

William Turner Thiselton Dyer (1843 – 1928)

William Turner Thiselton-Dyer was born in Westminster, London, on 28 July 1843, a son of William George Thiselton-Dyer, a physician, and Catherine Jane, née Ferminger, botanist. A top mathematics scholar at King's College School, he went on to study medicine at King's College, London, but did not complete the course. Instead, in 1863, he went to Christ Church, Oxford, to extend his mathematics, turned to natural sciences in 1865 and graduated with first class honours two years later. He took up professorships in natural history at the Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester, Gloucestershire, and botany at Dublin's Royal College of Science, and in 1872, on the recommendation of Joseph Hooker, director of Kew Gardens, became professor of botany at the Royal Horticultural Society in London.

He had been working part-time as Hooker's secretary for about a year when he was officially appointed assistant director of Kew in 1875. Much of his early work dealt with the introduction of commercial plantation and crop plants – cacao, cinchona, tobacco, oil palm, coffee and rubber – to the colonies and overseas territories. Large quantities of seeds of trees and shrubs were also sent to New Zealand, Australia and South Africa. Later he was given charge of the privately funded Jodrell Laboratory, which became known as one of the best research laboratories in Europe. He was also entrusted with the design of a new rock garden for a large collection of alpine plants bequeathed to Kew. Thiselton-Dyer married Hooker's eldest daughter Harriet Ann in 1877, and when his father-in-law retired in 1885 to devote more time to taxonomic work, Thiselton-Dyer was appointed director of Kew.

An autocrat who demanded unquestioning loyalty and obedience from his staff, he continued the development of Kew, indulging in his penchant for landscaping and strengthening imperial links. He had a disdainful attitude towards women, and his rebuff of Beatrix Potter when she visited Kew with her botanical drawings in 1896 turned her away from her scientific interests. (In 1967, twenty-two years after her death, her watercolours were used to illustrate a field guide to the fungi and lichens of the British Isles.) He travelled little himself, but his few published works reflect his knowledge of plants and their economic potential in the colonies, and the species from South Africa, Southeast Asia, Western Australia and New Zealand that are named after him are an indication of the respect he engendered. He was elected a fellow of the Royal Society in 1880, awarded the Clarke Medal of the Royal Society of New South Wales in 1892, and knighted in 1899. Although Thiselton-Dyer always used the compound form of his name, it acquired the hyphen around 1890. However, his contemporaries often addressed him as Dyer, and that is the form used in two New Zealand plants named after him, the grass *Agrostis dyeri*, named by Petrie in 1889, and a small creeping eyebright, *Euphrasia dyeri*, separated from *Euphrasia repens* by Wettstein in 1896.

After his retirement in 1905 Thiselton-Dyer lived as a country gentleman in Gloucestershire. He died in Whitcombe, a village near Dorchester, Dorset, on 23 December 1928. His wife Harriet, who had spent most of her life at Kew, and as a young woman had received tuition in flower painting from Hooker's artist, Walter Hood Fitch, died in 1946 at her home near Bere Alston, Devon, aged 91. They had one son and one daughter.

Euphrasia dyeri

Euphrasia is a genus of about 200 species of semi-parasitic plants, commonly known as eyebrights, of temperate regions. Most of the 15 native species are alpine. *Euphrasia dyeri* is a soft succulent annual herb with many delicate ascending stems from a common base, the plants often massed together into loose mats. The leaves of 3–5 equal spreading segments are 4–8 mm long. The flowers, solitary or a few together, have a white corolla up to 8 mm in diameter, and a slender tube, which may be white or brightly coloured, up to 8 mm long. The anthers are yellow or brown. Easily overlooked unless in flower, it is rather local in Canterbury and more widespread in Otago and Southland, in montane to low alpine bogs and flushes.

