



# Natural History Pioneer

Pioneer:  
first to study a  
subject, one who  
opens up new areas  
of research,  
someone who explores  
new territory.

Ellen Hutchins was genuinely a pioneer in the collection and study of seaweeds, at the start of the exploration of 'this most difficult branch of botany'. Her botanising covered other non-flowering plants (cryptogams): lichens, mosses and liverworts. She made significant discoveries and had plants named after her in all of these 'tribes' as she called them.

She sent specimens and drawings of her plants to the leading cryptogamic botanists of the day. They published her finds and were highly appreciative of her work. There was a strong sense of collaboration, and a reliance by those who published on those who collected.

## Ellen was very much the right person, in the right place, at the right time

Ellen enjoyed botanising, and was highly motivated as she gained a sense of usefulness and purpose, as well as connection to others and companionship from it. She was determined and curious, and put in the hard work needed. She was highly skilled at identification. Her depictions are detailed and precise. Her specimens are painstakingly and carefully presented.

West Cork, including the Bantry Bay area, had previously been neglected by the botanical community. It was remote, unknown. Travel to it and around it was difficult. As so few botanists had visited Bantry Bay, and because of the rich array of plants growing there, it was relatively easy for Ellen, with her enthusiasm, determination, and increasingly specialist knowledge of the non-flowering plants to find new species.



*Enterographa hutchinsiae* in West Cork  
photo courtesy of Jenny Seawright [www.irishlichens.ie](http://www.irishlichens.ie)

*Hutchinsia*  
plant label

*Ulotia hutchinsiae* (Sm.) Hammar  
Specimens collected by Ellen Hutchins 1812  
Image courtesy of the Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London

## Shells

As was often the case in Natural History, individuals specialised in a number of different areas. Ellen, and many of her fellow botanists, were also shell collectors (conchologists). Ellen is known to have found at least two new species of shells.

*'Though our shores are all rocky and not as rich in shells as plants, we have many species taken up with the local coral sand in a very perfect state. Perhaps no one spot produces a better variety.'*

ELLEN HUTCHINS (EH) to DAWSON TURNER (DT) 2ND NOVEMBER 1809

Coral sand (maerl, a type of coralline algae) was dredged from Bantry Bay to use as a manure on the fields.



*Lyonsia norwegica*  
A new species found by Ellen  
Image courtesy of [www.photomarine.com](http://www.photomarine.com)

Illustrated Index of British Shells by G.B. Sowerby (1859)  
Plate 08, Number 15 *Pteria hirundo* (Wing Shell) found by Ellen  
Image from Google Books

## Discoveries and Type Specimens

Ellen discovered a considerable number of species new to science. The specimen used for the first published description of the new species is kept and called the Type Specimen or Type Material, and these are used for botanical research and identification purposes. A recent search by the Natural History Museum, London turned up at least seventeen Type Specimens of species found by Ellen Hutchins in Bantry Bay over two hundred years ago.

## Plants called Hutchinsiae

There is a significant list of plants named after Ellen Hutchins, with the dedications made by some of the biggest 'names' in botany.

Lewis Dillwyn (1778-1855) named *Cladophora hutchinsiae* after her. He wrote in his British Confervae that he knew 'few, if any botanists, whose zeal and success in the pursuit of natural history better deserve such a compliment'. Another seaweed, *Dasya hutchinsiae* was named after her by William Henry Harvey (1811-1866) who was curator of Trinity College, Dublin's herbarium. *To her the botany of Ireland is under many obligations . . . she was particularly fortunate in detecting new and beautiful objects, several of which remain the rarest species to the present day.'*

William Jackson Hooker dedicated the first plate (drawing) in his book *British Jungermanniae* (1812-1816) to a plant he named after her, *Jungermannia (jubula) hutchinsiae* – Hutchins Hollywort, and is happy 'in the opportunity it affords me of dedicating that species, one of the most beautiful with which I am acquainted, to its discoverer Miss Hutchins, of Ballylickey, near Bantry. To her, I am indebted for many of the the most rare and interesting species which will here be described.'

*Herberta hutchinsiae* was found by Ellen in 1810 but identified by Hooker as *Jungermannia juniperina*. It was not elevated to a separate species level and named for her, until 1917 by Prof A. W. Evans.

Sir James Edward Smith (1759-1828), founder of the Linnean Society, named the moss Hutchins' Pincushion (*Ulotia hutchinsiae*) after her, saying: 'a lady whose numerous discoveries in the more difficult departments of Botany justly entitle her to commemoration in the specific name'.

William Borrer (1781-1862), an English lichenologist, mostly handled her lichen finds. Three of the lichens she discovered are named after her: *Lecania hutchinsiae*, *Pertusaria hutchinsiae* and *Enterographa hutchinsiae*.

