



Basil Sievwright was born in Lerwick, in the Shetland Islands, the son of a notary public. He emigrated to Victoria, where he married Mary Brown Fraser in 1861; their daughter Helen Jane was born at Collingwood, Melbourne, that year.

It was probably early 1862 that he came to Dunedin, where he was first a teacher and then a law clerk. Evidently impressed by the prospects, he sent for his family.

Mary Sievwright and infant arrived at Port Chalmers in the 818-ton American ship *Eureka* on 29 April 1862, and the family settled in Mornington, where William was born on 11 November 1862. There followed 5 more children but they lost two in infancy and William died aged 21.

In September 1869 Basil was admitted to the bar, and in 1871 the family moved to High Street, two doors up from Clarke Street. He set up practice at that time with his fellow countryman Robert Stout. Stout did the firm's court work while Sievwright concentrated on the commercial side of the business.

In 1873 when McLandress, Hepburn & Co auctioned off sections in St Leonards, Basil Sievwright purchased a number, and in 1886 he added a further four sections.

Basil Sievwright helped develop St Leonards and Robert Stout developed and named nearby Maia.

Basil was president of the Royal Horticultural Society of Otago from 1874 to 1876 and was able to develop this interest at St Leonards where he had his first summer house built on the slope above Scotland Street (now Takahē Terrace) named Pa Waitaha. A farm was established with stables, dairy, orchard, and the large glasshouse which is now the oldest remaining feature of the present

Vice Chancellor's University Lodge property. Sievwright's distinctive gardener's cottage with Gothic-style windows still exists as 2 Ruru Avenue. He next built a double storey wooden house on the property where the Lodge now stands. In 195-96 he was elected to the West Harbour Borough Council

Stout later went into politics, and the firm broke up amid mutual recriminations in 1887; from 1890 it became Sievwright and James (and later Mondy, Stephens, Monro and Stephens). About 1882, Sievwright upset Frank Fitchett, who gave him a horse-whipping for alleged breach of professional etiquette; he was fined 2 pounds 10 shillings for his trouble.

Basil was financially astute, and among his numerous business interests was Kempthorne, Prosser & Co New Zealand Drug Company, of which he was a director from its formation in 1879, and chairman from 1882 to 1902. This became a period of great expansion for KPs.

Basil organised the draining of the swamps of south Dunedin to open it up for settlement, and he and Charles Reid formed the first Dunedin building society, which assisted many people to purchase their first home.

He was a generous benefactor to charitable causes while Mrs Sievwright and her sons and daughters enjoyed a busy social life.

In 1896 the family moved to another new house in High Street and Pa Waitaha was leased out to another family.

In 1899 Basil suffered ill health and gave up business, dying on 3 April 1902, aged 66. His widow moved to London to be with family and died there in 1909.

Basil Sievwright is buried in Dunedin's Southern Cemetery with son William.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand ([www.cemeteries.org.nz](http://www.cemeteries.org.nz)) from Ian Church's new book *Haven at St Leonards The Story of University Lodge, its background and occupants*.