

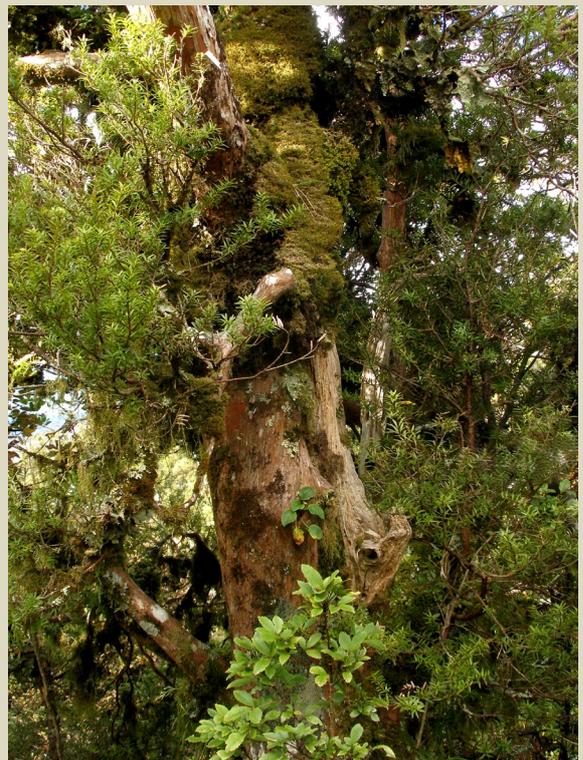
John William Hall (1830 – 1915)

John William Hall was born on 26 January 1830 at Peating Magna in Leicestershire, England, and was educated and served a pharmacy apprenticeship there. He left on the *Egmont* for New Zealand, arriving in Auckland in 1858, and began farming at Otahuhu. However, soon after the opening of the Thames goldfield in 1867, he established a chemist and drug business in Thames. At that time the town was made up of two settlements, Shortland and Grahamstown, collectively called "The Thames"; among the many hotels and watering places that sprang up in the fast-growing industrial area of Grahamstown was the *Union*, listed under the name of John Hall. The same man, perhaps?

Hall was interested in growing trees. Deploring the destruction of native bush, he bought three acres of land at Parawai, Thames. On it he planted New Zealand trees, partly to prove that they were not as difficult to grow as was often believed, and also to attract rapidly disappearing native birds. With few exceptions, the trees and the birds both flourished. He proved, too, that pūriri and totara can be grown from cuttings, and also exchanged seeds with friends in England. James Adams (1839–1906), the first headmaster of Thames High School and plant collector for Cheeseman, was another friend, and both families were reported to have been delighted when Adams' eldest son Ernest married Hall's daughter.

As well as promoting the cultivation of our indigenous trees and shrubs, Hall undertook some experimental taxonomy. He had long suspected that there were two kinds of totara, and obtained a few plants of each of the two forms from the ranges and grew them on in his shrubbery. The differences in leaf habit and earlier observations of fruit characteristics supported his contention, and led to Thomas Kirk naming and describing a new species, *Podocarpus hallii*, in his *Forest Flora of New Zealand* (1889). It was known by that name for many years. However, William Colenso had earlier recognised the thin-barked tōtara in the Ruahine Range as a separate species, and in 1884 had written an informal description, naming it after his friend, botanist Allan Cunningham. Debate continues about who is the "right" author, but most botanists have now opted to accept Colenso's name. Nevertheless the thin-barked tōtara is still commonly called Hall's tōtara.

John William Hall died at Thames on 24 May 1915, nearly 17 years after the death of his wife Mary. Both are buried in the Shortland Cemetery. After a long period of neglect there is reawakening interest in Hall's arboretum, which remains in part as the William Hall Memorial Reserve, in a housing subdivision on a hillside above Thames.



Podocarpus cunninghamii

Podocarpus is a genus of about 100 species of coniferous trees and shrubs, mainly confined to temperate Southern Hemisphere regions. The four endemic New Zealand species range from low growing mountain shrubs to tall forest trees. Tōtara was first collected and described by Allan Cunningham in 1826. *Podocarpus cunninghamii* (known for many years as *Podocarpus hallii*) is a medium-sized tree up to 20 metres high and trunk to 1.25 metres diameter, with thin, papery, reddish-brown bark. The leaves are dark green, alternate, stiff and short-stemmed, 2–2.5 cm long, smooth and closely set on branches. Young trees have brownish, larger leaves, set further apart. It flowers in about December, female and male on separate trees. The ovoid fruit with red peduncle ripen from May. The bark is easily detached in large sheets and was often used for temporary huts, and the inner layers by Māori for packing titi (muttonbirds). The dull-red, close-grained timber, although less durable than that of *Podocarpus totara*, was used for buildings, bridges and wharves. Hall's tōtara grows in lowland to subalpine forests from Kaitaia south to Stewart Island.