

Arthur Algernon Dorrien-Smith (1876 – 1955)

Arthur Algernon Dorrien-Smith was born in Oxfordshire on 28 January 1876, the elder son of Thomas Algernon Dorrien-Smith and Edith Anna Maria Tower of Tresco Abbey on the Isles of Scilly, and Ashlyns Hall, Hertfordshire. He was educated at Eton from 1889 until 1894 when, following family military tradition, he joined the Rifle Brigade. During the war in South Africa 1899–1902 he was mentioned in dispatches and awarded the DSO, and in January 1902 he was promoted to captain. After serving as an extra aide-de-camp to the third governor-general of Australia, Lord Northcote, in 1904–05, he retired and joined the Special Reserve.

He was one of a third generation of horticulturists at Tresco. In 1831, when the Crown lease of the Scillies was relinquished by the Godolphins, his great uncle Augustus Smith was granted a lease for 99 years; he pronounced himself Lord of the Isles of Scilly, built Tresco Abbey on a rocky outcrop above the ruins of St Nicholas priory, began experimental planting of shelter belts and was the first to grow subtropical plants on the windswept isles. Thomas Algernon Dorrien-Smith succeeded his uncle in 1872; he continued development of the gardens and introduced the growing of cut flowers, especially early daffodils, for market. Already a keen horticulturist, Arthur Algernon Dorrien-Smith made botanical collections in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand while on military service.

In November 1907 he was a member of the Sub-Antarctic Scientific Expedition organised by the Philosophical Institute of Canterbury. Transport was by the government steamer *Hinemoa*, captained by John Bollons. An unexpected discovery was a group of eight castaways who had survived the wreck of the *Dundonald* eight months earlier. The botanical group consisted of Leonard Cockayne (leader), Bernard Ashton, John Smaille Tennant,

Robert Laing, Joseph Crosby-Smith and Arthur Dorrien-Smith. Thomas Kirk had requested the inclusion of a "distinguished lady botanist" but the Council "could not see its way clear to take a lady". After returning from the Auckland Islands Dorrien-Smith stayed in Marlborough and in January 1908 collected in the Cobb Valley/Mt Arthur area with headmaster Frederick Giles Gibbs and others.

On 11 May 1909 at Holy Trinity Church, Sloane Street, London, he married Eleanor Salvin Bowlby of Westminster, London. In September that year they left on a world trip, which included plant collecting in Western Australia (October 1910) and the Chatham Islands (December 1910), and plants that survived the return voyage were divided between Tresco and the Edinburgh and Kew botanic gardens. In World War 1 he rose to the rank of major and was again mentioned in dispatches. After the death of his father on 6 August 1918 he continued development of Tresco Abbey Garden and its collection of plants, especially those from South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. He received the Victorian Medal of Horticulture in 1944, and was a fellow of the Linnean Society. He died at Tresco Abbey on 30 May 1955, at the age of 79, survived by his wife Eleanor (died 13 April 1978, aged 91), three daughters Anne Elizabeth (Phillimore), Innis Mary (Llewellyn) and Helen, and son Thomas Mervyn Dorrien-Smith. Three sons were killed during the Second World War.

In 1911 Cockayne described *Veronica Dorrien-Smithii* as a new species "after Captain A A Dorrien-Smith DSO who recently collected what I take to be a form in Chatham Island, and who likewise is paying great attention to the cultivation in England of New Zealand trees and shrubs." It is now treated as synonymous with *Hebe dieffenbachii*.



Hebe dieffenbachii

Honouring German explorer and naturalist Ernst Dieffenbach who collected the type specimen in 1840, *Hebe dieffenbachii* (synonym *Hebe dorrien-smithii*) is a bushy or spreading low shrub bearing pairs of variable dark green narrow leaves, paler underneath (no sinus). Spikes of white to purple flowers to 12 cm long appear from December to March, or later. It is endemic to the Chatham Islands, usually in coastal scrub and along forest margins, and also on limestone outcrops on the coast or inland. It is a feature of the limestone cliffs bordering Te Whanga lagoon.

PHOTO: John Sawyer, NZPCN