



In Dunedin's Northern Cemetery lies the grave of Captain John Whitson who was Master of the sailing ship *Dunedin*, the first ship to carry frozen meat from Port Chalmers to the United Kingdom.

The *Dunedin* was owned by the Albion Line of Glasgow, which in November 1882 amalgamated with Shaw Saville & Co to form the Shaw Saville & Albion Company. Built in 1874 the *Dunedin* was a sailing ship of 1250 tons. It was on February 15, 1882 that the *Dunedin* left Port Chalmers with the first 5000 carcasses of mutton. Captain Whitson was in command and he took a personal interest in the supervision of the cargo and landed it in good condition.

Whitson, a native of Montrose, had been selected for the great voyage by W.S. Davidson the General Manager of the New Zealand and Australian Land Company of Edinburgh. In 1889 a contract was concluded with The Albion Shipping Company whereby they would fit out one of their best and fastest ships with insulated meat chambers, boilers, and Bell-Coleman refrigeration machinery.

When Davidson met the ship on arrival at London in 1882 he found Whitson "looking very strained and careworn". It had been a voyage which demanded much of the Captain of the ship with the new-fangled refrigeration equipment, and everyone concerned with the venture was fortunate that John Whitson had been the right man for the occasion. The Albion Shipping company were so pleased that the directors gave him a bonus of twenty pounds, and the New Zealand and Australian Land Company voted him 100 guineas.

After a further four voyages with the *Dunedin* his health deteriorated and when the ship arrived at Port Chalmers on March 1, 1886, he was so ill he had to relinquish command and seek medical aid. Yet he was at the Oamaru wharf in May to wave farewell to his former command but he died within 24 hours of her leaving port, on 4 May, 1886 at age 45.

His body was sent by train to Dunedin and his burial on 8 May was attended by some 200 mourners.

*Research taken from copies of newspaper clippings and a Hocken Newsletter kindly supplied by Ian Farquhar.*