

## William Paterson (1755 –1810)

William Paterson was born on 10 August 1755 in Kinnettles, a small village near Forfar, in Angus, Scotland. His father David Paterson was a gardener at nearby Brigdon House, and it seems that William, after a basic education, followed his father's occupation. His keen interest in botany was noticed by Mary Eleanor Bowes, Countess of Strathmore, and under her patronage he undertook horticultural training at Chelsea. In 1777 she sent him to South Africa, and on four inland excursions he collected seeds, living plants and herbarium specimens for her Chelsea garden. However, after her disastrous second marriage she was unable to pay him.

He joined the British Army, and while serving in India from 1781 to 1785 he corresponded with Sir Joseph Banks, director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. Back in Britain he worked on the narrative of his African journeys, dedicating it to Banks. It was published in 1789 and translated into German by Johann Reinhold Forster.



### ***Blechnum colensoi***

*Blechnum colensoi* (was *Blechnum patersonii*), peretao, is a distinctive creeping fern with very dark green fronds of variable shape, veined in black. The sterile fronds, which may consist of a single tongue-shaped blade or many alternate pinnae, contrast markedly with the slender fertile pinnae. It is common in wet lowland or montane forest from the Waitakere Ranges southward, usually hanging from steep, dark banks or streamsides.

Paterson was gazetted captain in the New South Wales Corps in 1788. On 26 September 1789 at St Martin in the Fields, London, he married Elizabeth Driver of Montrose, Scotland. They arrived in Sydney in October 1791 and a few days later left for William's posting to the convict settlement on Norfolk Island. William described and his convict servant John Doody illustrated the flora and fauna for Banks, but the work was never published.

Back on mainland Australia in 1793, Paterson led an expedition into the Blue Mountains, and discovered and named the Grose River; he made further collections for Banks, experimented with trees on his 100-acre allocation of land in Petersham, and when appointed acting governor in 1794, established a garden at the lieutenant-governor's house in Sydney. Invalided to England in 1796, he renewed his earlier requests to Banks and became a fellow of the Linnean Society in 1797 and the Royal Society in 1798. He and his wife also sat for portraits by the eminent painter William Owen. Returning to Sydney in 1799, with orders to curb the officers' illicit trading in spirits, he found his garden turned into a horse paddock. Attempts to discipline his officers ended in a duel, and he was shot in the shoulder.

In 1804, his health deteriorating, he was sent to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) with a party of convicts and troops to form a new settlement at Port Dalrymple. Although his four years there were marked by hardship and indecision, he noted the natural resources and continued to send specimens to Banks. In January 1809 he was recalled to Sydney to take command after the overthrow of Governor William Bligh, and he relinquished the post when Governor Lachlan Macquarrie arrived with his own regiment. Paterson left Australia with his wife and regiment on 12 May and died aboard the *Dromedary* off Cape Horn on 21 June 1810. His devoted and conscientious wife, after a brief second marriage, lived quietly in retirement and died at Liverpool in 1839. They had no children.

William Paterson is remembered more as a natural scientist and explorer than as a soldier and administrator, and his botanical collections are preserved in the Natural History Museum, South Kensington. Robert Brown, who was in Australia from 1801–1805, named after him the purple flag genus *Patersonia* and several species. The shade-loving New Zealand fern *Blechnum colensoi* was once included with Australia's *Blechnum patersonii*, and the Norfolk Island hibiscus *Lagunaria patersonii* is now fully naturalised here.

