

William Casson Of Thorne

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WILLIAM CASSON OF THORNE

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William Casson of Thorne

INTRODUCTION

William Casson, an inhabitant of Thorne in Yorkshire for virtually his entire life, is usually recalled as the first resident chronicler of the town and its rural hinterland. The three editions of his book *The History and Antiquities of Thorne, with some account of the drainage of Hatfield Chase*¹ are his most lasting memorial, remaining a standard local reference even today, over 160 years beyond their first appearance. He is also remembered in other, minor, ways, for example as the discoverer of Fen Buckler-fern *Dryopteris cristata* in Yorkshire, and as the author of a published address to the Thorne Literary & Scientific Association.² A much more spectacular legacy, which even now partially survives, existed some way out of the town, on the edge of Thorne Moors. Here, William established a garden, and with his brother John was later involved with commercial plant raising. Today, rhododendrons *Rhododendron*, Sheep-laurel *Kalmia angustifolia* and Springbeauty *Montia perfoliata* all attest to former interest in and activity on the peat moorland's south western flank. There are no

William Casson of Thorne

physical clues of responsibility for this alien floral element, yet the written evidence links it undeniably with William and his brother. In so doing, it also reveals a much more significant horticultural enterprise than was hitherto appreciated.

WILLIAM CASSON'S LIFE

William was born at Thorne on 23 October 1796, son of Quaker parents, Mordecai and Mary Casson. He remained a bachelor throughout his life, but had two brothers and one sister. One of these brothers, also named Mordecai, emigrated to North America, residing during at least his later years in Tuscarora, to the east of Shenandoah in the 'Quaker State' of Pennsylvania.³ His other brother, John Calvert, lived at Thorne, and died there in 1878⁴ as did their sister Sarah in the following year.⁵ William himself attained the age of 89, although his health was not always good. He also had an accident to his hip, which caused a slight lameness and disease of the foot. He subsequently suffered from it a good deal at times, and ultimately died of erysipelas on 22 January 1886. Despite extreme old age, he

William Casson of Thorne

remained in possession of almost all his faculties, only the loss of an eye, again in an accident,⁶ causing him impairment.

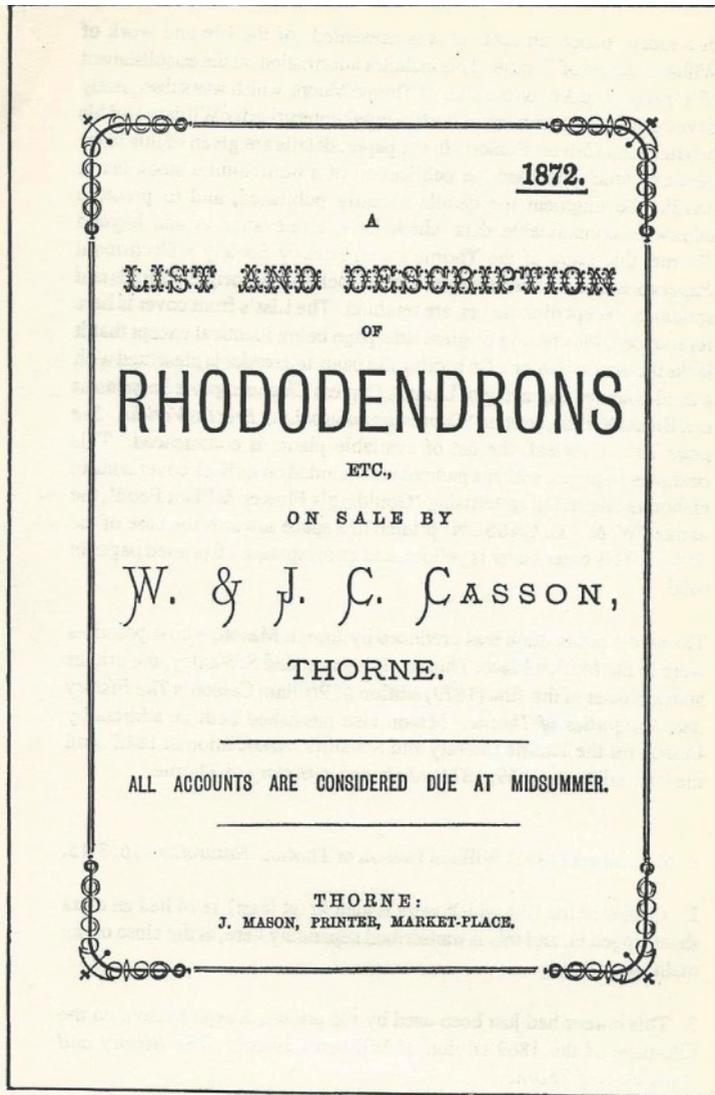
William had only a rudimentary education, at the vicarage school under the Rev. Eric Rudd. He was subsequently apprenticed to a firm of grocers, also perhaps within the Casson family, at Gainsborough in Lincolnshire. He later succeeded to a grocery business in Thorne, established in 1793 by his paternal grandfather, Mordecai Hord Casson.

