellen Hutchins Festival.

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Letter 1

Dawson Turner to Ellen Hutchins, 4th April 1807

Mr Dawson Turner, who is under many obligations to Miss Hutchins for specimens of Fuci sent through Mr Mackay, avails himself of this opportunity of expressing those obligations, & of requesting she will do him the favour to accept of the enclosed. It would gratify him greatly to hear that it contained anything interesting to Miss Hutchins, & he begs leave to add that if he can at any time be useful to her, by forwarding either marine or flowering plants from this part of Britain or by any other means, it will have always afford him pleasure.

Yarmouth 4 April 1807

Letter 2

Ellen Hutchins to Dawson Turner, 22nd June 1807

Sir

I have had the pleasure to receive your kind & very interesting present. I beg you to accept my best thanks. I am very sensible of the value of your obliging attention. Your plants have given me a great deal of pleasure & have corrected many mistakes that I have made – I have met with some of them here – *Fucus Ceranoides* is extremely common in this part of the country. It seems confined to those situations where rivers or rivulets fall into the sea. The tops of it are eaten by poor people. –

I have got a few fine specimens of such plants as Mr Mackay has informed me you thought most rare of those I have met with. I shall have the pleasure of sending them to you. One that I could get only fragments of last season, I have this year found in a very perfect state. Of one I take the liberty to enclose a small specimen, I have much larger to send –

I should have great pleasure in preserving for you any plants of this country that you may wish for. I think to delay sending such as I have until the end of summer hoping that I may add to them. So very inexperienced a beginner as I am may hope to find many more plants on the rocky shores of this bay –

I have the honour to be your obliged
& very humble Servant

E Hutchins

Ballylickey near Bantry

June 22nd 1807 –

Since I wrote the above I have got the plant enclosed. I think you may prefer having it in its present state to having it preserved on paper. I therefore send it, I have got no more than this specimen of it –

Letter 3

Dawson Turner to Ellen Hutchins, 23rd November 1807

Madam

The letter with which you were so kind as to favour me last June reached Yarmouth just as I was upon the point of leaving it upon a tour to the Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland, whence I am but lately returned. I much regret that this circumstance has prevented me from taking a more early opportunity of thanking you for your kindness, & has probably subjected me to a charge of neglect, of which I should be extremely sorry to be guilty. It gave me great pleasure to find that the few special specimens which I took the liberty of sending you through Mr Mackay proved acceptable to you, & as my summer excursion has furnished me with the opportunity of making great additions, it will gratify me much if you will allow me to send you such as you may still wish to possess, & will point out the most secure & ready means of conveying them to you. I do not wish you to regard

this offer as confined to marine plants alone, for I have at present spare duplicates of most of our scarce alpine plants as well as of a great many Lichens & Mosses and I should be happy to supply any you may wish for. I am extremely obliged to you for the two beautiful specimens contained in your letter: they both appear to me to belong to *Fucus laceratus* [*Cryptopleura ramosa*], but constitute a variety which I had never seen before, and which far surpasses all the rest in beauty. Should you have met with more of it since that time, which you do not want for any other correspondent, I should feel myself indebted for what you could spare. I am at this time anxious to figure in my *Historia Fucorum*, of which 3 numbers are already published, the beautiful *Fucus* which you sent me some time since through Mr Mackay & which in colour & in its proliferous mode of growth bears at first sight some affinity to *F. rubens* [*Phyllophora crispa*]. Previous, however, to publishing it I have to beg your permission to mention your name as the person who discovered it, & to request that you would take the trouble of favouring me with such particulars respecting it as you may remember. I wish also to know where & at what time of the year it was found. The lower part seems to have a midrib, of which there are no traces in the upper part. I should be glad also to know if you have given it any name by which you are desirous of it being called. Should you have found it in any plenty I would take the liberty of begging for a few more specimens for my different friends, but indeed I should be thankful for anything, however common, from your part of the coast, as it would give me the opportunity of seeing to what changes the same plants are liable between Norfolk and Bantry Bay. Of shells our coast is so unproductive that to offer what are found here would in reality be offering nothing: at the same time if you collect the British species I could procure you many from my different correspondents. We have many *Sertulariae* [hydroids], & I am not ill provided with duplicates, which are much at your service.

I will also add that it will at all times make me happy to be honoured with your correspondence, & to have opportunities of testifying that respect

with which I am

Madam Your much obliged

& very faithful Servant,

Dawson Turner.

Yarmouth 23rd November 1807

Letter 4

Ellen Hutchins to Dawson Turner, 15th December 1807

Sir

I had the pleasure to receive your kind letter a few days ago. I am much obliged by your offer of sending me specimens of Alpine plants & shall be glad to have a few of any kinds that you can quite conveniently spare. Of the species of *Jungermannia* that inhabit mountains and mountainous situations I have got the following *Alpina*, *ruspestris*, *curvifolia*, *Julacea*, *Cochleariformis*, *ciliaris*, *quinquedebtata*, & the species enclosed which is very common on all the mountains in this neighbourhood growing in large loose tufts. I need not trouble you to give me any of those and if you should want specimens I shall be very glad to send them to you. Of mosses and lichens I know very little & I fear am not likely to learn much of them as I cannot hear of any english books to assist me with Withering. Should I hereafter be able to learn more it would give me great pleasure to find anything worth your acceptance. At present I am quite a beginner having been only a little

more than two years attending to any part of Botany in a country very remote from assistance and unacquainted with any person nearer than Dublin to correct all my mistakes –

