



When the Sawyers Bay tannery was established in 1881, its first manager was James Cleghorn from Melbourne. The Cleghorn family's association with the leather trade was a long one. James' father, Arthur Cleghorn, had been born in the village of Kilconquhar, Fifeshire, in an area where the main industry was 'leather currying', and the village possessed a tannery which was the main source of employment for its inhabitants. Arthur immigrated to Australia, where he established his own successful tannery at Footscray, Melbourne around 1854. Ten years later, he sold the works to Michaelis Hallenstein and Co., and became instead the tannery manager.

Grant Preston Farquhar, who had a leather importing business, was the Dunedin agent for the Footscray tannery from 1862 until 1881, when he went into partnership with Michaelis and Hallenstein to establish the new tannery at Sawyers Bay, which was to be one of the largest and most complete in the country, on a "self-contained" site adjacent to the railway and with a good water supply and 'perfect' drainage. James Cleghorn, who had grown up in the business was brought from Melbourne to take charge of the finished works and was on hand to advise and supervise during their construction. He and his wife Anna settled at Sawyers Bay, where they raised a family of two sons and a daughter. Within a few years, the tannery was producing leather of a quality that was in high demand from boot-makers and shoe manufacturers throughout the colony.

James Cleghorn was an excellent practical engineer as well as an administrator. In 1892 he in partnership with Farquhar and Collins, invented and patented a new and efficient furnace, capable of both increasing the factory's output, and reducing its environmental pollution. It also made more efficient use of fuel. After two years of test running in the works, the *Witness* reported that "The advantages claimed for the new furnace, and the results said to be demonstrated by its use, are : (1) A more complete, and therefore more economic, combustion of fuel, and consequently great saving of expense ; (2) an almost entire annihilation of smoke, thus practically solving one of the most difficult problems the corporations of manufacturing towns have had to deal with ; and (3), a matter of some importance, the longer life of the boilers."

James was also an active participant in the affairs of his community, and applied his musical talents as both soloist in various recitals and as Church choirmaster. In 1906 the *Otago Witness* reported that the choir members of the Port Chalmers Presbyterian Church visited him at home to present him with a pair of silver candlesticks as a “tangible token of its appreciation of his services in musical circles throughout the district”.

James Cleghorn died on 25 November 1929 aged 76. His son Leslie having succeeded him as tannery manager. He was buried in Port Chalmers cemetery, joining his daughter Mary Helen, who had died in 1904. Anna joined him in 1936.

The Sawyers Bay tannery, renamed Glendermid Ltd. in 1918, continued to operate for many years. In 1989 it was taken over by the Primary Producers Co-op. Society, who finally closed it in 1994.

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

Sources: Issues of *Otago Witness* www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz;

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