



**Figure 1: Self portrait of Ramsey Traquair, around 1860, from Miss Roberta MacIntosh's commonplace book**

**RAMSAY HEATLEY TRAQUAIR**  
**(30<sup>TH</sup> JULY 1840 – 22<sup>ND</sup> NOVEMBER 1912)**

Ramsay Heatley Traquair was born in Rhynd, just outside Perth, but was brought up in Edinburgh when his clergyman father retired there. Traquair studied medicine at Edinburgh University - a common route into the natural sciences in the 19<sup>th</sup> century - specialising in fish anatomy. He was a friend of W. C. McIntosh, later Professor of Natural History at St. Andrews.

Traquair was well liked by all who knew him. His sense of humour is seen in the self-portrait sketch he made in Miss Roberta McIntosh's commonplace book. The portrait could have been drawn during the 1861 British Association's expedition to Dura Den in Fife when a specimen of *Holoptychius*, 32 inches long, was discovered.

Traquair held posts as Professor of Natural History and Professor of Zoology in England and Ireland. As Professor Zoology at the Royal College of Science in Dublin he began research on fossil fish. Whilst in Ireland he met and married talented artist Phoebe Anna Moss who illustrated his work.

In 1873 Traquair returned to Scotland to take up the post of Keeper of Natural History at the Royal Scottish Museum. He spent the rest of his career there, building up a renowned collection of fossil fish over a period of more than three decades.

Traquair carried out pioneering research on the distribution and classification of the Scottish Old Red Sandstone fish, including those from Dura Den. This work is included in Sir Archibald Geikie's *Geology of Eastern Fife*. Consequently Traquair was recognised as Britain's leading fossil fish expert, receiving the Royal Medal of London's Royal Society in 1907. He also was awarded the Lyell Medal.

He published extensively on palaeoichthyology, authoring many papers and a series of monographs. His studies of rocks and fossils in Scotland overturned earlier work on fossil fish, establishing new taxonomic classifications.

In 1881, Traquair was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of London and became a visiting lecturer at the Natural History Museum. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, acting as Vice-President between 1904 and 1920. He was also a Fellow of the Geological Society of London.

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*Figure 2: Fossils of **Holoptychius** found in Dura Den, Fife © Photo Library – Glasgow Life, Glasgow Museums*

Several examples of the fossil fish, *Holoptychius*, are preserved on large slabs of yellowish sandstone, such as the one shown above in figure 2. This example is from Dura Den, near Cupar, Fife. The fossils date from the Devonian Period and are around 360 million years old. *Holoptychius* was a predator that grew to one metre long and was covered in large, ridged scales. It was a lobe-finned fish like the living coelacanth that lived in fresh water lochs situated in an arid and desert environment.

References:

<http://website.lineone.net/~erikato/traquair.jpg>

<http://website.lineone.net/~erikato/fish10.htm>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramsay\\_Traquair](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramsay_Traquair)

<http://collections.glasgowmuseums.com/starobject.html?oid=385689>



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