

# Joseph Beattie Armstrong (1850 – 1926)

Joseph Beattie Armstrong, the son of John Francis Armstrong and his wife Ann Bowman, was born in 1850 at Whitehaven on the west coast of Cumberland, England. His father, a foreman gardener, served his apprenticeship near Gretna Green on the Scottish border before entering the service of Thomas Hartley at Gillfoot, near Whitehaven. When Joseph was about four years old, his father left for the goldfields of Victoria, Australia, and on his return three years later, he tended gardens and plantations at Washdale Hall in the Cumberland Lake District. He later emigrated, and on 26 December 1862 arrived in Canterbury, New Zealand, with his wife and two children. Joseph was then twelve years old.

It is not known what formal education, if any, Joseph had, but during the four years his father was gardener at Hambleton, the central Christchurch property of entrepreneur George Gould, Joseph helped him with his spare-time study of native plants and the collection of specimens for the museum herbarium. Devoting his time almost exclusively to botany, encouraged by Gould and provincial geologist Julius Haast, Joseph's talents were obvious by the time he was 18. He had been collecting for his own herbarium since the age of thirteen or fourteen, was able to name mosses, ferns and fungi, and in 1867 had discovered a new filmy fern, *Trichomanes armstrongii*, when accompanying Haast to the headwaters of the Waimakiriri.

In 1867, soon after the establishment of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens, John Armstrong was appointed curator, and Joseph, in charge of the nursery work, assisted him. Recognising the value of native plants for horticultural purposes, they established a native section, using their collections as a living museum that students could consult. They continued to live at Hambleton Cottage, a 25-minute walk away, until Joseph's marriage to Annie Elizabeth Abbot in 1871. The couple then moved to the half-acre section and house on Springfield Road, which John now owned. Probably the most significant of Joseph's fourteen papers published from 1879 to 1884 was his 1881 *Veronica (Hebe)* synopsis.

In 1889, after 22 years of service, the Armstrongs resigned in protest at new regulations that required all work to be approved and recorded, the propagation house abandoned, the cultivation of hardy plants discontinued and bedding plants substituted. John Armstrong was to be pensioned, and the position of head gardener offered to Joseph. He declined. He was still only 39, and although he continued to appear on electoral rolls as a gardener

it is not known what future work he undertook. He died in the Christchurch Hospital on 26 January 1926, aged 63 years, predeceased by his wife. He bequeathed three items to the Christchurch Domains Board: a portrait of his father, his library of around 100 volumes and his herbarium. Three plants: a filmy fern, *Hymenophyllum armstrongii*, the rare high alpine *Pygmea armstrongii* and a distinctive subalpine daisy, *Celmisia armstrongii* (described by Donald Petrie in 1894), honour Joseph Beattie Armstrong. *Hebe armstrongii* is named after his father.



## *Celmisia armstrongii*

Mountain daisies of the genus *Celmisia* are among the most common plants in the New Zealand mountains. *Celmisia armstrongii* is named after J B Armstrong, who first collected it. It is a large tufted herb, either single or in clumps. Rigid, leathery, longitudinally ridged leaves have a characteristic yellow or orange band running down each side of the midrib, while thick white tomentum covers the lower surface, except for the midrib. Flowers 4–5 cm across on stems up to 25 cm long occur during January and February, the stems and many narrow bracts covered in soft white tomentum. Subalpine to low alpine in high rainfall regions along and west of the Main Divide in the South Island, it is prominent in snow-tussock herbfield in most of Westland, and extends down into subalpine scrub.