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# Colenso



## On the schooner “Blackbird”...

On Sunday 26 October 1834 the *Prince Regent* arrived in Sydney from England; among the passengers grateful for landfall was young William Colenso, itching to get on to New Zealand and start work.

But it was not till six weeks later that they finally got passage—on the fore-and-aft (ie, sails all in a line with the keel) schooner *Blackbird* of 67 tons. Colenso recorded the passage in his diary, December 1834:

- 9 *Left Sydney (breakfast Mr. Hill's) at 11 a.m. on board Blackbird. Dined & tea. cockroaches thick. Slept on deck.*
- 10 *This Morng. at 6 we weighed anchor & proceeded down the Bay. At 9 we ran on a reef, Shark's Island, on shore ate oysters, shells etc.—curious sandstone etc.—on board at 2—at 5 weighed anchor and at 7 anchored again in Watson Bay, in consequence of the cutter not being there—this evening the cutterboat brot. the clearance but forgot the register—the Capt. was obliged to go up to S. for it—slept well this evening in spite of cockroaches!*
- 11 *At 8 this mornng. the P. Regent passed us, at 9 we left the heads and was sick almost directly.*
- 12 *Sick*
- 13 *do*
- 14 *Sick—making little progress—the horrid cockroaches—noise—motion. Sermon on deck, Mr. Wade—Acts II.*
- 16 *Tuesday, wind now fair—moving slowly, saw a black fish today, beautiful weather.*
- 17 *Wednesday—slowly progressing.*
- 18 *Thursday do Six months fm England.*
- 19 *Friday do Saw a whale, a large one.*
- 20 *Saturday. do Afternoon rain & wind, a most amazing current to the S so that our vessel wd. not ansr. the helm at all—rolled exceedingly—sung a hymn, read & prayed together.*
- 21 *Sunday—old friends, porpoises, paid us a visit—unfavourable weather, no service.*
- 22 *Monday. Wretched night, rolled very much.*
- 23 *Tuesday—calm—porpoises innumerable—beautiful medusas—large shark—white gannets—towards evening, breeze.*
- 24 *Wednesday, calm—contrary wind—spoke barque—Hobart Town—out 7 months whaling—700 casks oil—gave us about 20 c.nuts & a piece of fresh pork—men drunk—complete disorder—happily our Capt. is an uncommon sober man.*
- 25 *Thursday—a beautiful warm day—how truly applicable— “Bright & joyful is the morn” etc. Wind contrary, first Xs. at sea.*
- 26 *Contrary winds, ½ a gale—lovely medusas of different sorts passing by.*
- 27 *Most melancholy night pumps every ½ hour—lease increasg.—chron. down—sea breakg. over us, don't know our exact sitn.—½ gale this day, confined to cabin at 12.*
- 26 *Gale abated—very hazy—petrels. At 8 first saw land—joyful sight. Cape M. v. D.*

bearing S.S.W.—15 miles—hazy weather still—then the “3 Kings”—in the aft. service from Luke 13-6-9—in the evening made the N. Cape—prayers below.

- 29 Wind contrary and light—Cuvulle Islands in sight—this evening we saw Pocock ahead.
- 30 Pt. Pocock & Cape Brim the 2 points of the Bay in sight at 5 p.m. we entered the Heads—land appeared very broken & high. At 6 a boat came alongside with Mr. Mears, a merchant, & 5 natives. At 7 we left the Blackbird and, after 2 hours hard rowing agt. wind & tide, we arrived at Mr. W. Williams, Paihia—were (sic) we were most kindly received—we saw Mr. and Mrs. W.—Mr. Brown, Mr. & Mrs. Baker, Mr. H. Williams & Miss Colman & several N. Zealand girls—we were carried ashore thro’ the surf by natives—Praise & honour ascribe to our God.

Sixty-seven tons is not a big boat to cross the Tasman in. I can find no contemporary illustrations, but here is a modern 96 ton vessel



Here is a modern fore-and-aft schooner of about the size of the *Blackbird*.



