

Percy Gates Morgan (1867 – 1927)

Percy Gates Morgan, the son of Charles Hackett Morgan, a schoolmaster, and his wife Emily Louisa Downes, was born on 2 September 1868 at Richmond, near Hobart, Tasmania. His parents had married in New Zealand and the family returned there around 1873. Percy was educated at country primary schools in Otago where his father taught, and scholarships took him to Otago Boys' High School 1881–1884, and the University of Otago. When his father left on his own for Tasmania in about 1889, Percy became the mainstay of the family, which included six other sons and two daughters. However, he gained his BA in 1890 and MA with honours in English in 1891, after which he studied at the Otago School of Mines for a certificate in mine and land surveying. He became an associate on graduation, and gained practical experience in the local coal industry until 1895.



Celmisia morganii

Celmisia morganii is one of several lowland species closely related to those of alpine areas. It is a large-leaved daisy with lance-shaped leaves forming erect tufts often massed into large groups festooning wet bluffs and ledges. Flowering from December to January, the species is known from only one site, 100 m above sea level in the Ngakawau Gorge north of Westport. It may have evolved when alpine plants spread to lower altitudes during times of colder climate, becoming stranded in small colonies with climate warming, and subsequently adapting to the changing conditions.

He moved north to the goldfields of Waihi and Thames, furthered his qualifications, and in 1897 became the first director of the new Waihi School of Mines, remaining there for nearly eight years. On 27 December 1900 he married Mary Jane (Minnie) Gilmour, daughter of a local mine manager. His younger brother John succeeded Percy as director, and in 1911 married Mary Jane's sister Emily.

In 1905 Percy Gates Morgan joined the New Zealand Geological Survey, which was then being reorganised in Wellington by J A M Bell. He assisted in the mapping of the Hokitika area of the South Island west coast, and when Bell resigned in 1911 Morgan succeeded him as director. Duties in Wellington prevented him from taking part in further regional mapping, but he personally made innumerable examinations of economic deposits throughout New Zealand, and his many publications showed the benefits of meticulous revision. He was an active member of several scientific organisations in New Zealand and overseas, and was elected fellow of the Geological Society of London in 1913 and the New Zealand Institute in 1922.

Early in January 1912 botanist Thomas Frederick Cheeseman received a package of plants from Morgan. Among the specimens was a "curious" celmisia he had collected somewhere between Westport and the Ngakawau River. Describing it as a new species, Cheeseman wrote, "Mr Morgan has done excellent service in collecting the plants of north-west Nelson, and I have pleasure in dedicating the species to him."

Percy Gates Morgan, "P G", remained director of the Geological Survey until his sudden death at Wellington on 26 November 1927, survived by his wife and four daughters. A kindly and reserved man with a strong personality and definite ideas, his life was dedicated to both public service and scientific enquiry.