

Henry Blencowe Matthews (1861 – 1934)

Blen Matthews was born at Kaitaia on 23 June 1861, the son of Richard Henry Matthews and Clarissa Isabella Matthews, née Dunn; he was the eldest of their six sons and an adopted niece. Blen's grandparents were early missionaries in the Far North. His father had hoped to be ordained also, but family responsibilities precluded theological study. An intelligent and enterprising man, he farmed 1170 acres of land near Kaitaia, and was a noted amateur botanist. Blen may have been educated at home by his parents or grandparents as there was no school in Kaitaia until 1875. In 1882 he married Evelyn Subritzky of Houhora, but nine years and six children later they divorced. In 1901 he married Evelyn's sister Elizabeth, the widow since 1888 of his youngest uncle, Samuel Hayward Ford Matthews.

Blen farmed 250 acres of land in Kaitaia, part of the large block granted to his grandfather in 1859, and in 1901 became chairman of the recently established dairy company, holding the position until his resignation in 1914. When Harry Carse arrived as a new teacher at the local school in 1893, he and Richard Henry Matthews, then a member of the school committee, found a mutual interest and began studying the native plants around Kaitaia. Richard Henry solicited the help of his sons, especially as he got older, but in his many letters to Cheeseman never mentioned them by name. Blen was one of the "Boys" (always written with a capital "B"), even when he was 50! With only four years between their ages, Blen and Harry Carse became good friends. Blen had a quick eye, and took an active interest, particularly in the orchids. He was almost certainly the discoverer of *Thelymitra matthewsii*, named after his father, and *Corysanthes*

carsei (*Corybas carsei*) named after his friend, who was with him when he located it a second time.

When Richard Henry Matthews died in May 1912, Blen inherited his presentation copy of Cheeseman's 1906 *Manual of the New Zealand Flora*. Continuing where his father left off, he wrote his first letter to Cheeseman on 2 July 1912. His disappointment in having his finds named after other people was partly appeased by Cheeseman in 1915, when he named *Pterostylis matthewsii* after Blen, and wrote, "I have much pleasure in dedicating the plant to its zealous discoverer, who, with his father, the late R H Matthews, has done excellent work in investigating the orchid flora of the extreme northernmost portions of the Dominion." (In 1932 the species was identified as an Australian vagrant, *Pterostylis nutans*).

In 1914 Matthews sold most of his property for township development, retaining the homestead block of 40 acres, and in 1916, to facilitate the education of his youngest son and daughter, he bought a house in Remuera, Auckland. During the intervening year his exploration with Carse extended to the Coromandel Peninsula – possibly related to his youngest brother's move to Kennedy Bay. In 1924 he was the catalyst that led to correspondence between Harry Carse and Amy Hodgson, her introduction to bryologist George Sainsbury and the development of her pioneer work on liverworts. Blen Matthews' remaining years were shared between Auckland and Kaitaia, with occasional forays southwards with his friends. He became ill during his last visit to Kaitaia, and died in the Mangonui Public Hospital on 12 March 1934.

Pterostylis nutans

Although the nodding greenhood is no longer found in New Zealand, where it was first known as *Pterostylis matthewsii*, it is common in some parts of Australia. It is a slender orchid readily recognised by the sharp forward and downward incline of the solitary, green, hood-shaped flower, 1.5–2 cm long and supported on a stem 5–20 cm or more high. The leaves grow in a rosette round the base of the stem, and have undulating margins. There have been three confirmed records for this occasional trans-Tasman vagrant, usually amongst scrub: Kaitaia 1910–1915; Castor Bay on Auckland's North Shore 1942, and Waihaha, west of Taupo, in 1995, where it flowered in October.

