



William Henry Valpy and his family were important figures in early Otago. He and his wife, Catherine, nee Jeffreys, arrived in Dunedin on the Ajax on 7 January 1849 with five

of their children; Ellen Penelope, Catherine Henrietta Elliot, William Henry, Arabella, and Juliet Anna Owen. (one married daughter, Caroline, remained in England).

Valpy, a judge with the East India Company, had retired in 1836 to settle first in Bath, and then in Cheltenham. He came from a long line of scholars. Acting on medical advice the ailing Valpy decided to emigrate to a healthier climate and sailed for Dunedin.

Beside his extended family Judge Valpy brought a large staff of servants, a sawmill, a flourmill, and farming equipment. Perhaps his most telling import was a large supply of money. He took up large amounts of land including Forbury, named after his birthplace, and Caversham, named after his mother's birthplace.

An Anglican, Valpy did not seek to offend the leaders of the Free Church of Scotland settlement. However he soon did so. On learning that labourers had been promised an eight-hour working day, but were being paid three shillings for a ten hour day, he and the Rev. Thomas Burns hired labour on the basis of the shorter day. As Valpy was the largest private employer in the colony the Otago Association and Captain Cargill had to follow his example.

This was the action of a high-minded and well-to-do man. Perhaps it would not have caused offence had not Governor George Grey appointed Valpy to a seat on the Legislative Council overlooking the Otago Settlement leaders. Cargill whipped up a storm of opposition to nominated government appointments in general and Sassenach appointments in particular, pillorying Valpy in the Otago Witness. Greatly shocked, Valpy died on 25 September 1852, without taking up his seat.

It was a great pity for the new colony that Cargill took this line as Valpy was a person of ability and connections who should have been encouraged and courted as a businessman and investor.

He is buried in Dunedin's Southern Cemetery and remembered in the name of Valpy Street St. Clair.