

There is no headstone on Slattery's grave  
in Dunedin's Andersons Bay Cemetery

### **'The Shiner': Swagger and Folk Hero**

There is no headstone on Edward Slattery's grave in the Anderson's Bay Cemetery, to tell his story. Perhaps there should be, for this man was an iconic figure of Otago folklore. He has been celebrated in the writings of John A. Lee, and Jim Henderson. Songs and verses have been dedicated to him, and he has been commemorated in the name of a recent local music group. He was the inimitable 'Shiner'.

Edward (Ned) Slattery, 'the Shiner', was an Irishman from County Clare who came to New Zealand around 1869, and joined that select group of individuals who lived on the open roads – the swaggers. From the 1870s till the 1920s, Ned travelled the roads and “knew every road and byroad, barn and doss-house in every county..” from Gore to Timaru. When the inclination took him, he would take casual labouring jobs, but would never stay long in one place before feeling the urge to move on. However, getting a free meal or drink, by whatever means he could devise was the Shiner's specialty. There are hundreds of tales told of him, many concerning his predilection for whiskey and the tricks he would play on the unsuspecting to acquire it. “The Shiner simply couldn't resist having a joke or playing a prank, usually for his own benefit and at the expense of another person.”

There was the time when he asked a publican if he would accept stamps. On being assured that he would, Ned ordered a large whiskey and a pint of beer, downed them swiftly and then made his payment – six loud stamps on the floor with his heavy boot. On another occasion he asked for his crockery demijohn to be filled. This was duly done but when the outraged publican found that Ned had no ready cash with which to pay, the whiskey was immediately emptied back into the barrel. However, Ned was subsequently able to enjoy a few drams contained in the very large sponge he had hidden in the bottom of the jar. Another story is told of a practical joke he could not resist playing on the parish priest at Oamaru. The priest, advised to drink goats' milk for his health, wanted to buy a goat. Ned, hearing of this, delivered a goat, and was well on his way with the grateful cleric's two pounds in his pocket before the housekeeper went to milk the animal and found it was a billygoat.

Despite his propensity for practical jokes, the Shiner was a lovable character, well liked and admired. Eyewitnesses describe him as a tall, slim man, pleasantly spoken, with a gentle sense of humour. He was famous for his Irish jig and frequently competed in the Caledonian meetings. Originally intended for the priesthood, he was educated, had a lively intelligence and a quick wit. Oddly enough, considering his transient lifestyle, he was on the electoral roll and voted (with a certain amount of entertainment) in the 1919 general election.

Eventually, age and ill health caught up with the Shiner. He ended his days in the care of the Little Sisters of the Poor at Brockville, where he died, aged 89, on August 11 1927. He was buried in a paupers' grave, Block 25, plot 95, in Anderson's Bay cemetery.

Prepared for the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand  
([www.cemeteries.org.nz](http://www.cemeteries.org.nz)) by Helen Gilmore.

Sources: [www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz](http://www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz); *Swagger Country* (1982) by Jim Henderson  
Kevin McLoughlin (folk musician, Shiner)