



Samuel Barningham

In 1879 Samuel Barningham established the Victoria foundry in George Street. The *Otago Witness* reported the ‘gratifying’ addition to local industrial enterprise of Barningham and Co. who had commenced the manufacture of ornamental ironwork for balconies and verandahs, which could only previously have been obtained from overseas. Within a few years, however, the firm of Barningham and Co. had become more readily associated with kitchen ranges. Their “Zealandia” and “Miner” cooking stoves became some of the most popular in New Zealand, and were exhibited widely at industrial exhibitions and A&P shows throughout New Zealand, and in Melbourne, where, in 1881, they were awarded third prize for Australasian cooking and heating ranges. The steadily increasing popularity of the Barningham ranges was due to their efficiency, adaptability, and to the many inventive and improving features that were progressively developed. All sizes were designed to burn either wood or coal, and transform, when required, to an open –fire arrangement, a feature unique to Barningham stoves. Eventually high-pressure boilers were added for heating the water supply, and written instructions on how to connect the range to the hot water system were supplied by the firm. The later models began to incorporate such features as decorative tiles fitted into the ironwork, ‘...a source of great attraction to all who love a bright and cheerful kitchen.’ These improvements made them ‘very popular with housewives’, and also with larger institutions. By 1901 many businesses in Dunedin had installed the Zealandia.

Over the years, the Victoria foundry also designed and produced a range of other products, both practical and decorative. A propeller washing machine and mangle, the “latest thing” in adjustable school desks, fire escape ladders, the cast iron cross on the spire of the Northeast Valley catholic church and the window frames and ventilating panels of St Patricks, as well as a variety of designs in tomb railings. Innovation and quality were the hallmarks of the foundry.

Barningham himself was a hobbyist inventor skilled not only in metalworker but also in grinding and polishing lenses. He displayed examples of his own mechanical designs work during the 1909 Industries Week in Dunedin, consisting of “two clocks, two microscopes, a ribbon-cutting microtome, a micrometer ruling machine, and working enlargements of a lever watch movement and of a chronometer.” One clock was designed to show the date, while the other had a ‘self-winding’ mechanism which had taken more than five years to perfect. The microscope and its accessories were considered to be “really high-class instruments’.

Samuel Barningham died on 30 August 1911, aged 58, and lies in the Southern Cemetery. Surprisingly, his grave is not embellished with his foundry’s cast-iron railings, but consists of a concrete cover bordered with polished granite. Originally surmounted by a decorated headstone, this has now broken and fallen onto the grave. The lettering still visible is on a fragment lying on a neighboring plot.

Prepared for the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand (www.cemeteries.org.nz) by Helen Gilmore.

Sources: Issues of *Otago Witness* on www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz
www.nzetc.org