



JAMES BACKHOUSE (1794-1869)

James Backhouse came from a family of successful Quaker businessmen in Durham. After leaving school, he was apprenticed to a chemist where he acquired some medical knowledge. He contracted tuberculosis and, as part of his convalescence, began working in a nursery where he developed an interest in Australian plants. That, combined with an interest in prison reform, encouraged him to undertake missionary work in Australia. Soon after his wife died in 1827, he left his children with relatives, a York nursery business in the hands of his brother, and set off for the southern hemisphere with George Washington Walker. Backhouse travelled to all the Australian colonies and South Africa, making recommendations about social conditions, setting up Quaker Meetings, and collecting plants which he sent to Kew Gardens. He returned to England in 1841, to spend the rest of his life writing about his travels and looking after the nursery business with his son, James.

