

## William Archer (1820 – 1874)

William Archer was born at Launceston, Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) on 16 May 1820, the second surviving son of Thomas Archer from Hertfordshire, England, and his wife Susannah, née Hortle. He was educated locally at the Reverend John Mackersey's school at Campbell Town and probably at Longford Hall Academy, and from 1836 to 1840 studied architecture and surveying under William Rogers in London. He then worked for two years with renowned railway engineer Robert Stephenson at Newcastle upon Tyne and while still in England designed a large stained glass window for the family church at Longford. The five panels were made in Newcastle upon Tyne, and when he returned to Tasmania in October 1842 Archer supervised their installation.

After his elder brother Thomas contracted scarlet fever and died in 1844, William helped his ailing father manage the family's extensive properties, and for the next few years lived at Woolmers, near Longford. On 7 April 1846 he married his cousin Ann, the only daughter of James Hortle, chief district constable at Longford. Two years later they moved to Cheshunt, near Deloraine, and in 1852 William built a new house there for his growing family. His expertise in church design became known, and he was appointed architect to the diocese of Tasmania. His domestic work included his own home and minor commissions for family members, but he was seldom paid for his services.

When his father died in 1850 the Woolmers land was leased and William was able to devote more time to his botanical interests. From 1856 to 1858 he and his family lived in England; he took his many native plant specimens to Kew Gardens, and worked in the herbarium there for two years, assisting Joseph Hooker with his *Flora Tasmaniae* (London, 1859). The book was dedicated to William Archer and his fellow Tasmanian, Ronald Gunn, and noted Archer's contribution of "a beautiful series of drawings of Tasmanian orchids, together with 100 pounds." Whilst in England Archer was elected a member of the Linnean Society.

After visiting England again in 1859, the Archers lived in Hobart. William became secretary of the Royal Society of Tasmania and contributed articles, mainly on botany, to its *Papers and Proceedings*. Although the family estates, like most in Australia, had been developed with convict labour, he supported the abolition of transportation and at various times between 1851 and 1866 was a member of parliament. Increasing financial problems led to a move to Melbourne in 1871, in the vain hope that he could practise architecture and

better provide for his twelve surviving children. They returned to Tasmania at the beginning of 1874, and moved back to Fairfield, near Longford, where William Archer, a pious man bound by convention and family obligation, died of tuberculosis on 15 October 1874.

Hooker, in 1857, honoured him with *Archeria*, a small genus of Tasmanian and New Zealand shrubs; he is also commemorated in the Australian orchid *Prasophyllum archeri* and several other Australian plant species.



### ***Archeria traversii***

*Archeria* is a genus of shrubs in the heath family, with five species in Tasmania and two endemic to New Zealand. *Archeria traversii* is a montane shrub of South and Stewart islands, resembling mānuka, but with larger, dark green glossy leaves. The slender, erect or spreading branches have smooth, dark orange-brown bark. Bell-shaped flowers in terminal clusters are red, pink or yellow-green. The other New Zealand species, *Archeria racemosa*, has larger, relatively broad leaves, and occurs from Great and Little Barrier islands to near East Cape.