

# George Osborne King Sainsbury (1880 – 1957)

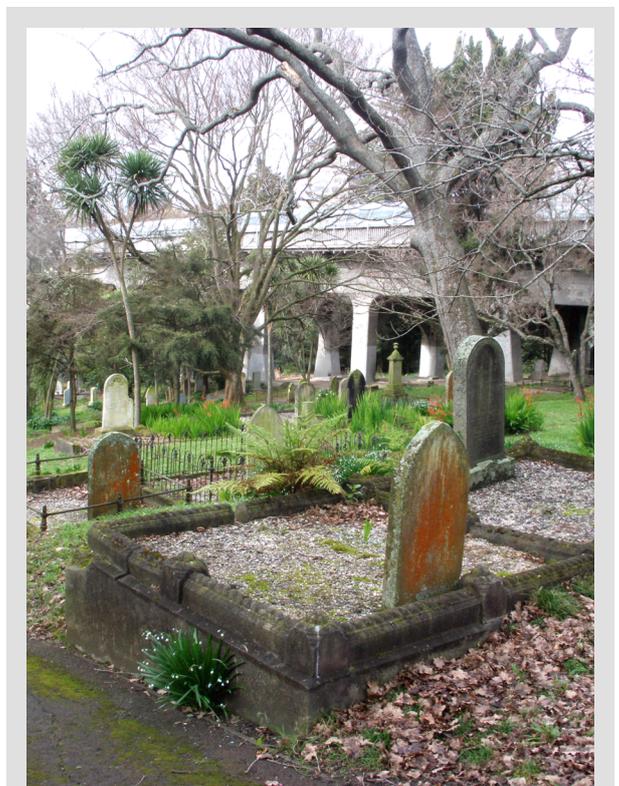
**B**orn in Napier, New Zealand, on 1 June 1880, George Osborne King Sainsbury was the youngest son of lawyer George Edward Sainsbury and his wife Edith Ashfield King, both from southern England. George, from a family of brewers and wine merchants in Bath, had practised as a solicitor in Wiltshire before immigrating to New Zealand in the early 1870s, encouraged perhaps by his older sister Mary and brother-in-law Purvis Russell, who had established a sheep run in central Hawkes Bay. George Sainsbury, aged 26 and already trained, was admitted to the Bar in the Supreme Court at Napier in 1875 and opened an office in Tennyson Street. In 1883 he was joined in partnership by fellow Englishman Francis Logan and in 1900 by a second generation New Zealander, Heathcote Williams from the Bay of Islands.

After several visits to England, ostensibly for health reasons, George Sainsbury and his family lived there for six years, arriving back in New Zealand on 11 February 1889. Osborne was a student at Wanganui Collegiate School from 1892 to 1897; he excelled academically, went on to study law and was called to the Bar in about 1903. He practised as a barrister and solicitor at Gisborne until 1911, and made three further trips to Europe with his parents before the outbreak of war in 1914. In Gisborne on 15 December 1908 he married Edith Alice Sherratt, a daughter of Alice and William Grice Sherratt, co-founder of the local mercantile firm Bennett and Sherratt. Osborne and his brother Claud joined forces in a farming venture from 1911 to 1917 and then returned to law, practising in partnership at Wairoa until their retirement in 1947.

"G O K S" became seriously interested in botany in the early 1920s. His rediscovery of the rare shrub *Pittosporum obcordatum* and his subsequent paper in 1923 brought him to the notice of the botanical world. However, it was the bryophytes, especially mosses, which captivated him, resulting in over thirty years of collecting (mainly in the North Island), studying and writing. In collaboration with English bryologist Hugh Neville Dixon, and on his own, he described many new species. In 1941 Dixon named *Sainsburia novae-zealandiae* (now *Fissidens taylorii* var. *sainsburyanus*) in his honour, noting that its collector "has not only done much to add to our knowledge of the highly interesting moss flora of New Zealand, but has stimulated interest in its study among many new workers". Contributions from co-collectors Amy Hodgson, Kenneth Allison and William Martin helped him to compile a list of indigenous mosses, and his text *A Handbook of the New Zealand Mosses*, with illustrations by Nancy Adams (1955) was highly acclaimed in New Zealand

and abroad. In December 1955 Sainsbury moved to a more convenient house in Havelock North to continue his work on the mosses of Tasmania and Victoria, Australia, but suffered a stroke the next year and died in the Napier Hospital on 22 July 1957, at the age of 77. His wife and two married daughters Rosalie Giblin and Beryl Harper survived him. Their only son Popham was killed in operations over North Africa during World War II.

Sainsbury shared his family's passion for cricket. He loved music, was an inspirational writer, and his fondness for mountaineering and photography complemented his dedication to bryology. He was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand in 1956, and at his death was described as "New Zealand's foremost bryologist".



Symonds Street Cemetery, Auckland, 2005

## *Fissidens taylorii* var. *sainsburyanus*

*Fissidens* is a very large moss genus with some 450 species worldwide on all continents except Antarctica. The generic name, from *fiscus* 'split' and *dens* 'tooth,' refers to the split teeth that make up the peristome. The epithet *taylorii* honours 19th century Irish cryptogamist Thomas Taylor. *Fissidens taylorii* var. *sainsburyanus* occurs on bare soil, shaded or semi-shaded, often under exotic trees in urban settings such as cemeteries and parks, occasionally in indigenous vegetation. It was collected by Sainsbury near Wairoa on 23 July 1939 and has since been found in other locations in New Zealand, Tasmania and mainland Australia.