



One of a family of six boys from Hillstone, England, John Eustace came to New Zealand with his parents as a child, on the *Chile* in 1862. Small of stature he had an inventive brain, although little education. At 12 he began work as a blacksmith's striker. He then took up an apprenticeship with the Wax Vesta Company as a tinsmith, making tin match boxes.

In 1883 he married Martha Emma Hoskings and they had three daughters and one son.

In 1896 he set up his own business as a tinsmith in Moray Place making kettles, trays and boxes. During the South African War he had large orders for meat and jam tins, and enlarged the premises.

In the early 1900s he was asked by Smith & Smith, who sent paint all around the country, to make some paint tins which did not leak. After a sleepless night, he invented an airtight 'lever lid' tin of the kind that is in universal use for paint today. A patent was taken out with the help of Robert Smith, but John Eustace did not realize that it was a provisional patent only which only lasted for six months.

Although the airtight tin was so successful that orders poured in from all over New Zealand, then from Britain and the USA, the provisional patent soon expired, and the market was flooded with tins from British and American manufacturers who had pirated

his ideas. However Smith & Smith promised that they would always buy their tins from Eustace's firm, which they did for as long as John Eustace and his son were running the firm.

Although he did not become a millionaire his business was prosperous and in 1925 he established a new tin 'canister' factory in King Street, employing many men. A representative from an American firm once visited him to see 'the God-damn idiot who had lost a fortune.' John Eustace said, 'Well, I'm happy, I've got a good family, I get three feeds a day, I can only wear one suit at a time what would I want with a fortune?'

He was described by F.W.G. Miller, who interviewed him in his old age, as 'quiet, gentle, and philosophical'.

His son, John William Eustace, took over the factory, and ran it until he too retired, when it was sold to J.Gadsen & Co.