



## **Asthmatic fit fatal**

THOMAS ARTHUR, who for many years had been a sufferer from severe asthma, died following a violent fit at work, aged 48.

He was at the time working in Messrs Peterson and Co's George St shop.

“A fellow employee came into the room, and discovered him lying prostrate, nearly suffocated. He was promptly attended to, but never rallied, and died soon after,” reported the Otago Daily Times on August 5, 1901, two days later. It was a tragic and premature ending to a life in New Zealand, which his family had undertaken in the hope that it would improve his health.

Thomas Arthur, a London grocer, his wife Fanny, infant son Thomas jun and sister Ellen arrived at Port Chalmers in the Taranaki in November 1880. They opened a grocery shop in Albany St and, during the next decade, produced a family of four daughters and another son. At some point during this time the family moved from the Albany St residence to Northeast Valley. By the mid-1880s, Thomas sen was listed in Stone's directory as no longer a grocer but a grocer's assistant, while Fanny Arthur had become the owner-storekeeper of a shop in Northeast Valley. It is likely that his continued health problems required him to take on lighter duties and to take employment at Peterson's while his wife took over the family business.

Thomas jun, meanwhile, had begun to make a name as a poet, and became a frequent contributor of lyrical verse to newspapers and magazines. He wrote many poems on the subject of Central Otago and the gold dredges, one of the best known being *On the Road to Alexandra*. In 1905 he married the daughter of a neighbouring boot-maker, but the marriage

did not succeed, and he returned to his mother's residence. He was suffering by then from a chronic kidney disease, which was to prove fatal. He died of kidney failure on February 22, 1911, at the age of 32.

Fanny, the family matriarch, lived on until 1927. All the evidence suggests she was a remarkably determined and capable woman for her time. The only daughter of a wealthy London baker, she had embarked on a voyage to the other side of the world, and cared for a large family and an ailing asthmatic husband, while successfully running a business in her own right. Her name appears on the first electoral roll compiled after women's suffrage became law in New Zealand. She died at the age of 72, after 47 years in Dunedin.

All three are buried in a modest concrete-covered grave in the Northern Cemetery, marked only with a granite stone bearing the name Arthur.