

In the Portobello Cemetery lies the grave of one of Otago's earliest settlers, Octavius Harwood....



Octavius Harwood was born in London in 1816. He studied classics at Oxford before becoming an apprentice on trading ships to the West Indies and South Africa. On the 1st May 1837, Octavius joined a barque, the 'City of Edinburgh', to sail for Sydney, a journey which would change the course of his life. In Sydney, Octavius met George Weller who encouraged him to join him in New Zealand. Octavius was appointed store clerk for the new whaling station at Otaku, and arrived in New Zealand in 1838.

By 1841 the whaling industry was in decline and the Wellers returned to Sydney in financial ruin. By this time Octavius had met and married a Maori, Tipou, who already had a son. In 1842 Tipou died of consumption leaving Octavius to raise her son. Octavius was distraught. But he soon

developed a relationship with another Maori, Piro, who became pregnant with twins. Only one of the twins, Mere, survived and lived to the ripe old age of 79.

By the time the Scottish settlers arrived in Dunedin, Octavius's relationship with Piro has vanished from the records. Janet Robinson arrived on the Philip Laing in 1848. She went to Otaku to find work and met and married Octavius. Janet and Octavius set up home in Otaku and Octavius leased land to farm. They farmed successfully for many years until an outbreak of scab forced the farm to close. Even a personal letter to Queen Victoria couldn't save Octavius's farming career.

Octavius and Janet had nine children and spent the rest of their lives living in upper Portobello. In 1896 Janet died, Octavius died four years later in 1900. They are both buried in Portobello cemetery.