

# Esmond Hurworth Atkinson (1888 – 1941)

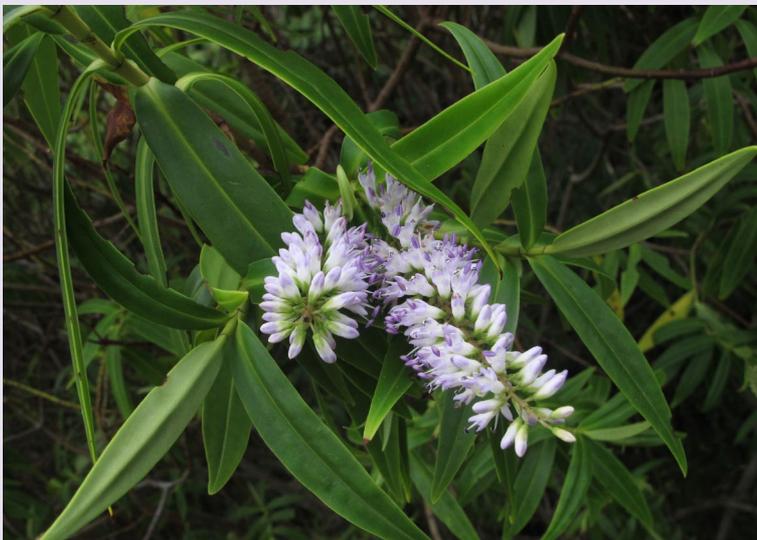
**E**smond Hurworth Atkinson was born at Wellington in 1888, the eldest in a family of four. His father Tudor Atkinson was a grandson of Sir Harry Atkinson, an early premier of New Zealand, and on his mother Anne's side, James Crowe Richmond was an engineer, artist and politician. Both are remembered for their public service and links with Taranaki. Esmond had an unpressured childhood in the ambience of his parents' love of music, literature, art and science, living until the age of seven in the Wadestown hills overlooking the town and harbour. The family then changed to an alternative lifestyle near the Otaki river mouth, his father continuing to practise law in the nearby township, while trying to make Rangiorua viable by farming and other ventures. Esmond and his sister went to Miss Swainson's school, and an old notebook of the period shows his early artistic and botanical interest in the environment.

After five years at Otaki the family returned to Wellington, and Esmond's education continued at the Terrace School, Wanganui College and Wellington College. When his father's business failed, he left school and took a position with the Department of Agriculture, and at the same time studied for a BSc degree at Victoria University College. His botany at Victoria was reputed to be almost perfect, and he was nominated to participate in the 1907 expedition to the Auckland Islands, but turned it down because of forthcoming exams. He failed mathematics and did not complete the course! In 1913 he became engaged to Dorothy Alison Burnett, the granddaughter of early settlers and friends of the Atkinsons and Richmonds.

Family responsibilities prevented him serving in the First World War until 1916, when he worked his passage to England and served as a decoder in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve. He married in London soon after his arrival, the Burnett family having gone to England earlier to do war work.

In 1919 he rejoined the Department of Agriculture where his work included pen and ink illustrations of both New Zealand flora and exotic weeds, and in 1928 transferred to the Dominion Museum as official artist. Mainly self-taught, he took every opportunity to tramp and camp, botanise and paint (watercolours), but most often worked near Wellington and in his 60 acres of bush above York Bay. In 1915 Leonard Cockayne described a new hebe, naming it "after my friend Mr Esmond Atkinson", and in 1926 they co-authored a paper on the wild hybrids of New Zealand beeches. Several of Atkinson's flower paintings, which were to be part of a book, were later printed and mounted for use as gifts; he exhibited with the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts and his work is represented in the National Art Gallery.

An unusual type of epilepsy that developed after the war led to his retirement in 1932, although he was often well enough for tramping and painting expeditions with his wife and two sons. In 1935 he and his wife spent a year in England as guests of Mrs Wilson (widow of Antarctic explorer Dr Edward Wilson) who hoped to find medical help for him. They returned to live at York Bay until Esmond Atkinson's accidental death as a result of his illness in 1941.



## ***Hebe stricta* var. *atkinsonii***

*Hebe stricta* var. *stricta*, koromiko, is a shrub to small tree, up to 4 metres tall, occurring from the Far North to the Manawatu, in lowland to mid-montane areas, often on the banks of streams. The leaves are fairly thin, and the leaf buds lack a sinus. *Hebe stricta* var. *atkinsonii*, a bushy shrub bearing pairs of variable narrow pointed thin leaves and white or pinkish flowers in a spike to 19 cm long, is widespread in the lower North Island and the coasts of Nelson, Marlborough and North Canterbury. On Taranaki/Mt Egmont and the Pouakai Range, *Hebe stricta* var. *egmontiana* has narrower leaves, inflorescences as long as the leaves, with scented mauve or white flowers, and a higher chromosome number.