



There are very few mausoleums in Otago, but in the Port Chalmers New Cemetery is the beautiful mausoleum of the Mill family.

John Mill was born in Fyfehire, Scotland, in December 1845, and educated at Tayport. He left home at 11 years of age to become an apprentice deck officer. He arrived at Port Chalmers on 31 December 1862 aboard *Sarah M* and swam ashore that night – impetuous, or part of the New Year’s Eve celebrations?

During the next three years he worked as a boatman with the pilot service. He was involved with the salvage of the *Thomas and Henry*, the bell from which was used at the first Port Chalmers School on the corner of Grey and Scotia Streets.

By the late 1870s he had built up a fleet of lighters, owned a number of storage hulks, had shares in several sailing vessels and steamers, had become a partner in the Otago Towing Company which owned the two tugs *Koputai and Plucky*. By the end of the 1880s he was the owner of and shareholder in over twenty ships and hulks. In 1876 he had erected a woolstore at the far end of the export wharf, and expanded his business to that of coal merchant with depots at Port Chalmers, Dunedin, Oamaru, Timaru and Bluff, where he also established wool and grain stores.

In 1896 he opened a wool-pressing plant at the Victoria wharf. He held an interest in the Portobello Railway Ferry Company, and was the first Chairman of the Port Chalmers Co-operative Dairy Co Ltd which opened on 1 November 1893.

He also was a director of Standard Insurance Company, Perpetual Trustees Estate and Agency Company and Kempthorne and Prosser Ltd.

John Mill gave long service to various civic, public, and sporting organizations. He served as Mayor of Port Chalmers for three terms and was a Justice of the Peace for thirty years, was on the Otago Harbour Board from 1877 to 1885, and was a member of the Hospital and Charitable Aid Board. He served on the District High School Committee for fifty years from 1875.

He was a popular civic leader. From his family home, "Willowbank" in Aurora Terrace it became his habit to walk down to the pictures every Friday night and the local boys learned to crowd around him to have their admission paid.

John Mill is remembered for his connection with various Antarctic expeditions. In 1901 as mayor he welcomed Captain Robert Falcon Scott and the crew of the *Discovery*. When it was time to start loading coal, Scott wrote in his account of the expedition:

Of all the stores carried, coal was perhaps the most important and I had determined to wedge in every ton we could carry, more especially as, through the generosity of Mr. John Mill of Port Chalmers, such coal as we received there was a free gift.

When the ship sailed for Ross Island the following day Mill had given forty-five tons of Westport coal which was stacked in bags on the ship's decks. On Scott's second visit in 1910 Mill again supplied the coal gratis.

When Shackleton's support vessel *Aurora* arrived at Port to undergo extensive repairs her master, Captain John Stenhouse, appointed Mill to act as her agent, and Mill and Joseph Kinsey were appointed to oversee the task of getting *Aurora* ready to relieve the party left at Ross island before conducting a search at Elephant Island.

Mill married Mary Wilson in 1863 and they had five sons and two daughters. John died on 14 August 1926, and Mary on 22 June 1931, and both are buried in the mausoleum. John was a staunch friend of Port Chalmers but his influence and goodwill was felt and appreciated in Dunedin and other parts of the Dominion.