



Thomas Kempthorne was born in Cornwall in 1834 but arrived in Melbourne as a young man, working first as a labourer and then in the wholesale drug trade. In the 1860s he was sent to explore the business possibilities in Dunedin, and stayed to set up his own manufacturing company. After various partnerships it became Kempthorne Prosser in 1870. Evan Prosser, a Welsh chemist, provided technical knowledge, while Thomas Kempthorne provided the business drive.

In 1879 the firm became a limited company and a substantial warehouse and pharmaceutical factory was set up in Stafford Street, from which not only drugs and bandages were supplied but everything from false teeth to hospital beds. In 1880 warehouses were set up in Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland.

In 1881 the government offered a bonus of 500 pounds for three years to any firm which could manufacture 50 tons of sulphuric acid a year, as all acids were then imported and transport by ship was dangerous and expensive. Thomas sailed to Melbourne, signed on an expert, and began building an acid works at Burnside in April 1881. The first sulphuric acid was produced in August, and later hydrochloric, nitric, and acetic acids and ammonia were produced there. Sulphuric acid was also used on guano, bones and other animal matter to produce the first chemical manures in New Zealand.

Evan Prosser withdrew from the company in 1886 to move to Sydney but Thomas remained closely involved until his retirement. His interest in technology was shown when in 1901 he imported Dunedin's first steam-car. He was a director of various companies, and well-known benefactor to various causes such as St. Paul's Cathedral.

He suffered a stroke at a meeting of directors of National Insurance Co. After 'pluckily' remaining until the end of the meeting, he returned home where he died soon afterwards on 3 November 1915. He had been married twice, first to Sarah Moody, and after her death to Annie Robinson. He

was survived by six children from his first marriage and one from his second. Both he and Annie are buried in Dunedin's Northern cemetery.