Population census returns, trade directories⁷ and an advertisement in *The Gardeners Year-book and Almanack*, 1874⁸ chart the commercial progress of William and John, who formed what became a successful and respected firm, based on the family's interests. Their business, which encompassed a variety of activities, included tallow-chandling, tea dealing, grocery, drapery, malting, seed dealing, horticulture, farming, even brick-making in the mid-1850s. William was generally described in population census returns as a draper and grocer, although as a 'Grocer Seedsman & Farmer jointly with John

William Casson of Thorne

C. Casson' in 1871. John was usually entered as a farmer and

William Casson of Thorne



The front cover of the Casson stock list, its variety of typeface styles being typical of the period.

William Casson of Thorne

– from 1861 – seed merchant. At the 1871 census, the partners employed six men and three boys. They owned family property east of Thorne at Clap Gate Farm (96 acres) and also rented a further 39 acres of local farmland. At the time of John's death in 1878, he was then the 'active partner in the firm of W. and J. C. Casson, seedsmen, grocers, and farmers'.⁹ The 1881 census data record William as a draper and grocer 'retired from business'.

William was a lifelong Quaker, although the number of Friends at Thorne was relatively small, with many of them belonging to the Casson family. Until *c.* 1846, William's interest was a formal and traditional one, occasioned by familial custom, but from then on he became an 'eager glad disciple'¹⁰, intent on spreading a similar joy in his faith. He was closely involved with Thorne Preparative Meeting and was a member of Balby Monthly Meeting. He became a minister in March 1870,¹¹ and visited other meetings at times, including those in the Yorkshire Dales, often in the company of a Scarborough Quaker minister, Henry Hopkins, himself once a grocer.¹² William was sometimes

William Casson of Thorne

requested to speak at Wesleyan class meetings in the Thorne neighbourhood, and when occasionally visiting hydropathic establishments to help restore his health, he was not infrequently asked to conduct family worship there. He also carries on a considerable correspondence in a similar vein.

Upon his death, William was interred at the Friends' burial ground off Church Street in Thorne. His long and benevolent connection with the town, coupled with his high moral and social character, caused him to be heeded with popularity and esteem. His death occasioned several appreciative notices,¹³ although one Quaker obituarist¹⁴ commented with an unintentional edge that William 'was not endowed with large natural abilities, but he showed how valuable a man may be without possessing any great gifts'. The high regard which William drew to himself partially arose from his obvious interest in the welfare of the district's poor; he exhibited a particular concern for the inmates of the Thorne Union workhouse. Here, he was a regular visitor and benefactor and for some years held a religious service on

William Casson of Thorne

Sunday afternoons. Indeed, during these years the workhouse management felt it unnecessary to have the expense of a paid chaplain. William was also fond of children; he liked to invite parties of young people to his house in Silver Street for tea, with a ‘ramble on the moors afterwards in search of wild flowers, which he loved to gather and cultivate’.¹⁵

William was a staunch liberal, and during his long lifetime ‘occupied several parish offices with great ability and presided at most of the public and parish meetings for a long series of years’¹⁶. He was, for example, from 1845-60 surveyor of highways, as his father had been. Until only a year or so before his death, William was one of the way wardens, a position he only relinquished due to failing health, possibly arising from his hip injury. As surveyor of highways he was appointed annually, and worked assiduously, although there was no salary attached. His last public act was the laying of the foundation stone of Thorne Town Hall on 3 October 1883. He mounted the stone to give his address in which, as the town’s oldest inhabitant, he outlined the principal events that

William Casson of Thorne

had taken place there since the beginning of the century, his recollections extending back to about 1803.¹⁷

William's other activities were similarly locally directed and of long duration. He held a practical interest in the reclamation of Thorne Moors where, with John, he owned 50 acres of 'unproductive moor' beyond Clap Gate Farm. He was a trustee to the Thorne Moors Owners, and an original director of the Thorne Moor Improvement Co. of 1861.¹⁸ He was for many years the chairman of the Thorne Gas-Light & Coke Co., formed in 1863. William was one of the first promoters, of the Thorne Agricultural Show (established 1853), and was an active member of the Thorne Agricultural Association for many years. The decorative grottoes and floral displays at the shows owed much to his inventive artistry. The latter was not, however, entirely altruistic, as recalled in 1886.¹⁹

'In years gone by long ago, the very first man we used to encounter on Thorne Show ground ... was Mr. Casson, busy with his grottoes ... Mr. Casson was a Quaker, and had an eye to

William Casson of Thorne

business ... and in some nook or corner of those charming little retreats was certain to lurk a sufficiently suggestive reminder that Mr. Casson was a seed merchant, and that those who wanted giant wurzels and abnormal turnips might do worse than consult him or his partner on the subject.’

Despite his limited formal education, William displayed intellectual ability when, at the age of 33, he completed his *History and Antiquities of Thorne*. It is somewhat ironic that William should be remembered as the writer of the book and its subsequent imprints, as each actually appeared anonymously. Nevertheless, the evidence of authorship is conclusive.²⁰ It is regretted that no appraisal has been located which evaluates William as a local historian, or judges the significance of his part in an understanding of the region’s history.

