

Thomas George Wright (c. 1831 – 1914)

Thomas George Wright was born around 1831 in Surrey, England, the son of Thomas Wright, a printer, and his wife Ann, née Folo. After training as a compositor he joined the navy and served off the coast of China and then in the Crimea, where he was attached to the medical stores department and came into contact with Florence Nightingale. Some of his most treasured possessions were orders for supplies that she had signed. It has been calculated that Wright arrived in New Zealand in 1860 or 1861. Returning to his trade, he was employed as a compositor for the *Lyttelton Times* and then went to Dunedin and served on *The Star*. In Christchurch again around 1870, he became a reader for *The Press*. He was elected a member of the Philosophical Institute of Canterbury in 1872, and on 31 January 1879 at St Barnabas Church, Fendalton, he married Emily Reader. In his first letter to Christchurch botanist Thomas Wrench Naylor Beckett dated 14 June 1887 he assessed the botanical scene:

I am afraid that you will find me only a very indifferent bryologist, although I certainly possess a tolerably large collection of mosses, specimens good, bad and indifferent, raked up from all parts of New Zealand. The point of identifying species to which you refer is one which you will find crop up as soon as you set to work. There are but half a dozen books, as far as I know, which will help you – the *Handbook of New Zealand Flora*, the three southern floras, the *Musci Exotici*, and a few scattered notices in the NZ Transactions. Of the mosses described in the *Musci Exotici* there can be but little doubt the elder Hooker did his work well. Of the others, especially the Handbook, there appears to have been too great a tendency to jump at the conclusion that our mosses are identical with European species. I believe (you must take my belief only for what it is worth) that in

many points they differ. But to settle this requires a good series of European specimens authenticated. This I do not possess. At all events you will very soon find mosses that do not agree with any described in the works I have named. What is wanting for this country is a really good work on mosses (like Braithwaite's) but it would be an undertaking involving much labour, and would be a pecuniary loss, as the circulation would be mainly confined to presentation copies. ... Your best and nearest hunting ground you will find along the seaward side of the Port Hills near the summit. You will find many curious mosses up there, among them some Andreaea, there used at one time to be a good sprinkling of ferns, but fires and jobbing gardeners have nearly exterminated them – fortunately mosses are not saleable or they would have gone also ... If you get into conversation with the younger Armstrong of the Government gardens you will find he is well up on the subject. There is but one other person that I know in Christchurch who takes any interest in bryology – and he is an old shoemaker – who I really believe knows more about them than anyone else here in New Zealand, unless it be Colenso. I will, with your consent, take an opportunity shortly of introducing you to him, when you will find, if you will listen to him, he will 'talk moss' for hours.

By March 1892 Wright's house on Gloucester Street, Linwood, had a number (178). Exchanges between the Christchurch bryologists continued, although it appears that Beckett and shoemaker Robert Brown had fallen out. Wright retired from *The Press* in 1910 after nearly 40 years of "discharging his duties faithfully and well", and was described also as an ardent horticulturist who contributed the garden notes to the *Weekly Press*. About a year after the death of his wife, Thomas George Wright died on 2 June 1914, leaving three daughters and a son.

Andreaea sp.

Andreaea, a distinctive group of mosses in the family Andreaeaceae, is a worldwide genus of about 50 species. The five common species in New Zealand are mainly small, semi-spherical, dense, dark mosses growing on bare rock, especially at high altitudes. The reddish-brown, often almost black, velvety pads of moss penetrate small cracks in the rock and are quite difficult to remove. In the 1890s New Zealand botanist Robert Brown named three rock-inhabiting mosses, including *Andreaea wrightii*, dedicating them to "Mr Thomas George Wright of Christchurch, an earnest cryptogamic botanist".

Moss and lichen habitat
Amuri Range, 2000