## The fate of the *Blackbird*

The ship *Hive* beached on Bherwerre Beach, in Wreck Bay, in the Shoalhaven District on the South Coast of New South Wales in 1836; she remained virtually intact in the surf zone, although all knew she would break up in the first big storm. The schooner *Blackbird* had returned from New Zealand on 4 January with a cargo of timber, potatoes and yams. Having discharged its cargo the schooner was then engaged to salvage the *Hive*'s stores left onshore, departing Sydney on 11 January 1836. The *Blackbird*, a colonial vessel of 67 tons, was built in 1828 at the Government dockyard at Moreton Bay.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* of 25 January 1836 picks up the story

“THE BLACKBIRD—We regret to hear of a serious accident to the *Blackbird* schooner, belonging to our industrious townsman, Mr. W.H. Chapman [also an Auctioneer, owner of Yarranbandinni Station], of which the following are the particulars. On Monday, the 11th instant, the schooner started for the wreck of the *Hive*, for the purpose of saving the stores and other articles left ashore: Captain Nutting, Mr. Chapman, Mr. Osmond, and about twelve men going in the vessel. The wind blew strong from the southward, and the *Blackbird* did not reach Jervis Bay until the 15th, when an anchor was let go in about ten fathoms of water, within about two miles of the beach, upon which lay the wreck of the *Hive*. The weather was remarkably fine at this time with very little surf, and the whaleboats were hoisted out for business. The boats continued to work to and from the shore with the principal part of the provisions and other stores, and made twenty-two trips during the day. The little vessel was getting fast loaded, and everything seemed to be proceeding prosperously, when the men came on board for the night. At about nine P.M. a sudden gust of wind from the southward came on, which terminated in a violent gale. The schooner commenced drifting, and an attempt was made, without the slightest success, to get the vessel under weigh; but she continuing to drive in upon the beach, another anchor was let go which held for about half an hour, when the first cable went, and was followed almost instantaneously by the second, taking along with it the windlass. At this time the night was extremely dark, the wind blew a hurricane, attended with rain, thunder, and lightning, and the sea was making a complete breach over the schooner - all on board expecting nothing else than death, for it was so dark, that the situation of the shore could not be strictly defined. The vessel appeared to be getting into broken water, shipped several heavy seas; the whale boat which was made fast to the vessel, also broke adrift. To save the lives of those on board, it was found necessary to throw overboard every portable article, the sails were furled, the fore-top-gallant yard and main-top-mast struck, and the yards pointed to the wind. The appearance of the gale abating, it was thought advisable, as a last hope, to make as much sail as possible, and run her ashore, which was done. The vessel, after striking several times on the sand, and the surf making clean breeches over the schooner, (all on board expecting to be swept away) at half-past two, the whole of the cargo was thrown overboard, and the *Blackbird* fortunately carried up high on the beach, out of danger. At daylight the vessel was dismantled, and Mr. Chapman and Captain Nutting returned to Sydney by land, leaving the Captain of the schooner and the other persons in charge.”

<http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/publications/pubs/shipwrecks-hivereport.pdf>



## Actions on Smoking and Health

*To the end of his days he held spirits and tobacco in utter detestation.* (RC Harding)

Colenso ought to be the patron of ASH NZ: his writing is full of evidence for his dislike of the fragrant weed. He disapproved of tobacco as an item of barter with Māori, dismayed at its addictive power. He wrote on 20 June 1846 to Dandeson Coates, complaining of his financial situation: “Other memoranda of Losses may be easily gathered—from my not keeping Tobacco to pay the Natives for provisions and labour supplied (as is almost every where done to their injury).” Creating addiction, then supplying the needs of addicts has always been a profitable undertaking....

