

Samuel Doody (1656 – 1706)

Samuel Doody was born at Stafford, England, on 28 May 1656, the eldest son of John Doody and his second wife Ann Nicklin of Eccleshall, Staffordshire. The surname Doody is believed to be of Irish heritage, a variant of O'Dowd (Ó Dubhda). John Doody, who was born in about 1621 at Hanchurch, Staffordshire, became an apothecary in Staffordshire and later moved to London where he had a shop in the Strand. Samuel followed his father into trade as an apothecary, and succeeded him in the business in about 1696. His brother Joseph, John and Ann's second son, became a maltster, preparing grain for brewing, in Stafford.

Samuel Doody's particular botanical interests were mosses, fungi and other non-flowering plants, which until the 17th century invention of compound microscopes, were little studied. He became an authority on these, and his assistance was acknowledged in the second volume of John Ray's *Historia Plantarum* (1686). The appendix to the second edition of Ray's *Synopsis Methodica Stirpium Britannicarum* (1696) also included a long list of plants that Doody had found. John Ray (1627–1705) was a minister, botanist and plant hunter; a pioneer in the scientific study of plants who established the modern concept of species.

Doody also associated with and assisted Adam Buddle, Leonard Plukenet, James Petiver and Hans Sloane. All were members of the Temple Coffee House Botany Club, which met once a week for social intercourse, botanical discussion, the exchange of botanical specimens and communication from correspondents. In the summer months, members sometimes went on botanical excursions in the vicinity. Formed in 1689

and active until about 1717, the club is believed to have had about forty members, and with the Royal Society, was a vital centre for the promotion of science.

Concurrently, in 1693, Samuel Doody undertook the care of the Apothecaries' (Physic) Garden at Chelsea, at a salary of 100 shillings. He seems to have continued this until his death. Founded in 1673 for the study of medicinal plants, and chosen for its proximity to the River Thames, it is the second oldest botanic garden in England. It was also established in conjunction with the first ceremonial barge. As a City Livery Company, the Society of Apothecaries used its barge for official processions and events on the river, for taking members to and from the garden, and for herborising expeditions (the society's term for educational, botanical field trips). An international seed exchange programme, still operating today, was initiated during Doody's tenure at Chelsea. In 1695 he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society.

He suffered from gout and was notorious for an unspecified failing, probably intemperance. He never married, and after several weeks' illness, he died in November 1706, at the age of 50 years. More than a century later his name was immortalised in the fern genus *Doodia*, described by Robert Brown in 1810. In 2014 researchers from Te Papa and the University of Melbourne published an investigation of the Blechnaceae ferns, strongly supporting the transfer of species in *Doodia* to *Blechnum*, and recommending adoption of the new name, *Blechnum parrisiae*, honouring New Zealand fern expert Barbara Parris, for the former *Doodia australis*.



Blechnum parrisiae

The genus *Doodia* contained 15–20 terrestrial colony-forming ferns, mostly in Australasia. They were distinguished by spore-bearing structures in short lines, rather than in continuous lines, each side of the mid-vein. The most common species in New Zealand, *Doodia australis* (now *Blechnum parrisiae*) is abundant in northern coastal pohutukawa forest, light scrub and grassy hillsides, and sporadic south to the northern South Island. It also occurs in Australia. The pink tissue of young fronds contains flavonoids, which protect new growth from ultraviolet damage. They become harsh with age, hence the common name, rasp fern. The Māori name pukupuku, which translates as 'gooseflesh', also refers to the texture of the fronds.