

Edmund Davall (1763 – 1798)

Born in London in August 1763 into a family of minor nobility, Edmund Davall was the son of Edmund Davall, a British Admiralty provisions officer, and Swiss-born Charlotte Thomasset whose father J an Pierre Thomasset was the mayor of Agiez. After Thomasset's death in 1730 his widow Anne Thomasset-Quisard and their many children moved to her family home at Orbe. In 1749 she went with her daughters to London, where Charlotte and her sisters Louise, Nanette and Octavie managed a guesthouse.



Davallia tasmanii* subsp. *tasmanii

Davallia comprises perhaps 40–50 fern species found in East Asia, Polynesia, Madagascar, Natal, Chile and New Zealand. *Davallia tasmanii* subsp. *tasmanii* is common on the Three Kings in dry coastal scrub and forest, creeping along the ground or climbing rocks and trees. It has a thick creeping rhizome, 2–3 cm in diameter, clad in brown scales. The stiff, dark green leathery fronds are pinnate, 7–22 cm long, the lower pinnae much larger than the others, with the pouched indusia on the frond margins. Cheeseman, on his vegetation surveys of Three Kings in 1887 and 1889, recognised it as distinct. He wrote, "As the plant requires a name, I have given it that of Tasman, who was not only the first discoverer of this group, but also of New Zealand, and whose name has not yet been associated with any of its natural productions."

Young Edmund Davall had a passion for botany. By the time he was twenty he was well versed in the science and had gone to Orbe for further research, moving into the home of his Thomasset aunts. After his father died in London in 1784, following a leg amputation, his mother returned with him to Switzerland and lived with her sisters also, until her death four years later. Soon after arriving at Orbe Davall established a botanical garden, which he tended personally, and he became known to Swiss naturalists who joined him on botanical excursions, quoted him in their publications and encouraged him with useful contacts. On a trip to London in 1788, with letters of recommendation from Jakob Samuel Wittenbach, pastor and naturalist of Berne, and Jean Senebier, pastor, botanist and librarian of Geneva, he was welcomed warmly by Sir James Edward Smith, the first president of the Linnean Society of London, and invited to stay with him. A life-long friendship was forged, and during his time there Edmund Davall was elected a corresponding member of the Linnean Society. Their ensuing correspondence is in the archives of the Linnean Society.

In early 1789 Edmund Davall returned to Switzerland, and on 4 September 1789 he married Henriette Crinsoz de Cottens (1762-1839) of Orbe. His health, already poor during his stay in London, declined, and eye problems made letter writing difficult. He was urged to reduce his botanical work, but continued to send plants to Smith. His health deteriorated further, and he died on 26 September 1798, at the age of 35 years, his work on the Swiss flora unpublished. Edmund and Henriette had four children; the first two born in 1790 and 1792 did not live, Edmund, born in 1793, became a forester, and Charles Edward, born in 1795 and godson of Sir James Edward Smith, an officer. Davall's collections went back to England; they were incorporated in Smith's herbarium, deposited in the archives of the Linnean Society and dispersed in 1863 when its museum closed. His books were bought by Smith and are still in the society's library.

In 1793 Smith commemorated his friend in the genus *Davallia*, which includes the hare's-foot ferns, and is represented in New Zealand by two taxa. *Davallia tasmanii* subsp. *tasmanii*, is endemic to the Three Kings, northwest of Cape Reinga, and the second, *Davallia tasmanii* subsp. *cristata*, discovered in 1984, is known only from a single population in Puket  Forest, Northland. *Carex davalliana* (Davall's sedge), native to much of Europe, was also dedicated to Edmund Davall.