



Robert Craig Gillies was born in 1835 in Rothesay, Scotland to John Gillies and Isabella Lillie, one of their nine children. He attended for a year at Glasgow University then the family emigrated to Otago on the *Slains Castle*.

John Gillies, his father, bought 10 acres at Halfway Bush as a family home, as well as a 100-acre farm property at Tokomairiro. Robert worked on the Tokomairiro farm before entering the provincial surveying service from 1867-61.

He then moved to Dunedin and began a real estate business with C.H. Street, whose daughter Emily he married.

He was involved in various businesses, including being first chairman of the Otago Daily Times and Witness companies, and he also took up a farm at Awamoko where he built up a farm of fine Leicester sheep.

When his firm became Perpetual Trustees, Estate and Agency Co in 1884, Gillies was first chairman.

Less interested in political life than his brothers (although he was briefly in parliament shortly before his death), he was active in Knox Church and a founder of the Otago Institute to which he contributed papers on local flora and fauna. He was also a keen student of astronomy, with his own observatory.

The aims of the Otago Institute were (and still are) To Contribute to Otago Society by:

- Promoting public awareness, knowledge and understanding of Science & Technology
- Advancing Science and Technology education.

- Providing expert advice on important public issues, as required.

The Gillies were an influential family in Otago – the father John Gillies was a farmer, lawyer, politician and magistrate; son Thomas Bannatyne Gillies was a farmer, lawyer and politician; son John Lillie Gillies was a farmer, politician and Provincial Treasurer; son William became a farmer then Presbyterian Minister.

Robert Gillies died on 15 June 18886 and is buried in the family grave in Dunedin's Northern Cemetery.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand from information contained in *Southern People, a Dictionary of Otago Southland Biography*.