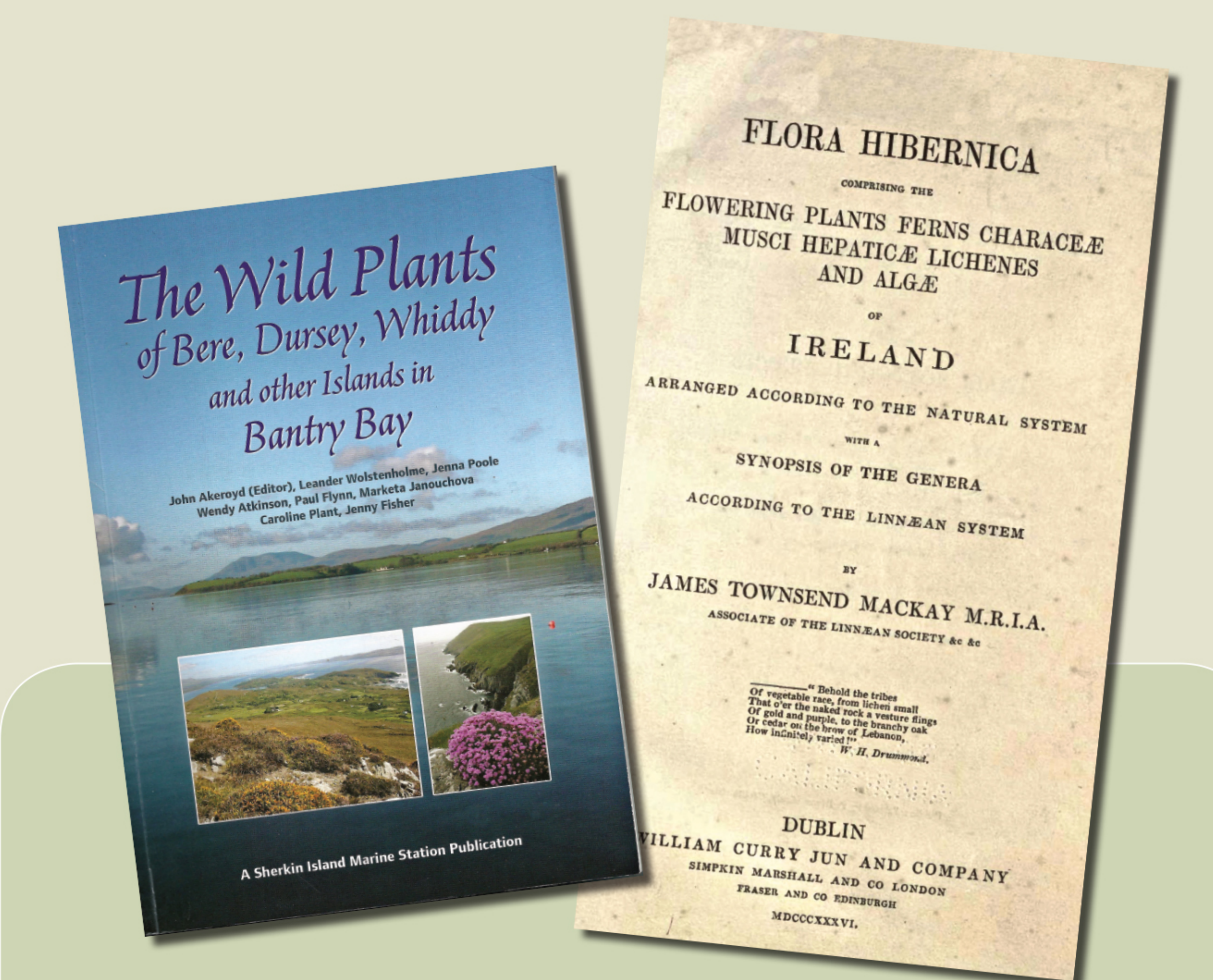
*Hutchinsiae (Hornungia) petraea* was named by the eminent botanist and microscopist Robert Brown (1773-1858) and Ellen thanked Turner 'for the specimen of the new genus Mr Brown has done me the honour to name after me.' EH to DT 15th September 1812. Although technically renamed, this plant is known as Hutchinsia on garden centre labels in the UK.

Ellen discovered Bantry Notchwort (*Leiocolea bantriensis*): having not been seen for more than 100 years in Co. Cork, this species was recently rediscovered by Irish bryologist Dr Rory Hodd in a remote gully in the Cahu Mountains.



*Pinguicula grandiflora*  
(a Lusitanian plant) – plate from *English Botany* by J.E. Smith and J. Sowerby. Drawing by Sowerby. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Trustees of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

*Jungermannia hutchinsiae*  
Plate 1 from W.J. Hooker's *British Jungermanniae*, from a drawing by W.J. Hooker.  
Reproduced with the kind permission of the Trustees of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew



## The flora of Bantry Bay

Ellen was asked by Turner in 1809 if she would prepare 'a complete catalogue of the plants of all kinds that you have found in your neighbourhood' for the Linnean Society of London. Her total list – not completed until 1812 - ran to over 1100 species.

James Mackay (1775-1862) drew on her list for his *Flora Hibernica* (1836), the first complete flora of Ireland. The Sherkin Island Marine Station publication, *The Wild Plants of Bere, Dursey, Whiddy and other Islands in Bantry Bay* (2013), includes Ellen's story, and is the first comprehensive list of plants on Whiddy Island since hers.

Ellen was a significant member of the community of cryptogamic botanists of her day.

For further information and resources see [www.ellenhutchins.com](http://www.ellenhutchins.com)

Letter credits  
Turner to Ellen : Archives, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, London  
Ellen to Turner : Wren Library, Trinity College Cambridge  
Dillwyn to Turner : Wren Library, Trinity College Cambridge