

# Leonard Rodway (1853 – 1936)

Leonard Rodway was born on 5 October 1853 at Torquay, Devon, England, the thirteenth child of dentist Henry Barton Rodway and his wife Elizabeth, née Allin. Educated at Birmingham and on the Thames training ship *Worcester*, he spent three years in the mercantile marine before turning, after illness, to dentistry. He trained at Middlesex Hospital, London, gaining his licentiate in dental surgery in 1878, and migrated to Australia. In Brisbane on 19 May 1879 he married a dentist's daughter, Louisa Susan Phillips. The next year they moved to Hobart, where Rodway practised until 1923.



## *Thismia rodwayi*

*Thismia rodwayi* belongs to the Burmanniaceae family of mainly tropical saprophytes closely related to the orchids. The genus name is an anagram of *Smithia*, named for 18th–19th century London microscopist, Thomas Smith. *Thismia rodwayi* is an unusual, seldom seen plant, which lacks green leaves and appears only briefly above ground to flower. Its whitish underground rhizomes have associated mycorrhizal fungi enabling it to take up nutrients from decaying matter in the forest duff. Between late October and February, ephemeral red or orange translucent flowers, about 15 mm long, appear above the leaf litter, looking rather like tiny red lanterns. Found throughout the central and northern half of the North Island in association with a wide range of forest types, *Thismia rodwayi* is also found in Tasmania and southeastern Australia, where it is commonly known as fairy lantern.

PHOTO: Ewen Cameron

However, he is mainly remembered for his interest in botany, another family tradition. Devoting his spare time, energy and financial resources to field trips, describing new species and building up a large collection of specimens, he prepared an in-depth catalogue of Tasmanian native and naturalised plants. In 1884 he became a member of the Royal Society of Tasmania, and between 1892 and 1928 presented many scientific papers to the society. He published *The Tasmanian Flora*, a standard reference for forty years (1903), *Some Wild Flowers of Tasmania* (1910) and *Tasmanian Bryophyta* (1914–16).

As honorary government botanist for 36 years, he made a major contribution to the study, teaching and application of botany. He corresponded with botanists at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and exchanged specimens with Australian and overseas herbaria, working towards a Tasmanian herbarium as a basis for the agricultural industry. This was established in 1928 with Rodway as director, and by 1936 he had incorporated into it most of his own valuable collection. During his tenure as trustee of the Tasmanian Museum and Botanical Gardens (1911–28) and then director of the latter, he promoted their scientific, economic and educational role rather than that of public recreation and entertainment.

From 1923–29 he lectured in botany at the University of Tasmania, but his most effective teaching was through the Tasmanian Field Naturalists' Club, of which he was a foundation member. A keen bushman, he was associated with many other organisations concerned with scientific education and outdoor recreation, and he helped establish Tasmania's first scenic reserves. He became a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George in 1917, and in the 1920s received medals from the Royal Societies of New South Wales and Tasmania.

After the death of his wife in 1922, Leonard Rodway married Olive Barnard, an amateur naturalist whose photographs had illustrated *Some Wild Flowers of Tasmania*. He retired in 1932 and died on 9 March 1936 at Kingston, survived by his wife, and four sons and a daughter from his first marriage. Physical features of three Tasmanian national parks, and several botanical species, including the elusive *Thismia rodwayi*, which has also been found in New Zealand's North Island, are named in his honour.