WILLIAM CASSON AS A NATURALIST

The *History and Antiquities of Thorne* also reveals its author’s interest in natural history.

William Casson of Thorne

This is especially evident in the chapter outlining Thorne Moors, William's published description of its surface being the first.²¹ A number of species are alluded to in the chapter, particularly of flowering plants and birds, but also memorable taxa from other groups, like snakes and the biting Nematocera. William was seemingly keenest on botany, and the available evidence largely restricts his natural history to Thorne Moors. However, his interests probably also encompassed the larger region of Thorne parish and adjacent parts. He may have had a similar outlook to Gilbert White, who died only three years before William's birth. Casson was aware of *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selbourne*, citing White²² in discussing Yews *Taxus baccata* in churchyards. This view of William's attitude is given credence by noting his choice of verse, derived from Oliver Goldsmith's 'The Traveller', on the title-page of each edition of the *History and Antiquities of Thorne*. William seemed satisfied with his geographical lot, which he clearly felt was worthy of investigation and documentation. His published work reinforces this interpretation,

William Casson of Thorne

indicating a sympathetic *rapport* with Thorne and its region.

With his interests and outlook, it was natural that William should be involved with the Thorne Literary & Scientific Association, which was formed in 1836²³. He served on the administering committee, and occasionally lectured on botanical subjects. On the Association's sixth anniversary, at its annual general meeting of 21 January 1842²⁴, William delivered an address to the assembled company, in verse, on the acutely irritating midges *Culicoides* of Thorne Moors, referring to them as 'colicoides punctata'. The subject was prompted by memories of an earlier Association meeting at his moorland garden (q.v.). He continued with poetic allusions to the botanical interest of Thorne Moors, and in closing, offered his best wishes to 'our little band'. The address was published for the Association, in an augmented form, by Joseph Mason.²⁵

C. W. Hatfield²⁶ regarded William as an 'intelligent and enthusiastic observer of nature', and some of the Thorne botanical records which

William Casson of Thorne

the former included probably emanated from William.

An obituarist²⁷ noted that he was:

‘... always known as a good botanist, and a successful cultivator of plants and flowers, and his garden on the moors was often visited by naturalists and botanists from a distance.’

William guided the Sheffield Field Naturalists’ Society on their excursion to Thorne Moors on 21 June 1865²⁸. This is the earliest known visit to the area by a society based beyond Thorne,²⁹ though there is no later evidence to link William with visits by any other organisations. He was firmly a naturalist of his time, associated with the earliest phase of botanical interest on Thorne Moors, when the site was seen as a rich source of herbarium specimens and of records of broad geographical significance.³⁰ The increasingly sophisticated and regulated attitude to Thorne Moors botany which appeared in the 1870s, mirroring wider changes, was engendered from beyond Thorne. Although the third edition of William’s *History and Antiquities of Thorne* appeared during that decade, the botanical data

William Casson of Thorne

had not been altered from that of the 1869 edition.

The botanist James Backhouse (1825-90) described William as ‘my now aged friend’ in 1884.³¹ In examining natural history at Thorne, this is only one example of a significant Quaker interest in the nineteenth century. In addition to William, and another Thorne Quaker botanist, William Harrison,³² non-resident Quaker naturalists like Backhouse, above, Thomas Le Gay Brewerton³³ and John Heppenstall³⁴ had links with Thorne Quakers, and these would repay further study. Indeed, it is likely that William’s botanical contacts were largely Quaker ones. As noted, an obituarist observed that the garden property on the edge of Thorne Moors was often visited by naturalists. A little further into the moor was ‘Scheuchzeria Well’, as mapped and named in the 1850s.³⁵ This moorland pool was probably the most accessible destination for seeking specimens of Thorne’s most celebrated botanical native. Rannoch-rush *Scheuchzeria palustris*.³⁶ This species was first found by William Harrison, in 1831; it was known in the field to William Casson by 1841³⁷

William Casson of Thorne

It is likely that William's visitors travelled to the garden, and were then guided over the moor to the nearby Rannoch-rush station. It was comparatively easy to reach, and was presumably the one their guide knew best. It is possible that William was one of very few botanists who had local and consistent knowledge of Rannoch-rush on the accessible Thorne side of the moorland. William Harrison emigrated to Indiana in North America sometime after his discovery,³⁸ and other known collectors were often neither local nor persistent. By the time the 'investigative' botanists of the 1870s and later began to know the moor, the species had all but succumbed to drainage; only Dr F. A. Lees found a single flowerless example, in 1870.³⁹ The press reports of the 1865 excursion by Sheffield naturalists do not refer to Rannoch-rush, although the garden region was visited and commoner plants reported on. *Scheuchzeria* Well would not have been missed had so renowned a 'botanic lion'⁴⁰ still been growing there. Indeed, it only marginally survived into the following decade anywhere on the moor. The unique place name 'Scheuchzeria Well' may have been coined by William,

William Casson of Thorne

becoming formalised when mapped. Who else but local landowners and their employees could provide detailed place-names to the surveyors of the Ordnance Map Office, and who but William would be so familiar with that botanical site?

