

# James Adams (1839 – 1906)

James Adams, the eldest son of Alexander and Edith Adams, was born near Killarney, in County Kerry, Ireland, on 12 May 1839. Like all others in the Irish countryside, the family suffered the hardships of the potato famine. However, James received a good education and as a young man went to London where he took a BA degree at London University. In 1865 he was appointed headmaster of a private grammar school at Douglas on the Isle of Man. His forward-thinking ideas on education – the importance of the sciences (including natural history) and that learning should be free, secular and for girls as well as boys – led him to leave his comfortable life and emigrate to New Zealand.

With his wife Ann and four small children, he left Liverpool in 1870, hoping to settle in Dunedin where the education system of the Scottish settlement seemed close to his ideals. Unable to get a teaching post there, he used his letters of introduction to the Bishop of Auckland, and was appointed assistant master at the Church of England Grammar School at St Mary's Cathedral in Parnell. He became headmaster in 1872, a position he held for the next eight years, during which a long friendship with Thomas Frederick Cheeseman was established. In 1879 Cheeseman was the school's visiting teacher of botany and zoology, and over the next thirty years the two men made many botanical excursions together.

In 1880 Adams moved to the Thames goldfields and established the Thames High School, which, with the enrolment of his daughters in the sixth form, was at once co-educational. The bush-clad hills of

the Coromandel attracted his interest, and following Thomas Kirk's account of the botany of the area, he published his own observations in the *Transactions of the New Zealand Institute* in 1883. Over the next few years, often with his eldest son Ernest, then a surveying cadet under Stephenson Percy Smith in Auckland, he climbed many of the high peaks. Two notable plants found were *Celmisia adamsii* from Table Mountain and Castle Rock, and *Eletranthe adamsii* (now *Trilepidea adamsii*, a mistletoe now believed extinct) from near Thames. Further botanical trips were made with Cheeseman, and sometimes Petrie, to other parts of the North and South Islands, and eight more papers on a range of subjects were subsequently published.

James Adams remained in the Thames, where his nine children enjoyed the freedom of the small mining town and the pleasures of coast and bush. His eldest son Ernest married the daughter of his friend John Hall, an early resident of Thames, after whom *Podocarpus hallii* was named (now *Podocarpus cunninghamii*). In 1906 James Adams died suddenly whilst still the headmaster of the high school. Nancy Mary Adams (1926–2007), botanical artist and author of a book on the seaweeds of New Zealand, was his great-granddaughter.

From a few flowering twigs collected in the Far North between Spirits Bay and Tom Bowling Bay in January 1896, T F Cheeseman described and named *Hebe adamsii* in 1925, in honour of his companion on the North Cape expedition. It was not collected in the wild again until 1985.



## ***Hebe adamsii***

The shrub and tree species of New Zealand *Veronica* were classified in the genus *Hebe* from the 1920s until 2007, and are still known commonly as hebes. It is our largest and most widespread genus of vascular plants. *Hebe adamsii* is a shrub up to 1 metre tall and wide. Branchlets are golden-brown with an encircling red band at the leaf nodes. Leaf buds are usually with a sinus. Leaves are lanceolate, light green with an orange-yellow midrib obvious on both surfaces. Racemes of flowers, pinkish-mauve fading to white, are borne in late spring. *Hebe adamsii* occurs on only a few sites in the far north of the North Island, on east-facing, conglomerate cliffs, usually among *Astelia banksii*, or in vertical joints, sometimes in scrub.