



Alexander Thomson was born in Kirkliston, Linlithgowshire, Scotland on 8 October 1846, the youngest of 10 children of John, a miller, and Euphemia (nee Craig). He attended Bathgate Academy, then became a pick-boy in the coalmines. After his father's death the family came to Port

Chalmers assisted immigrants on the *Silistria*, landing on October 29, 1860. Their first home was a mud whare in Albany Street, and Alexander was employed pulling out logs from Pine Hill with his brother John.

Alexander then joined Andrew S. Wilson, a chemist who had established a soda water and lemonade factory. In 1866 he founded 'Thomson & Co' (at first with partners, later with his sons) which became one of the most important firms of its kind in New Zealand, importing machinery from London to manufacture soda water, lemonade and sarsaparilla. Purity, symbolised by Thomson's logo of a white cross in a shield, was the ideal in his factory. Branches were set up in Oamaru, Gore, Invercargill and Napier and agencies in Wellington, Wanganui, and Otaki. The firm's products secured international recognition, winning many exhibition gold medals and first-class certificates.

Alexander married Jessie White, sister of David Renfrew White, in 1875, and they had six sons and three daughters. In 1898 the family moved from North Dunedin to a dilapidated eight-roomed pioneer cottage in Halfway Bush, eventually restoring it and adding a 12-room wing in Tudor style. Today "Ferntree Cottage" is possibly the oldest home in Dunedin. The Thomson family owned this property for over 60 years and one William continued his father's garden design, planting native and exotic trees and shrubs.

Although he had a retiring nature and refused to enter politics, Alexander was Chairman of the Roslyn Tramway Co., a director of the Kaikorai Tram Co., Standard Insurance Co and Caledonian Society, a founder of the Savage Club, president of the Burns Club, member of the A & P Society and vice-president of the Otago Early Settlers Association. He was an enthusiastic collector, and his wealth enabled him to acquire a priceless collection of Maori artefacts, paintings, early records, maps and photographs. After his death his sons maintained the firm and farm at "Wai Rongoa" North Taieri. All the sons achieved fame in various fields.

Alexander died on 23 February 1904 and is buried in Dunedin's Northern Cemetery in the Steven grave (presumably one of his daughters) but he is not mentioned on the grave marker.