James Backhouse made his comment of friendship in 1884 in a published note attributing the discovery of Fen Buckler-fern in Yorkshire to a Thorne Moors gathering made by William in 1856. The latter had actually published it as a Thorne species in 1869.⁴¹ This record, and indeed William himself, were initially unknown to Dr F. A. Lees, who however subsequently included the record, and attributed it, in the *Naturalist* and in his *West Yorkshire Flora* ⁴². This is the only known occasion when any of William's data recognizably found their way into one of the county or infra-county floras. Not surprisingly, nothing written by William is included in the bibliography given by Lees.⁴³ He was however, quoted by Rev. E. A. Woodruffe-Peacock,⁴⁴ although the exact data derived cannot be determined. There is no evidence of an herbarium et Thorne, although William did on occasion collect notable specimens,⁴⁵ both for

William Casson of Thorne

identification by experts and as herbarium gifts for others. The latter was particularly true of Rannoch-rush.

THE MOORLAND VENTURE

The land extending from Thorne towards Thorne Moors was divided into a multitude of thin strips, known locally as cables, each identically aligned and bounded by dykes. These were the result of the plots of land to the east of Thorne being gradually extended over many decades,⁴⁶ thrusting eastwards in ever lengthening ribbons as the peat was removed and the ground beneath cultivated. Thus the edge of the moorland was continually, though fitfully, receding from the town.

The digging of Thorne Waste Drain in 1815 along the south-western edge of the surviving peat unwittingly created a barrier to further reclamation along the cables, with the peat and any reclaimed plots to the west rendered relatively inaccessible. The excavation of the drain was first suggested by William's father⁴⁷ when he worked the family property of Clap Gate Farm, its cable of land extending from Clap Gate Road eastwards to the peat. At the

William Casson of Thorne

appointment of rent charges in lieu of tithes in 1840, this was the only cable extending east of Thorne Waste Drain which incurred a charge on its exclave. The latter was described as comprising ‘Grass’, and amounted to 4 acres 1 rood 16 perches.⁴⁸ Three further reclaimed plots beyond Thorne Waste Drain, lying immediately south of the Casson cable, did not attract a rent charge in 1840, suggesting that they were not then in cultivation. Quite when these three also came into the possession of the Casson family is not exactly known.

Despite its designation as ‘Grass’, the original cable exclave was actually utilised, as inferred, in an imaginative and novel way, as the site for an ‘experimental Garden’⁴⁹ created by William.⁵⁰ It was perhaps inevitable that, should this trial be successful, it was likely to be eventually extended southwards in some way. The actual origins of the garden are obscure. There is no indication of it on any traced map from the 1820s, including the large scale 1825 Enclosure Award map,⁵¹ although the reclaimed Casson piece beyond Thorne Waste Drain is shown. Also, there is no allusion in the first

William Casson of Thorne

(1829) edition of William's *History and Antiquities of Thorne*. Nevertheless, the garden was certainly in evidence in July 1840,⁵² suggesting its likely origin sometime in the 1830s.

The first substantial reference to the garden is that contained in the 'Explanatory Notes' accompanying the published version of William's 1842 address to the Thorne Literary & Scientific Association. The partially reclaimed eastern extremities of the cables could not be farmed so well as the other parts, and their utilisation was sometimes solved by the creation of plantations of larch *Larix*, oak *Quercus* and other trees. William, in writing for the 1842 booklet, observed:

'At the edge of the morass ... is a small plantation of Larch, and immediately adjoining it is an experimental Garden, which a year or two ago was kept in very neat order, and attracted a good deal of attention, not only from the novelty of its situation, but also for the beauty and vividness of colouring in the flowers it produced, amongst which may be mentioned those of the Rose; the Rhododendrum [sic];

William Casson of Thorne

Fuchsias; Deutzias; Salvias, scarlet [,] purple, and patans [sic]; Rhodanthe Manglesii; Nymphillas; and many other choice plants for which a peat soil is favourable.’

William added that on the bank of cut peat demarcating the northern boundary of the garden, a moss collage of mostly exotic mammals, glass-eyed and almost life-sized, had been created. In one corner of the garden a small rill issued from the peat, above which the word ‘Temperance’ had been inserted into the peat in white moss. When William was writing in 1842, all these adornments had already been destroyed by a severe frost. Under the shade of the trees in the garden, an arbour of Heather *Calluna vulgaris* had been formed, and rustic seats⁵³ were provided for visitors:

‘Here in the summer season parties have frequently been assembled to take tea. The neat tea services used on those occasions were purchased by subscription a year or two ago, and generously presented by the Ladies of Thorne.’

