

Frederick Giles Gibbs (1866 – 1953)

Frederick Giles Gibbs was born at Notting Hill, London, the second son of James Gibbs, a registrar, and his wife Mary Elizabeth Waine. James died suddenly before the family's planned migration to Nelson, New Zealand, and Mary brought out their nine children on her own, arriving in 1877 on the *Queen Bee*. Frederick attended Bishop's School and then Nelson College, and a scholarship enabled him to complete a BA degree at Canterbury College in 1889. The following year he graduated MA with first-class honours in English and Latin. He returned to Nelson, spent three years as assistant master at Nelson College, and in 1894 was appointed head of the Boys' Central School, where he served with distinction until his retirement in 1923.

From his schooldays he had enjoyed outdoor activities, especially tramping, and he promoted a range of extra-curricular activities for his pupils. Wherever the boys went, Gibbs sent them to find botanical specimens to identify, and collect geological samples. During holidays he collected specimens for botanists Kirk and Cheeseman, and he collaborated with Cockayne in his work on the Nelson region. Due to his efforts the Matai Valley was made a city reserve and an area around Lake Rotoiti was secured for public use; huts were built and tracks signposted. In 1934 he became a patron of the newly formed Nelson Tramping Club.

Leonard Cockayne, in his *Report of a Botanical Survey of Stewart Island* (1909), wrote, "In January and February 1907 I paid a second visit to Stewart Island, in order to specially study the vegetation for my volume of *Die Vegetation der Erde*. I had the very good fortune to be accompanied by Messrs R M Laing, MA, BSc, F G Gibbs, MA and J Crosby-Smith, FLS, who most generously assisted my work in every way possible. The whole party ascended to the summit of Mt Anglem, spending three days on various parts of the mountain." He went on to describe several new plant species, one of which was named for each of the men.

Gibbs' interests and boundless energy encompassed business, science, industry and the arts, and he was actively and influentially involved with the Atkinson Observatory, Cawthron Institute, Suter Art Gallery, Nelson School of Music, Nelson Institute and the Nelson Chamber of Commerce. He was a man with strong convictions and ideals of community service, based on ethical standards rather than religious beliefs. He never married, but was very close to his strong and intelligent mother, and lived near or with her, until her death in 1920. Failing health finally forced the curtailment of his activities, and he died in Nelson on 16 January 1953.

Bulbinella gibbsii* var. *gibbsii

Bulbinella ('little bulb') is a misnomer, for the genus has only swollen roots, and Cheeseman suggested that the name *Chrysobactrum* should be revived for the six New Zealand species. *Bulbinella gibbsii* comprises two varieties: var. *gibbsii* is confined to Stewart Island, and var. *balanifera* occurs in both North and South Islands. *Bulbinella gibbsii* var. *gibbsii* is a small bog lily, commonly known as Māori onion. It grows in fresh green tufts of arched orange-edged leaves, which die to ground level in winter. Flower stems may be up to 30 cm tall, but usually much less, with conspicuous heads of bright yellow flowers in December–January. It grows only on Rakiura/Stewart Island, mostly at higher altitudes in wet places, but near sea level at Port Pegasus.

