

Arnold Wall (1869 – 1966)

Arnold Wall was born in Ceylon in 1869, the son of George Wall, a coffee merchant and planter, and his wife Mary Ann, née Dixon. He was the sixth of eight children, and was two years old when he and his three brothers and four sisters were sent to England to live at the family home at Clevedon on the Bristol Channel. A Ceylon friend, Helen Shipton, brought them up, taught and mothered them. A lively interest in the plants and wildlife around them was a natural part of their life at Clevedon.



Coprosma wallii

Coprosmas are related to the coffee plant, and have showy fruit, the colour varying according to the species. Insignificant male and female flowers are on separate plants. *Coprosma wallii* is a small-leaved tree to 9 metres tall, with rigid, divaricating branches. The rough bark has a red-orange inner bark (hence the common name, bloodwood) and the branchlets and petioles are hairy. The drupes, which are didymous (two-lobed) are usually blue-black, but sometimes dark red. *Coprosma wallii* grows in forest and wetland margins in the South Island (except Marlborough) and in two North Island valleys.

When Clevedon was relinquished in 1879, the boys went to Tottridge Park School, a 200-acre estate ten miles north of London, and this became Arnold's home until he was 17. Then he began teaching at various schools, while studying extra-murally for his London University and Cambridge degrees. He also made several visits to Europe, and climbing and botanical excursions with colleagues in Switzerland, the Lake District, the Fens and later, Wales.

In 1898 Wall was appointed professor of English language, literature and history at the Canterbury University College. He arrived in Christchurch, New Zealand, early the next year, and was immediately befriended by Arthur Dendy, professor of the biology department. Other new friends included F W Hutton, curator of the Canterbury Museum, and botanist Leonard Cockayne; all were members of the Philosophical Institute of Canterbury, which Wall subsequently joined in April 1899. In 1901 he married Elsie Kent Monro Curnow.

At first, Wall's vacation activities were mainly walking, climbing, fishing and hunting, until in 1915, while on a camping trip at Castle Hill, he was able to identify a plant requested by Cockayne, and decided to begin a serious study of the New Zealand flora. His botanical work continued until his retirement from Canterbury College in 1931. During that time he took charge of the herbarium of the Canterbury Museum, made numerous plant collecting trips to the mountains of the Southern Alps and ranges of the North Island, discovering several new species and varieties, and wrote at least thirty botany-related papers and articles. One of his finds, a coprosma with a distinctive red inner bark, from the Upper Poulter River, Arthur's Pass, was named in his honour by Donald Petrie in 1925.

After the death of his wife in 1925, and a trip to the Himalaya in 1932, Arnold Wall moved to Auckland, and with Lucy Cranwell wrote *The Botany of Auckland* (1936). In 1945 another joint effort was published, *The Botanical Names of the Flora of New Zealand*, which was co-authored with H H Allan. Back in Christchurch from 1951, he began recording his popular national radio programmes on *The Queen's English*, and in 1960 his autobiography *Long and Happy* was completed.

Arnold Wall died on 29 March 1966, at the age of 96 – a kind, gentle and knowledgeable man of many interests, who took great pleasure in his work. His name is commemorated in seven New Zealand plant species, and his poignant poem "The Old Botanist's Farewell to the Southern Alps" (1923) expresses the sentiments of all who love our mountains and flora.