Those days were remembered by the Doncaster historian John Tomlinson. Although born at

William Casson of Thorne

Epworth in 1824, Tomlinson's early years were spent at Thorne. He moved to Doncaster at the age of 30,⁵⁴ and it is thus likely that his published memories of the garden⁵⁵ predate c. 1854. He recalled 'fuchias, dahlias, rhododendrons and various other flowering shrubs which delight to suck nutriment from a turfy soil'. The only visual representation of the garden at this time is that of the 6" O.S. map of 1853. The garden is shown mostly surrounded by planted conifers, and with a 'Summer House' at its south eastern corner: perhaps an essential refuge from the midges. There was no representation at that time of a flanking horticultural scheme.

From the 1860s, references to the garden become subsumed in generalisations about the subsequent horticultural enterprise of W. & J.C. Casson on at least the three cable heads to the south. The garden itself almost certainly ceased to exist separately, becoming incorporated with the other plots. The name 'Casson's Garden/Gardens' became confusingly transferred to the whole of the four cultivated units east of Thorne Waste Drain. Although the

William Casson of Thorne

venture was jointly owned, it seems that John was the most active partner. Much less is known of him than of his more renowned brother. However, he played his part in Thorne life,⁵⁶ and died in 1878 at the age of 71:

‘As an owner, along with his brother, Mr. William Casson, of a somewhat considerable extent of land, as a practical agriculturalist, and as one of the steady-going improvers of the Thorne [Moor], the deceased gentleman occupied a prominent position.’

The first positive data on the horticultural undertaking are gained from the 1869 edition of the *History and Antiquities of Thorne*:

‘Some peat is annually sent off from the moor to nurserymen or gentlemen at a distance, either by rail or vessel, as American plants,⁵⁸ azalias [sic], kalmias, andromedas, rhododendrons, and heaths flourish splendidly in a peaty soil. Thousands of rhododendrons are raised from seed on Thorne Moor by W. and J.C. Casson, for sale.’

William Casson of Thorne

By the 1870s, the business was undoubtedly well-established, with its scale revealed by a stock list issued in 1872. In it, following a hand-coloured engraving of Lawson Cypress *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* cv. *Erecta Viridis*, a descriptive list of the plants available was presented. These featured 197 named hybrid rhododendrons ('Aclandianum' to 'Zampa'); also 10 'Azalias' and 'Rhodora canadense', all now included under *Rhododendron* (s.l). Many of these rhododendron taxa, derived from leading British and European growers, are now lost to commerce.⁶⁰ Interestingly, the catalogue noted that:

'W. and J.C. Casson have, in addition, a large stock of Hybrid Rhododendrons, named, of their own raising, which can be recommended as fine Plants, with good foliage, and the flowers in bold trusses, of good colours, well marked or spotted.

Unfortunately, none of these rhododendrons seemed to have survived as named hybrids, as evidence by their failure to feature in the international Rhododendron Register. Also listed

William Casson of Thorne

for sale, under ‘Shrubs and Plants’, were examples from at least the following genera: *Abies*, *Andromeda*, *Araucaria*, *Berberis*, *Bryanthus*, *Cedrus*, *Chamaecyparis*, *Cortaderia*, *Cotoneaster*, *Crataegus*, *Deutzia*, *Erica*, *Euonymus*, *Garrya*, *Ilex*, *Juniperus*, *Kalmia*, *Ledum*, *Leiophyllum*, *Magnolia*, *Mahonia*, *Mentziesia*, *Myrica*, *Myrtus*, *Pernettya*, *Pieris*, *Prunus*, *Raphiolepis*, *Retinospora*, *Ribes*, *Sequoia*, *Skimmia*, *Thuja*, *Thujopsis*, *Vinca*, *Yucca*, and *Zenobia*. It was also noted that three or four specimen rhododendrons were growing on ground occupied by W. & J.C. Casson well away from the moorland, immediately next to Thorne South railway station. They were intended as a more visible and accessible advertisement to the people of Thorne, and to others travelling on the railway.

Copies of the 1872 list which were issued in (at least) 1874 had an extra sheet stuck in, observing that attention was drawn to rare and new additions to the ‘collection on the Moors’ – though there is no hint of what these were – as well as to the extra showground alongside the railway. This land, it was noted, had been

William Casson of Thorne

purchased from the Manchester, Sheffield & Lincolnshire Railway Co. Having been partially filled with peat from Thorne Moors, it was planted early in 1874 with ‘RHODODENDRONS, AUCUBIAS, and SKIMMIA OBLATA’. In *The Gardeners’ Year-book and Almanack, 1874*,⁶¹ W. & J.C. Casson advertised their hardy rhododendrons and other shrubs and trees: ‘A List and Description sent on supplication, and a supply of Peat if required’. On John’s death in 1878, it was retrospectively remarked.⁶²

‘He took an especial interest in gardening, and the Moors, from the taste and skill displayed in the garden under his superintendence, have been a source of attraction, not only to residents, but to visitors as well. The rhododendrons and azaleas grown in this garden have obtained for Mr. [John] Casson a celebrity not confined to this country, large consignments have been sent to America, where they have been considered very notable specimens of their class.

