

Thomas Frederick Cheeseman (1845 – 1923)

Born in Hull, Yorkshire, Thomas Frederick Cheeseman was the oldest of five children of Thomas Cheeseman, a Methodist minister, and his wife Eliza Cawkell. In 1854 the family immigrated to Auckland, New Zealand, where Thomas senior soon took an active part in local affairs. Thomas junior was educated at the grammar school in Parnell and St John's College, Tamaki, and at the age of 19 was helping at his father's farm at Meadowbank. His early interest in natural history was stimulated by his bush surroundings and J D Hooker's newly published *Handbook of the New Zealand Flora* (1864), and as well as book learning, he made many botanical excursions in the Auckland area.

In 1867 Cheeseman sent a native orchid specimen to Sir Joseph Hooker at Kew, for identification. Hooker named it *Corysanthes cheesemanii* (now *Corybas cheesemanii*); it was the first of numerous plant species from New Zealand and Rarotonga to be named after him. Cheeseman continued to correspond with Hooker, who passed on his orchid observations, including that of the unique pollination system of *Pterostylis*, to Charles Darwin.

Cheeseman's botanical work was becoming well known – his first paper, *On the Botany of the Titirangi District of the Province of Auckland*, had already been published when he was 26 – and in 1874 he was appointed secretary of the Auckland Institute and curator of the museum, a position he held for fifty years. He botanised widely in the North and South Islands, often during his vacations, and also accompanied expeditions to Rarotonga, the Kermadec Islands and Three Kings, building up a large and comprehensive herbarium.

In 1889 Thomas Cheeseman married Rosetta (Rose) Keesing, the daughter of a prominent Auckland family. Photos of him show a fully bearded, balding man with a kindly face. He had a reputation for punctuality, and was said to be relaxed and patient with young people and those wanting to learn, at times revealing an innate sense of humour, but he could be remote – or even abrupt on occasions – if confronted by pomposity.

During his career Cheeseman published numerous scientific articles, mainly on botany, but also on zoology and ethnology. His *Manual of the New Zealand Flora*, commissioned by the government in 1900, was published in 1906. Following this major work, he edited the two-volume *Illustrations of the New Zealand Flora*, with drawings by Matilda Smith of the Kew herbarium, which appeared in 1914. When the *Manual* sold out in about 15 years Cheeseman began work on a new and enlarged edition; he completed the manuscript, but did not live to see its publication in 1925. Nor did he see the fulfilment of his plans for a new Auckland War Memorial Museum; it opened in 1929.

Thomas Cheeseman had a heart attack and died at his Remuera home on 15 October 1923, survived by his wife, a son and a daughter. His scientific achievements are recognised by numerous distinguished awards, including the Hector Memorial Medal and Prize in 1918, and in 1923 the prestigious gold medal of the Linnean Society of London. The genus *Cheesemannia* (now *Pachycladon*) in the cress family, and several New Zealand plants with the specific name *cheesemanii* also commemorate him.



Olearia cheesemanii

Olearia is a genus of free-flowering shrubs or trees, commonly known as bush daisies. *Olearia cheesemanii* is a much-branched shrub, seldom taller than 2 metres, with loose flaking bark. The branchlets are grooved and covered in buff-coloured hairs. The 5–8 cm long leaves are thickish, shiny above and clothed in silky buff-coloured hairs (tomentum) on the underside. Numerous large corymbs of flowers are borne in the spring, each flower roughly 12 mm in diameter, white with a yellow “eye”. It grows naturally from the Coromandel Range in the North Island to Buller River in the South Island, usually in gorges on rocky banks, and is a popular plant in cultivation.