



A number of Oamaru's early European settlers were of high social standing. One such man was Henry John Miller, the second son of Sir Thomas Combe Miller who was the Vicar of Froyle near Hampshire, England. Henry Miller himself became Sir Henry Miller, receiving knighthood while working as Speaker of the Legislative Council, which was the upper house of the New Zealand Parliament until 1951. Miller passed away in 1918, and is buried in the Oamaru Cemetery.

Miller was born in Froyle on 9 September 1830. He was schooled at the prestigious Eton College and then went on to further his education at Cambridge University (some sources suggest

Oxford). After spending a number of years at university, Miller spent time in France, then Ireland, ultimately making the trip to the southern hemisphere with his brother Thomas, where he spent time in Sydney before moving on to New Zealand.

Arriving in Otago in the late 1850s, Miller took up responsibilities as a run holder on the *Longslip* run near the Lindis Pass. His partners in this venture were Messers Gooch and Cookson; it is believed that Miller was the only partner who actually lived on the land.

In the mid 1860s Miller moved from the run and sold his sheep. He then settled in Oamaru where he had previously purchased land at the first rural land sale in 1861; this was where he built his home, the property was called *Fernbrook*. Miller had also purchased land between Peebles and Georgetown which was called *Altavady*; however this land was leased and farmed by tenants. In 1864 Miller married Jessie Orbell of Waikouaiti and together they started a family.

Miller was politically active. He was the Oamaru representative at the Otago Provincial Council from 1863 until 1867. In July 1865 Miller was appointed to the Legislative Council where he was based for 52 years. He was chosen as speaker of the Legislative Council in July 1892, the first speaker elected by Council. Miller held this position for eleven years, and was knighted for his work in 1901.

One of Miller's lasting influences was his involvement in the establishment of Waitaki Boys High School. As a foundation member of the Waitaki Boys High School Board of Governors, Miller was one of the first to support the idea of a school in North Otago that was based largely on the principles of English public schools such as Eton. He was influential in the choice of a spacious site on the outskirts of town and also encouraged a boarding establishment to make the school appeal nationally. Miller was also active in the decision to select a rector for the school who had either an Oxford or Cambridge education.

As a civic-minded man Miller was involved in many of the town's public institutions. He was a founding member of the North Otago Agricultural and Pastoral Association, the first Chairman of the Oamaru Harbour Board and a member of the Oamaru Dock Trust. Miller was also a trustee of the Oamaru Racecourse. Outside of North Otago, Miller was the Chairman of the Westport Coal Company from 1887 to 1915.

Sir Henry Miller was passionate about classical literature, was well liked by his peers and was considered a “true specimen of an English gentleman”. He passed away on the 6 February 1918 in his 88<sup>th</sup> year and is buried in Oamaru Cemetery with Katherine Helen Miller, who was 24 years old when she died in 1894.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand ([www.cemeteries.org.nz](http://www.cemeteries.org.nz)) from information and photographs supplied by Shanann Carr, Curator of Archives, the North Otago Museum, Oamaru.