Information from beyond the 1870s is regrettable sparse, but John’s death probably

William Casson of Thorne

genuinely marked the beginning of the end. When William died, in 1886, John's son Francis succeeded to the family's interests and responsibilities in the Thorne area.⁶⁴ He was a grocer and seed dealer,⁶⁵ but had wider concerns, including a knowledge of Thorne Moors. Here, he acted as guide for the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union in 1881 and Ackworth School Natural History Society in 1888.⁶⁷ His unexpected death on the last day of 1888 ended the family name in Thorne: he was 37 and unmarried. The grocery and seed business was acquired by A.T. Baker, who was issuing price-lists in his own name by 1891.⁶⁸

It is known that Francis had entertained the local workhouse children 'at picnics at his gardens on the Moors'.⁶⁹ This included 1885, when after 'a ramble on the moors, the children and a few friends were entertained by Mr. F. Casson to a substantial tea, spread in pic nic fashion on the grass near the rhododendron plantation'.⁷⁰ It is, however, likely that Francis eventually gave up horticulture, and disposed of the saleable stock; shortly before he died he attended a 'sale of rhododendrons on the Moors'. In August 1890, the 'plantations, gardens, shrubberies, peat waste

William Casson of Thorne

land, etc.’ were sold.⁷² For six years, nothing further has been detected, but in 1896 a fire swept through the area; its effects were described in the *Doncaster Gazette*:⁷³

‘The old rhododendron garden, known and visited throughout a long period when owned by the Casson family, was practically destroyed, and the trees and shrubs in the plantations near at hand were in many cases reduced to blackened and charred stumps.’

The surviving plants gradually became generally forgotten, remaining known only to those who cut peat in the vicinity, or otherwise knew the moor. A.A. Dallman’s published note on Labrador-tea *Ledum palustre* on Thorne Moors⁷⁴ presumably indicates the continuance of a species into the 1930s which was first known from the 1872 stock list.

In the mid 1940s, J.F. Verhees, a local naturalist then living in a cottage on the edge of Thorne Moors, first came to know the four reclaimed cable heads. They were not cultivated, and were largely dominated by rough herbage, although there were still signs of former glory. Three

William Casson of Thorne

white flowered rhododendrons, three or more with red flowers, and a mass with purple, pink and even occasionally mauve-lilac blooms, were still all present. These latter particularly dominated the northern cable head – the original garden site – but also extended a little way southwards at the eastern end of the adjoining cable. Other plants were found which were similarly out of place: a specimen of Chile-pine *Araucaria araucana*, a ‘flowering cherry’ *Prunus* and ‘double flowered’ snowdrops *Galanthus*. On the moor beyond the rhododendrons, a patch of Sheep-laurel thrived. These remained until the early 1960s, when all the abandoned area of reclaimed land was turned over to potato growing. Only those species which had spread on to the adjacent peat, or perhaps had been introduced there, managed to persist, to be rediscovered and documented by naturalists in the post-war years and beyond.⁷⁵

Today, rhododendrons still overshadow this peripheral area of the moorland.⁷⁶ In one spot, the Sheep-laurel is very locally co-dominant with rhododendrons and Heather, but is threatened by peat winning. A single specimen

William Casson of Thorne

growing elsewhere on the moors has now been destroyed. Along the drain demarcating the edge of the peat from the adjoining fields, a rediscovery of the 1980s – Springbeauty – still endures. It was not, however, planted deliberately, having originally been accidentally introduced with rhododendrons.⁷⁷ These latter are always superficially characterised as being *R. ponticum*, which many of them either are or resemble. However, in the nineteenth century, hybrid scions were often grafted on to stock of the species, which then gradually took over, so that many existing thickets of *R. ponticum* actually originated as hybrid plantings. This was at least partially true at Thorne, though an examination of the flowering rhododendron plants in 1989/90 demonstrated obvious diversity. Although the distinctly red and white bushes were cleared in preparation for potatoes many years ago, the peatland survivors still collectively exhibit a relatively long flowering season, and include specimens whose racemes are as variant as pale pink and deep purple. They display a similar medley of more general morphological characters, a number of the plants having particularly deeply and narrowly lobed

William Casson of Thorne

corollas. Self-sowing will have widened the range of variation, and it may no longer be possible to match the Thorne examples with any extant hardy hybrids originating from the last century.

