

# Ronald Campbell Gunn (1808 – 1881)

Ronald Campbell Gunn was born in Capetown, the fourth son of army officer Robert Gunn of Caithness, Scotland, and his wife Margaret, née Wilson. After several years in Réunion, where his mother died in 1812, Robert Campbell Gunn was educated in Aberdeen. At 16 he worked on a newspaper and in a large private library, before going to Barbados with his father who had been appointed quartermaster of the 93rd regiment. When his father died in 1826, Gunn became a clerk with the Royal Engineers on Antigua, where he married Eliza, daughter of James Ireland of the 93rd regiment. Their first child was born in Antigua.

Urged by his brother William, Gunn returned to Edinburgh and sailed for Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), arriving in February 1830 with letters that secured him a position as overseer of the Hobart Town penitentiary, under his brother. In 1830 he became assistant superintendent of convicts at Launceston. Further appointments included Justice of the Peace, police magistrate and private secretary to Sir John Franklin. He left these in 1841 to manage the estates of his friend William Lawrence, and two years later, those of Lady Jane Franklin. He won a seat in the first House of Assembly in 1855, and when he resigned from parliament in 1860 was appointed deputy-commissioner of crown lands. In 1865 he visited New Zealand as a member of the Australian commission appointed to investigate and advise on the most suitable location for the seat of government. He remained in various official positions until he retired from public service in 1876, too crippled to sign his name.

With opportunities to travel and pursue his scientific interests, and botanist Robert Lawrence's introduction to William Jackson Hooker, Gunn became a plant collector. For nearly forty years he sent thousands of specimens from most parts of Tasmania to the Hookers at Kew. He was a close associate of Governor Sir John and Lady Franklin, and hosted botanists Joseph Dalton Hooker and Dumont d'Urville during their visits to Hobart. He attracted a keen group of local naturalists, and corresponded with other enthusiasts, including William Colenso in New Zealand. Gunn's interests were not confined to botany – he made collections of mammals, birds, reptiles and molluscs for the British Museum, and took up the study of geology. Highly regarded as a botanist and general scientist, he was elected a fellow of the Linnean Society of London and of the Royal Society. Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker's *Flora Tasmaniae* was dedicated to Gunn and another Tasmanian botanist, William Archer.

Gunn's first wife died in 1836, giving birth to their sixth child. On 18 December 1839 he married Margaret Legrand, with whom he had another five children. They lived at Penquite House near Launceston before moving in 1854 to the park-like surroundings of his newly acquired Newstead estate. Two years after retirement he presented his private herbarium to the Royal Society of Tasmania, whence it went to the National Herbarium, Sydney. He died at Newstead House on 13 March 1881, survived by his wife and two daughters. Ronald Campbell Gunn is commemorated in the names of many Australian plants, including a small wetland plant, *Liparophyllum gunnii*, which is also found in New Zealand.



## ***Liparophyllum gunnii***

*Liparophyllum* ('oily leaf') is a genus of only one species, *Liparophyllum gunnii*, which is native to North, South and Stewart Islands of New Zealand, and Tasmania, where it was first discovered. *Liparophyllum gunnii* forms loose patches of narrow, fleshy, dark green, 1–3 cm long leaves growing in tufts from creeping thick white rhizomes. The tiny white, single flowers, 4 mm in diameter, grow on very short stout stalks; the fruit is globular and succulent, containing numerous bright yellow seeds. It grows in lowland to subalpine bogs, tarns or lake edges and wet tussockland, usually in shallow pools in mucky peat and often partly submerged. *Cyttaria gunnii*, beech strawberry, is a soft yellow-orange golfball-like fungus parasitic on silver beech, *Lophozonia menziesii*.