I hope you have before this time received a parcel of sea plants that Mr Mackay has forwarded to you. He has been so kind as to say that he would forward to you anything I may have to send & I think he will have the goodness to take care of those things you are so obliging as to offer to me. I am much pleased to find that you liked the varieties of *F laceratus* I sent. Of the strongly veined ones one I never met with more than the specimen you have. Should I be more fortunate next season I shall not neglect to preserve some for you. Of the other I have sent you some of the best specimens I could find & wish to know if you have any desire to have more of it. I met with it only in one spot for a short time in the month of June – Of the *Fucus* sent by Mr Mackay which I am glad to find you consider worth a place in your work, I sent you the two best specimens I found (in the parcel) marked No 4. I could find it only from the 28th of March to the 14th of April when it seemed quite going to decay. It is thrown up by the sea at the south side of Reendonogan point and at Garnish Island at the entrance of the harbour of Glengariff. I met with one young plant growing on the north side of Whiddy Island, all in this bay. The route is round, flat and about half an inch across beautifully waved at the edge. The midrib runs through or nearly through the whole plant. It is very round and strong next the root but becomes gradually more faint towards the ends of the leaves. Many fronds arise from the same root, from a single one to six or seven. The fructifications resemble those of *F hypoglossum* & when they burst the seeds are placed as in that species in lines that either side the midrib, I saw them burst. The edges of the plant are much waved. It seems to me greatly to resemble *F hypoglossum* though a much larger plant. Its colour when recent is much more brilliant than after being dried. It changes like most of the fine red plants to a purplish red. When I meet with it again I think I shall be able to preserve its colour better, and to send you some good specimens. My friends wish me to have the honour of being mentioned by you as the person who found this plant. As to its name I have no choice – Mr Mackay writes me that the *Ulva* I have sent you marked No 5, was first described by you. I am very glad to have met with it. Will you do me the favour to tell me its name, & also if you wish to have more specimens of it, or any of the plants I have sent. Those I have not written the names to, I shall know by the numbers – I now regret that I did not send you more of the plants of this bay as you say you should be glad to have any of them. However I shall have them for you next summer. It would give me great pleasure that the little I can do should be of any use to you. *Fucus ovalis* is very common here & we have *dasphyllus*. I should be very glad to get a specimen of *F tenuissimus* & of *F plicatus* & *fruticulosus* if you have them to spare. We have got one small variety of *F bifidus*, (the 4th of your Synopsis I believe) & the only one we have, it is rare. *F laciniatus* is very common. I have met with one fragment of *pendunculatus*. I was greatly delighted to find *F Wigghii*. I knew the plant on the shore by the plate you sent me without comparing it with the description. I found about 10 or 11 plants in a fortnight. Should you like to have more of it? We have *F palmetta* always on the stalks of *F digitatus*. *F tuberculatus* is an inhabitant of this bay, but is not common. Our species have not the taste you describe. *F ligulatus* is very common growing on all the rocks here in deep water, it is never that I have seen left bare by the tide. It begins to grow in March, & attains a large size in a very short time. In very vigorous plants a nerve runs through the leading shoot and larger branches – Of flowering plants I take the liberty to mention the following that I may know if you wish for any of them. We have a great many coloured varieties of *Anthyllis vulneraria*, *Centunculus minimus* very common in marshy places with *Linus radiola* & *Exacum filiformis*. *Pinguicula Lusitanica* common, *Carex extensa* & *distans*, *Saxifraga geum*, *Bartsia viscosa* very common, *Euphorbia hiberna* extremely common, the country people here poison fish with

it by putting it in rivers, and they eat the fish without injury – a pretty variety of *Blechnum spicant*. Most of those plants are considered rare by Mr Mackay the only botanist who I believe visited this country. *Arbutus unedo* grows in great plenty within five miles of this place in the mountains – of *Sertulariae* I am only just beginning to acquire a little knowledge. Should I meet with any rare ones I shall have the pleasure of sending you some. Of shells I have as yet too little knowledge to know what to offer you, though I have some native & foreign. I have collected such as I could find for my good friend and instructor in Botany Dr Stokes of Dublin –

Our shores are too rocky to produce many species but we have immense banks of coral sand which is very useful & valuable for manure, with it we get many shells. We have the large scallop with one valve flat in great plenty – I am told our species of *Echinus*'s are very fine. We have two, one pale red of about 14 inches circumference the other purple about 11 inches with much longer spines than the last. In summer we find plenty of the beautiful *Patella pellucida* on *Fucus loreus*. Of this *Fucus* we have a variety that perhaps you have not met with. It is not more than one third of the breadth of what you describe in your synopsis, much less compressed and of a very yellowish olive colour. –

I have taken the liberty to trouble you with a very long letter, in the hope that I may mention something that you may like to have specimens of –

I beg leave to assure you of the respect & esteem with which I remain dear Sir your
much obliged servant
E Hutchins

Ballylickey
December 15th 1807

the little *Conferva* enclosed grows in a cavern by the sea & is very beautiful when fresh. I lately got *C Rothii* and duplicates in small quantity –

Madeline Hutchins
Ellen Hutchins Festival

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