



#### STORY IN STONE

## JOHN CAMPBELL EASTON, 1866-1936

NORTHERN CEMETERY, BLOCK 108, PLOT 3A

John Campbell Easton was a Dunedin music teacher whose compositions were published locally, as well as in Australia, London, and the United States.

Easton was born near Airdrie, Lanarkshire, Scotland on 31 May 1866. He was the son of Isabella Easton (nee Campbell) and Nisbet Easton, an iron miner. He arrived in New Zealand in 1882, while still in his teens, and studied music with Alfred Sims and Arthur J. Barth (the well-known organist of Knox Church). His family settled at Fairfield.

Easton taught piano and harmony from 1893, and maintained a studio in the Octagon for about 40 years. His successful pupils included Hugh Black, who gained the only senior honours awarded at the Royal Academy harmony examination in 1903, and Ada Donaldson, who the same year gained first prize and a gold medal against eighteen other pianists in the Dunedin Competitions.

In the early 1890s Easton was bandmaster of the Caversham Band and organist at St Mary's Church, Mornington. He was later pianist to the Dunedin Liedertafel (now the Royal Dunedin Male Choir) and a vice-president of the Otago Society of Musicians. A freemason, he was organist to Lodge Otago No. 7.

The earliest known published composition by Easton, *May Flowers* mazurka, was published by the Dresden Piano Company in 1888, and the song *Tranquil Vale* (with words by J.B. Hunter) followed in 1890. His works found some success outside New Zealand. *Hyacintha* was published by Cawthorne & Co. in Adelaide, *Vanity Fair* march by Reynolds & Co. in London, and the dance *Polina* by the Sam Fox Publishing Co. of Cleveland and New York. Easton's other published compositions included the marches *Coeur de Lion* and *Under Two Flags*, and the minuet *May*. His choral anthem *Praise God* was reportedly sung by the choirs of most of Dunedin's city and suburban churches.

During the Boer War Easton composed the music to *New Zealand's Answer*, a patriotic song with words by J. Stewart Thornton. One of his later works was a set of piano sketches entitled *In a New Zealand Forest*, published by Charles Begg & Co. in the 1920s. A surviving manuscript work in the Hocken Collections, *March Cantankerous*, is remarkable for its delightful whimsicality, and its illustration of Easton's bold and beautiful penmanship.

J.C. Easton was said to be of a retiring, unassuming disposition. He died at his home in Elm Row on 14 July 1936 at the age of 70, survived by his wife and a daughter. He had married Violet Whittaker in 1907 and she died in Oamaru in 1984 at the age of 101. John Easton is buried in Dunedin's Northern Cemetery.

Prepared for the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand ([www.cemeteries.org.nz](http://www.cemeteries.org.nz)) by David Murray, Archivist, Hocken Library, Dunedin.

May 2011