



“Mr John William Laing, another of the fast-diminishing band of early settlers passed to his rest on Sunday morning”, reported the *Otago Witness* on 6 January 1909. John Laing was born 1826 in Crieff, Perthshire, where his father was minister of the established church. He was descended from an eminent Scottish family of scholars. His mother, Jane, was the daughter of Professor James Gregory, who held the chair of medicine at Edinburgh University, as had his father before him, and fourteen other members of the family had held professorships in medicine, mathematics and astronomy. His grand father, William Laing of Edinburgh, was a well-known collector of rare books, who had accumulated much of his unique collection during the Napoleonic wars, “when private and public collections of priceless value were scattered over the continent.” He had also been one of the founders and first directors of the Commercial Bank of Scotland. His uncle, Dr David Laing, was the librarian of the Edinburgh Advocates Library and an antiquarian and scholar of Scottish history and literature.

After an education at Monzie Boarding School and at the High School and University of Edinburgh, in 1842 young John and his friend William Landsborough set out for Australia in the barque *Duke of Richmond* to learn colonial farming. They went to work on the sheep station owned by Landsborough's brother, where Laing took a share in the property and remained for several years, while William Landsborough turned his attention to the back country of Queensland, and became famous as an explorer. Landsborough then returned to Britain where he received Royal honours, while Laing came to New Zealand. According to the *Witness*, this was a move “he always regretted”, although it does not tell us why. He arrived in Dunedin in the *Salopian* in 1851 to visit his three brothers who had taken up land in and around Dunedin. Liking the climate of Otago, he went back to New South Wales to wind up his affairs, and, on his return, used his considerable capital to buy up city and suburban property. He made his home at Brockville, Halfway Bush, where he lived a very retired life, listing his occupation on the electoral roll merely as ‘settler’. He married Janet Miller and they had five daughters and four sons. In the last ten years of his life, he moved to 60 Stafford street, naming his house Ramsay Lodge after his grandfather’s home in Edinburgh.

John Laing died on 3 January 1909, having had “sixty years, of colonial experience”, and was buried in the Northern Cemetery, where his wife and one of his sons later joined him.

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(www.cemeteries.org.nz) from the following sources:

Issues of *Otago Witness* and *The Colonist* on PapersPast website, Electoral roll 1882, Gregory and Laing families background information from: www.archiveshub.ac.uk Gazetteer for Scotland website (University of Edinburgh)