



New Zealand Wax Vesta Company, Limited , David Street, Caversham, Dunedin, is an industry which is the only one of its kind in the South Island, and was the first to start in New Zealand in 1895, in the Government building originally erected for Immigration Barracks, Caversham.

In 1901, on account of the large increase of business, the present premises in David Street, Caversham, were acquired. The buildings, which occupy the greater part of an acre of ground, are of brick, and the floors are composed mainly of asphalt; thus they are as nearly fire-proof as possible. The premises are airy, well lighted, and free from the odour of the ingredients used in the manufacture of wax vestas, so named in honour of the Roman goddess of the hearth and fire, Vesta,

Some of the machinery has been made in the colony and some has been imported from Britain, and is of the most modern make obtainable. To make vestas a number of extremely long lengths of cotton, each containing about twenty strands, are passed from a reel on which it is packed, through a trough containing melted stearine and other materials, to a drum. During this time the stearine sets, and the process is repeated a number of times till the requisite condition is acquired. The made taper is then passed to another machine, which cuts it to size and clamps the pieces in frames. They are then dipped in the material which forms the heading, and placed to dry in a drying room.

The “strike anywhere” match, made from phosphorus, lasted until early in the 20th century, and its awful reputation was well earned. The factory workers were exposed to “fossy jaw” and other forms of phosphorus poisoning, and the matches themselves ignited so easily that a busy rat could burn down a warehouse, and a careless small boy lose his life by sampling them.

The match boxes, both tin and strawboard are made on the premises. About sixty-five hands are employed in the works, and make good wages. Much of the material has, necessarily, to be imported from Europe and Britain, but in every case possible the company gets what it can, such as brown paper, of which a great deal is used, in the colony. The registered office of the company is in Wellington.

Mr. Robert W. Rutherford, J.P., Manager of the New Zealand Wax Vesta Company, Limited, is a son of Mr. Robert Rutherford, J.P., the first mayor of Caversham, and was born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1858. He came out to New Zealand with his parents, in 1864, and was educated at the Dunedin High School. Subsequently he engaged in business as a photographer, but retired from that occupation on account of ill-health, and entered into business with his father as wax vesta manufacturers, later on turning the business into a limited liability company. Mr. Rutherford has been a member of the Caversham Borough Council since 1898. He married a daughter of Mr W. Baskett, an old colonist, and has three daughters and one son.

Robert Rutherford died on 5 July 1921 and is buried in Dunedin’s Andersons Bay cemetery in the family plot.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand (www.cemeteries.org.nz) from information in the Cyclopaedia of Otago and Southland, p410.