

John Peter Bollons (1862 – 1929)

John Peter Bollons was born on 10 November 1862 at Bethnal Green, London, the son of cab-master Thomas Bollons and his wife Helen Elisha. His long career at sea began in 1877 at the age of 14 when he joined a barquentine bound for the West Indies to load bulk corn. In November 1881, just before his 19th birthday, he arrived in New Zealand on the full-rigged barque *England's Glory*, which ran ashore at Bluff while altering course to pick up the pilot. Local sealers and whalers cared for the crew of the totally wrecked ship; John decided to stay, and for the next five years lived with the family of a Pākehā whaler and his Māori wife, growing to love the Māori people, their language and the town.



Hebe bollonsii

The first formal descriptions of hebes from New Zealand were published (as *Veronica*) in 1786 by George Forster. The genus *Hebe* was first proposed by Jussieu (1789) for South American material of *Hebe elliptica* collected by Commerson on Bougainville's 1766–68 expedition, but the genus name was not used generally until reinstated in 1921. *Hebe bollonsii* is a highly branched, rather bushy shrub to about a metre tall. The broad elliptic leaves have a pointed apex, the upper surface dark green, usually glossy, and the underside light green. Racemes 10 cm long, of pale mauve or white flowers, appear February to March. It occurs in petrel scrub, low wind-shorn shrubland and open forest, or on rock stacks, mainly on the Poor Knights and Hen and Chickens island groups, and eastern Northland.

He worked for a few months on the Bluff pilot cutter, and then as second mate on the government ketch *Kokeno*, at the time engaged in the clamp-down on seal poaching. He was second officer under Captain Fairchild on the government steamer *Stella* in 1887 when the Kermadec Islands were annexed for New Zealand, and after gaining overseas experience with the Union Steamship Company, received his master's certificate in 1892. In 1893 he rejoined the Marine Department as second officer of the *Hinemoa*, again under Captain Fairchild, and was promoted to master following the latter's accidental death in 1898.

During the twenty-four years of Bollons' command, lighthouses and castaway depots were serviced, search and rescue missions undertaken, coastlines charted, and dignitaries and scientific expeditions transported and supported. His knowledge of the coast, islands, ocean and people was unsurpassed, and his work enabled him to pursue his interests in natural history and Māori culture. His collection of artefacts at Te Papa remains a significant one.

In 1896 he married Lilian Rose Hunter, daughter of retired master mariner John Hunter of Bluff, and around 1911 the Bollons family moved from Bluff to Kilbirnie, Wellington. When the *Hinemoa* was laid up in 1922, Captain Bollons became master of the *Tutanekai*. He was awarded the Imperial Service Order in 1928. A fluent speaker of Māori, a resourceful master seaman, firm disciplinarian and a kind-hearted gentleman, he died unexpectedly the following year, after a hernia operation. He was survived by his wife, four daughters and three sons, and was buried in the Bluff cemetery, overlooking the harbour.

His *Tutanekai* officers and crew erected a plaque in his memory at All Saints Church, Kilbirnie, where he had attended services regularly. Bollons Island, the second largest island in the Antipodes group, was named after him by the officers of the *Hinemoa*, and a shrub from Poor Knights Island, *Veronica bollonsii* (later *Hebe bollonsii*), described in 1912 by Cockayne, was "dedicated to Captain Bollons, to whom not only New Zealand botany, but zoology also, owes much".