



Dr. William Johnston Will , M.B., C.M., Edin., Chairman of the Dunedin Branch of the St. John Ambulance Association, was born in the East Taieri district in November, 1858, and is the second son of Rev. William Will, who came to Otago in 1854. He was educated at the East Taieri public school, and the University of Otago, and graduated at the Edinburgh University in 1884. The following year he returned to New Zealand, and established his present practice in the Green Island district, with his centre as Abbotsford, where he resides.

For some time the Presbyterian Church of Otago had been greatly exercised by the need to extend religious and educational services to the scattered rural community. Finally, in early 1854 two young Free Church ministers from Scotland arrived. One was the Rev William Will who was appointed to East Taieri, now to become the second Presbyterian parish of Otago, the other the Rev William Bannerman was settled in Clutha.

Rev William Will was born in Collace, Perthshire, Scotland and educated at the University of Edinburgh, and was only 29 years of age when introduced to his future congregation by Rev Thomas Burns on Sunday 15 February 1854. Thus began a ministry which was to have a powerful impact on the religious and moral life of the East Taieri district for the rest of the century. His long ministry of 45 years was the longest in Otago's history.

When the Rev. William Will and his wife first arrived in 1854 they travelled out from Dunedin by bullock dray. At Abbotsford the bridge broke down as they were crossing. Further on coming down Saddle Hill a barrel of crockery fell off the dray and rolled into a gully. It lay there untouched for several weeks. When it was recovered and opened miraculously not a dish had been broken.

The first residents of the East Taieri Church manse were Rev. William Will, then a widower, and his children. They were joined by Will's new wife, Annie Jardine, in 1879.

A biography of Dr William Johnstone Will, MB., CM.,Edin.,( who became Chairman of the Dunedin Branch of the St. John Ambulance Association), son of Rev. William Will, provides a picture of life in this and the former manse. Visitors were frequent, and the manse became "a favourite half-way house" for ministers travelling to the surrounding districts. William Will was an important and influential figure in the community - the "Pope of the Taieri" - and also a respected statesman of the wider Presbyterian Church. The manse has continued as the residence for all of William Will's successors as Presbyterian minister at East Taieri. Like William Will, several were influential leaders, including Peter Willsman, minister from 1977-2001, who became Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand. All provided an important service as moral and spiritual leaders to the strongly Presbyterian local community.

At first Will had to do all his journeying on foot to visit his parishioners. Work was greatly lightened when he got a horse. With the advent of better roads Mr Will and his buggy became a familiar sight throughout the district, which extended from the sea coast to Waipori, and from Green Island to below Waihola. Within a few years various portions of the large parish gained ministers of their own and East Taieri parish became what is still today.

Rev William Will died on 29 Oct 1912, aged 88 Years, and is buried in the East Taieri Cemetery in the family grave, beside his beloved church.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand (cemeteries.org.nz) from information taken from:

NZ Historic Places Trust website:

<http://historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=3213>

and from "Pulse of the Plains" by W R Kirk.