William Casson of Thorne

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William Casson of Thorne

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- 4 *Doncaster, Nottingham & Lincoln Gazette, Doncaster Chronicle, Goole & Marshland Weekly Times*, 18 January 1878.
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William Casson of Thorne

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- 9 *Doncaster Chronicle*, 18 January 1878.
- 10 *The Annual monitor for 1887, or obituary of the members of the Society of Friends in Great Britain and Ireland, for the year 1886*, 45 (new ser.): 47-56.
- 11 Friends' House Library *List of Recorded Ministers 1861-1924*. Unpubl.
- 12 *Extracts from the minutes and proceedings of the yearly meeting of Friends ... 1886*: vii-ix.
- 13 *Doncaster Gazette, Doncaster Chronicle, Goole Weekly Times*, 29 January 1886; *Annual monitor for 1887 ...*, 45 (new ser.): 47-56. *Extracts from the minutes and proceedings of the yearly meeting of Friends ... 1886*: vii-ix.
- 14 *Annual monitor for 1887 ...* 45 (new ser.): 47-56.
- 15 *Annual monitor for 1887 ...* 45 (new ser.): 47-56.
- 16 *Doncaster Chronicle*, 29 January 1886.
- 17 *Doncaster Gazette, Doncaster Chronicle, Goole Weekly Times*, 5 October 1883.
- 18 An act to make further Provision for the Draining, Warpings and Improvement of *Thorne*

William Casson of Thorne

- Moor in the West Riding of Yorkshire*. [24 + 25 Victoria. 1861].
- 19 *Doncaster Chronicle*, 29 January 1886.
- 20 Hatfield, C.W., *Historical Notices of Doncaster*. Vol. 1. Doncaster, 1866; *Doncaster Gazette*, 29 January 1886; Kirk, G.E., *Catalogue of the Printed Books and Pamphlets in the Library of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society*. Part 1, A-L. Wakefield, 1935.
- 21 *Naturalist* **112**: 117-124
- 22 Casson (1829).
- 23 Data on the Association have been gathered from local newspaper allusions, Casson (1842), and the organisation's printed annual report sheets. Odd copies of these latter are held by G.W. Thompson.
- 24 *Doncaster Chronicle & Farmers' Journal*, 28 January 1842, and Hatfield (1866), both erroneously give 22 January.
- 25 Casson (1842).
- 26 Hatfield (1866).
- 27 *Doncaster Gazette*, 29 January 1886.
- 28 Reports appeared in the *Doncaster, Nottingham & Lincoln Gazette*, 23 June 1865; *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 24 June 1865.
- 29 *Naturalist* **114**: 21-22.
- 30 *Naturalist* **112**: 117-124.
- 31 *Naturalist* **9**: 137.

William Casson of Thorne

- 32 Minute book of Thorne Preparative Meeting 1814-25, held by Sheffield Archives, Sheffield Libraries & Information Services, referenced QR23; Hatfield (1866); *Naturalist* **112**: 117-124.
- 33 The link is provided by an 1847 indenture, ref. QR 123, held by Sheffield Archives.
- 34 1847 indenture, ref. QR 123, held by Sheffield Archives; *Lapwing* **19**: 15-19.
- 35 Ordnance Survey 6" scale County Series Yorkshire sheet 266; surveyed 1849-52, published 1853.
- 36 Background data on the discovery of Rannoch-rush can be gained from: *Naturalist* **112**: 117-124; Limbert, M., (1990) The Drainage of Thorne Waste in the Nineteenth Century. *Thorne & District Local History Association Occ. Paper No. 5*.
- 37 Casson (1842).
- 38 Hatfield (1866).
- 39 Lees, F.A., (1888) The Flora of West Yorkshire. *Bot. Ser. Trans Y.N.U., Vol. 2*. The specimen still exists, in the Lees herbarium, Cartwright Memorial Hall Museum, Bradford.
- 40 Casson (1842).
- 41 Casson (1869).
- 42 *Naturalist* **9**: 164-166; *Bot. Ser. Trans Y.N.U., Vol. 2*.
- 43 *Bot. Ser. Trans Y.N.U., Vol. 2*.
- 44 *Naturalist* **45**: 301-304, 353-356, 381-384; **46**: 21-25.

William Casson of Thorne

- 45 Casson (1842); *Naturalist* **9**: 137.
- 46 Limbert, M., Some Notes on the Landscape History of Thorne Moors, in *Thorne Moors Papers* (ed. Limbert, M.); Doncaster, 1987.
- 47 Casson (1869).
- 48 The Archives Dept, Doncaster Library & Information Services, has a volume (referenced DY. WALL 3) entitled Apportionment of the Rent Charge in lieu of Tithes in the parish of Thorne in the West Riding of the County of York. It is a copy of an original dated August 1840. The accompanying map (DY. WALL 1), showing the numbered parcels of charged land in the parish, is also a copy. These documents note that the Clap Gate farm and cable comprised parcel numbers 1370 (the section east of Thorne Waste Drain) to 1380 (Clap Gate Farm itself). The Casson ownership of 50 acres of 'unproductive moor' presumably comprised the extrapolation of the cable width across the peat to the parish boundary. All 'cable' owners maintained the right to extend their strip holdings across the moorland to the edge of Thorne parish.
- 49 Casson (1842).
- 50 Tomlinson, J., *The Level of Hatfield Chace and Parts Adjacent*. Doncaster, 1882. Here it was observed: 'On Thorne Moors there was a garden belonging to a clever and genial Quaker. As a rule Quakers have not the character of being genial; but so William Casson was, in the best

William Casson of Thorne

sense of the term ... That Thorne people might delight themselves in beauty, he planted a garden on the edge of the moors’.

