

William Leonard Williams (1829 –1916)

Known as Leonard Williams to Pākehā, and Mita Renata to Māori, William Leonard Williams was born at Paihia, Bay of Islands on 22 July 1829, the third child and eldest son of Jane, née Nelson, and her husband William Williams of the Church Missionary Society. In his early years Leonard was educated by his father at the English boys' school at Paihia and Te Waimate (Waimate North), and when his parents moved to Poverty Bay in 1839, at Turanga Mission Station. In 1844 he attended the grammar school attached to St Johns College, which Bishop Selwyn had established at Te Waimate and then shifted to Purewa, Auckland. From his early teens he accompanied his father on several of his East Coast journeys, following in his footsteps literally as well as by vocation, and in November 1847 he left to study at evangelical Magdalen Hall, Oxford, England.



Carmichaelia williamsii

Our most easily recognised native broom, this shrub has distinctive wide flattened branchlets, and reaches a height of 3–4 metres. The flowers, usually in small clusters, are a pale yellowish colour with purple veins and blotches, and are produced throughout the year. When dry, the sides of the pods fall off to reveal several bright orange seeds suspended from the pod rim. There are estimated to be less than 500 plants remaining in the wild, on several islands in the Hauraki Gulf, and two remnant populations on the mainland near East Cape, characteristically in open forest on steep coastal sites.

After graduating BA from the University of Oxford in 1852 he offered to serve the Church Missionary Society. He took a training course at Islington and was admitted to deacon's orders on 25 May 1853. On 16 June 1853 he married Sarah Wanklyn at Witherslack Chapel, Westmoreland; they left for New Zealand in August, and Leonard joined his father at the Turanga Station, to undertake the training of Māori students. They were troubled times, and the work was beset with problems. Christianity was losing its appeal, and Hauhau incursions into Poverty Bay disrupted missionary work. However Williams never felt threatened, as he continued to travel remote areas. Throughout the 1870s he pursued his aim to improve Māori education, and carried on his father's intensive study of the Māori language – the third and fourth editions of *A Dictionary of the New Zealand Language* are his work.

He was consecrated Bishop of Waiapu in 1895, and in 1897 received an honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity from Oxford University. As bishop he continued to travel indefatigably on horseback over the rough tracks of his unwieldy diocese. On these journeys he regularly collected plant specimens and forwarded them, initially to J D Hooker at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, and later to T F Cheeseman at the Auckland Institute and Museum. He also assisted Cheeseman by compiling lists of Māori plant names for inclusion in his *Manual of New Zealand Flora*. He resigned in 1909 when he felt no longer able to make such arduous journeys, and died suddenly at Taumata, his Napier home, on 24 August 1916. His wife Sarah had died at Napier on 18 December 1894. There were no children of the marriage.

Leonard Williams was tall and sparse, with a dramatic waist-length beard. A kindly man, quietly spoken but firm in his convictions, he was regarded as probably the most eminent Māori scholar of his generation. Botanists remember him for the new plant he discovered at Hicks Bay, a broom that now carries his name, *Carmichaelia williamsii*.