

Harry Carse (1857 – 1930)

William and Rebecca Carse, née McIntosh, were of Scottish descent, and their son Harry was born in the small town of Leek, in Staffordshire, England. After receiving most of his education at Musselburgh near Edinburgh, Harry worked in the Macclesfield bank, where his father was manager. He came to New Zealand on the steamship *Kaikoura* in 1885, and in Auckland, at the age of 28, married Margaret Philip with whom he had a family of five – three daughters and two sons.

During his first years in New Zealand Carse took whatever work was available. However, when he became better known he was offered teaching positions in the Auckland area, and in 1893 was appointed to the Kaitaia School where he met Richard Henry Matthews, a foundation member of the school committee. They had a mutual interest in native plants, became friends – and pursued their botanical interests in earnest! In 1896 Matthews wrote the first of many letters to Thomas Frederick Cheeseman with reports of their finds, observations and specimens for identification. Carse, from his next teaching posts at Maungatapere, west of Whangarei, and Mauku in South Auckland, corresponded with Cheeseman, and also Donald Petrie, while keeping in contact with Matthews and spending summer holidays collecting with him. Then, in 1902, he gave up teaching to go dairy farming.

He bought land at Kaiaka near Kaitaia and continued his botanical projects, working closely with Matthews. Four years later he was appointed teacher at the nearby Fairburn School – close enough not to interfere with milking! After Richard Henry Mathews died in 1912, his son Blen became Carse's closest friend and botanical companion. Carse wrote the last of over a hundred letters to Cheeseman from Kaiaka. In 1921 he and his wife retired to Auckland, first at New Lyn and then at Onehunga, where the young botanists Lucy Moore and Lucy Cranwell, who often visited, noted that his herbarium seemed to occupy half of his small home. He kept collecting as long as he could, and died on 25 November 1930.

Harry Carse was described as a gentleman with a kindly and genial nature and a readiness to help others. Largely self-taught, his main work was with ferns and sedges, his most important publication, *On the Flora of the Mangonui County* (1911). Another major contribution to New Zealand botany was his encouragement to Amy Hodgson to pursue the study of liverworts, in which she became the New Zealand authority. Among the seven or so plants named in his honour, was the orchid *Corysanthes carsei* (now *Corybas carsei*) that he and Harry Blencowe Matthews relocated in 1912, two years after Blen's original discovery.



Corybas carsei

Corybas carsei (known recently as *Anzybas carsei*), with others in its group, has been returned to the *Corybas* genus from which it was split. The swamp helmet orchid *Corybas carsei*, New Zealand's rarest endemic orchid, is currently known only from one spot in an *Empodisma* bog in the lower Waikato, where it flowers in September. It has a single small green heart-shaped leaf, and a comparatively large reddish-purple flower; the lateral sepals and petals are shorter than the labellum, and the tip of the dorsal sepal is deeply cleft. The species has long gone from where it was first found – draining of Lake Tangonge and subsequent drying out of the bog, plus over-zealous collecting, gave it little chance of survival. The very similar Australian *Corybas fordhamii* is also very uncommon.

PHOTO: Eric Scanlen