- 51 Archives Dept, Doncaster Library & Information Services; ref. PR. FISH 1/5/6.
- 52 *Naturalist* **20**: 159-171.
- 53 Any rustic furniture was probably crafted by William himself. His obituary in the *Annual monitor for 1887* ... 45 (new ser.): 47-56, noted that: ‘when tired of reading or of writing he would turn ‘for rest’, as he said, to his little workshop, where he made wonderful little brackets and frames, stools and tables, on which he painted leaves and flowers. He made stools and frames for the children in a neighbouring Orphan’s Home; and little mementoes of his skill are now treasured in many homes up and down the country’.
- 54 Ballinger, J., John Tomlinson, J.P., Antiquary, in *Old Yorkshire* (ed. Smith, W.). Vol. 3, new ser. London, 1891.
- 55 Tomlinson (1882).
- 56 *Doncaster, Nottingham & Lincoln Gazette, Doncaster Chronicle*, 18 January 1878.
- 57 *Doncaster, Nottingham & Lincoln Gazette*, 18 January 1878.
- 58 The term ‘American plants’ had a specific meaning. *The Garden* **10**: 27-29 explains: ‘In England, after 1809, R[hododendron] catawbiense which in flowers does not differ

William Casson of Thorne

materially from *R. ponticum*, soon became, like the latter, extremely common. Con-currently with the acquisition of the American Rhododendrons, there were discovered, chiefly in company with them, many species of the beautiful genera *Ledum*, *Andromeda*, *Kalmia*, and *Gaultheria*, and of the section of *Rhododendron*, which being originally distinguished as a genus under the name of *Azalea*, still possesses that name in everyday converse. All were conveyed to England, where they immediately became popular, and gave quite a new complexion to the flower garden. For a very long period it was customary to grow these various shrubs in borders by themselves; they demanded similar soil, and bloomed mostly at the same season of the year. Hence they acquired, very naturally, the collective name of American plants, a term still [1876] in use’.

- 59 *A List and Description of Rhododendrons etc., on sale by W. & J.C. Casson, Thorne.* Thorne 1872.
- 60 As checked against Salley, H.E. and Greer, H.E., *Rhododendron Hybrids. A Guide To Their Origins.* London, 1986.
- 61 Hogg (1874).
- 62 *Doncaster Chronicle*, 18 January 1878.
- 63 The presence of Mordecai Casson in Pennsylvania may have been helpful in organising exportation.

William Casson of Thorne

- 64 See William Casson's will (note 3).
- 65 At the 1871 population census, Francis was detailed as a member of William's household, being listed as a grocer's assistant and presumably then undertaking his apprenticeship. In William Casson's will, dated 1880, it was stated that Francis was then employed as a grocer and seedsman, having perhaps succeeded his uncle on the latter's retirement. Francis was included as a grocer in the 1881 population census, and was listed (1888 data) as a grocer and seed dealer in *Kelly's Directory of the West Riding of Yorkshire 1889*. London, 1888.
- 66 *Doncaster Gazette, Doncaster Chronicle, Goole Weekly Times*, 4 January 1889.
- 67 *Naturalist* **7**: 22-24; *Nat. Hist. J.* **12**: 157-158.
- 68 *1891 Select List of Vegetable & Flower Seeds Offered for Sale by A.T. Baker (late F. Casson), Seedsman, Thorne*. Thorne 1891.
- 69 *Doncaster Chronicle*, 4 January 1889.
- 70 *Doncaster Gazette*, 21 August 1885.
- 71 *Doncaster Chronicle*, 4 January 1889.
- 72 *Doncaster Gazette, Goole Weekly Times*, 15 August 1890.
- 73 *Doncaster Gazette*, 15 May 1896.
- 74 *NWNat.* **10**: 45-47.
- 75 The history of this rediscovery is outlined in Limbert (1987).
- 76 Although the Casson's Garden area remains the centre of rhododendron distribution on Thorne

William Casson of Thorne

Moors, stunted bushes may be found scattered over the rest of the surface, although mainly on the western half. The exception to this is the area of planted rhododendrons on the moor beyond Whaley Balk/Bell's Pond, close to what was formerly known as Durham's Gardens, with which they were once doubtless connected. This site belonged to Makin Durham of Thorne Hall, and is alleged to have been laid out by the gardener and architect Sir Joseph Paxton, who died in 1865 (Limbert 1987). These rhododendrons all appear to be *R. ponticum*, and have none of the morphological variety of those further south. It is not known whether they were supplied from Casson land, or had an entirely independent origin. Clearly, however, it cannot be assumed that all surviving rhododendrons on Thorne Moors have been derived from the Casson plantings.

- 77 *Nat. Hist. J.* **12**: 157-158; Goole Moor to Crowle, Saturday, in Y.N.U./L.N.U. *Excursion Circular: Goole Moor, Broughton Woods and Twigmoor Gullery. Trans Hull Sc.Fld Nat. Cl.* **1**: 1-9.

William Casson of Thorne

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