



The Creative Miller Eye

In Dunedin's Southern Cemetery lies the grave of George Miller

George Miller, his wife Mary and 4 children from Suffolk England, arrived at Port Chalmers on the sailing ship 'Nourmahall' on May 5 1858. George died on 11 June 1905 and is interred in the grave where several family members now lie with the only memorial being a plain rectangle with just one word, 'Miller'. The simplicity of that plot gives no indication of the creative family that followed.

George and family lived in a mud hut near the Northern Ground at the end of Great King Street on their arrival but George, a builder, soon purchased two sections at number 92 and 96 Queen Street, and built two, two-storeyed houses utilising trees which grew on the section. These houses remain today, having been converted to flats for students. George was soon busy building houses supporting the rapid growth in Dunedin that following the 1861 Otago Gold rush.

The first person to be buried in the cemetery plot was one of George's sons also called George who died aged 19. Another son, Henry (called Harry), enjoyed working with wood

like his father and went on to become a master coach builder, constructing award-winning Hansom cabs and many of Dunedin's cable cars.

Henry Miller and his wife Catherine had six children. The eldest, Victor, died in France in WW1 and the youngest Henry, died in WW2 in Greece. Henry's second son Oswald took a keen interest in painting his father's coachwork and in 1913 began his own signwriting business becoming the leading signwriter in Dunedin. It was said that 'Oswald set the standard' and his business, Miller's Studios continues to 'set the standard' today, 98 years later.

Oswald's artistic eye was picked up by his sons, Roy and Ralph, who went on to produce remarkable art work. Roy spent his life running Millers Studios and became New Zealand's leading stained glass craftsman producing over 250 stained glass windows, which are found in churches all over New Zealand. Roy and his designer Beverley Shore Bennett were the first New Zealanders to be appointed Fellows of the British Society of Master Glass Painters. A website www.roymiller.co.nz is being developed to show his work.

Ralph was a signwriter, but his passion was drawing people and he produced a valuable collection of drawings of life in the Pacific during WW2, followed by dozens of paintings of life in Dunedin city. Ralph tragically died in his sleep in 1956 aged 37 but his work can be seen on walls around Dunedin and on the website www.ralphmiller.co.nz

Roy's son Winston using his artistic skills took the small family firm of Millers Studios into the world of shopfitting, introduced leading technology and increased the size of the company substantially. Winston sold his share of the business in 2004 but unfortunately died in 2006. Although a 'Miller' no longer keeps an eye on the business, the company Oswald started in 1913 continues today going from strength to strength..

The Millers were also musicians; Roy and Ralph both played in the St Kilda band and the AirForce and Army Bands in the Pacific, while their sister Mabel played the piano and at times the organ at the Andersons Bay Presbyterian church. The music continues today and in recent times many people in Dunedin have enjoyed the trumpet playing of Ralph's grandson Ralph (Hamish) Miller at the dawn parade, Carisbrook and many other Dunedin venues.

The Miller family today may not be linked to Miller Studios however family members continue a wide variety of creative pursuits including design, fabrics, crafts, painting, photography, teaching, architecture, writing and publishing. The grave might be plain and simple but the family's artistic eye continues to live on.

Prepared by Brian Miller of Dunedin for the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand (www.cemeteries.org.nz).