



Nathaniel Young Armstrong Wales designed some of Dunedin's most impressive 19th century buildings, and became a leader in public life.

Born at Belford, Northumberland, he was raised in Jedburgh, Scotland, and completed an apprenticeship as a joiner. Aged 21 he emigrated to Melbourne where he worked as a carpenter, and married Agnes Elliott on 1 May 1857.

In 1861 he borrowed the money for a fare to Otago, built a fern-tree cottage at Sawyers Bay and was joined there by his family.

In 1862 he began working for architect William Mason as clerk of works on the bank of New Zealand building, and Post Office (later known as the Stock Exchange) 1864 to 1868. He also began offering his services as an architect from the address: c/o W. Livingston, Bookseller, Dunedin.

In 1868 he became clerk of works for the Otago Docks Trust, supervising the construction of the graving dock at Port Chalmers (now filled in for the container port).

In April 1871 he went into partnership with William Mason as Mason & Wales. After Mason retired in 1874, Wales designed many public buildings including Wain's Hotel, and Staveley's 'magnificent' warehouse with hydraulic lift on the corner of Bond and Jetty Streets (recently gutted by fire), Ross & Glendining's Woollen Mill, and the Colonial Bank in Lawrence. In the 1870s he had several staff and worked himself from morning until late at night.

With the depression of the 1880s there were increasing blank periods and in the mid 1880s Wales was forced into overdraft, dismissed staff, took up an agency for a new system of galvanised iron roofing, dabbled in unsuccessful mining ventures, and wrote at times that he was "tired of it all".

However he still found the energy to serve on the Otago Harbour Board, and continue a long involvement with the Volunteers, becoming commander of the Dunedin District and Lieutenant-Colonel in 1886, and retiring in 1890. In 1895 he became mayor of Dunedin, defeating the long-standing mayor H.S. Fish in a contest, which was described, because of their names, as a battle "between two monsters of the deep".

In the 1890s business picked up and he took his son Patrick into partnership. In 1900 he formed the Architects' Association for Otago and Southland and was its first president.

NYA Wales died on 3 November 1903 and is buried in Dunedin's Southern Cemetery. The family have just had the lovely granite headstone carefully revitalised. He left a flourishing firm which would be carried on by his son, grandson, and great-grandson.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand from "Southern - People a Dictionary of Otago Southland Biography".

www.cemeteries.org.nz