He wrote in his Church Missionary Society journal on 2 May 1848,

We travelled on till dark, when we halted for the night at Okiwi, in Port Nicholson harbor, among a little party of Native fishers. Observing a little girl, of scarcely 4 years!! lighting her pipe with all the *sang-froid* of an experienced smoker, I remonstrated with her parents; they laughingly replied, they could not control her! (their usual cry,) on which I went up and took away her pipe, when she pursued me with a flaming brand, which I also took away, and gave her a good whipping, which caused her to make a prodigious outcry.

From a hut at Mangaroa on the Rimutaka Hill road, he wrote,

One of the whites begged of me, as a great favor, that I would speak to the Natives with me (8 in no.) to give them a tobacco pipe, for their only one had that morning broken. And when I told him, that none of my Natives used tobacco, he was greatly surprised, which surprise increased, when he heard of their having all given up the practice at my request. In fact, he would scarcely credit me; saying he had never before heard of such a thing, nor seen (during his 5 years residence in New Zealand) a party of Natives who did not smoke: so very general has this filthy lazy practice become.

He wrote later, that he was “Pleased to find, that, through my plain and faithful representations to them when at the School last winter, 15 persons (9 men & 6 women) of the valley of Wairarapa, had already left off Tobacco! These persons all inveterate smokers!!” —and again (September 1848), “Another matter, (little enough in itself, but of great tendency to the promotion of good,) I may also mention:—158 men & women of this District (ie, Ahuriri), have during the past year, voluntarily relinquished smoking *Tobacco*.”

He wrote to the Secretaries at Church Mission House in London on 4 December 1852 that my great great grandfather Georg Kissling was biased against him “from my having often denounced his incessant & filthy German habit of smoking tobacco”. In 1880 he wrote to the Committee of the Athenæum (*Hawke's Bay Herald* 6 December) asking “that the morning hours should be allotted for the ladies and the non-smoking members”, which “the committee reasonably granted”. In 1883 to JD Hooker with specimens: “When you see so many Cigar boxes,—don't run away w. the notion that I am become a smoker.”

In 1885 he wrote to the *Hawke's Bay Herald* (21 May) on the closure by teetotallers (temperance societies) of country hotels,

Again:—as I lately put it to one of my Scandinavian acquaintances, who had donned the *bit* of Blue, and who is a religiously-disposed man:— “You smoke, I think?” “Yes, I do;” was the reply. “Well,” I rejoined, “I don’t, and I do not like tobacco; and I believe, with many others, that tobacco is much more hurtful to our rising generation than strong drink. Suppose we (my party) were to combine, and not caring for the comfort and requirements of the larger number or our fellow-men, were to get a law passed prohibiting the use of tobacco; How would you like that?” “Oh! not at all,” he replied “that would never do; that would be very unfair; we would not submit to it; in fact we could not live without tobacco.” “Ah! yes,” I said, “that will do; I have it from your own mouth. And you are a Christian! a follower of Him whose principal tenet was,— ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’”—  
Now, just so, as I take it, is it with a man who needs his glass of Beer, or of Wine, or of Spirits....

Then this from an older, wiser, more moderate man, in his letter “Teetotalism and temperance” to the *Hawke’s Bay Herald*, 29 June 1888,

To me, the intemperate man is to be found in two distinct classes, or companies, in that one regiment:—1. The drunkard, the glutton, the inveterate smoker, the immoderate in dress and vain body ornaments, in pleasures, and in idleness and frivolity, in gossip and low unprofitable talk:—and 2. the total abstainer from the good things that the Great and Good Father of all hath given to man for his use and comfort, with His blessing on man’s progressive improvement in their manufacture, and in his proper use of them. Whether Teetotaler or Vegetarian, anti-tobacconist and antivivisectionist, ascetic or fanatic of any kind,—all alike belong to this class: each with an ill-directed zeal acrimoniously (and too frequently dishonestly) seeking to bring mankind into his own narrowminded way, and looking scornfully on all the rest as being “in the broad way of destruction,” if not already “lost”!

Any excess of fervour—zeal, passion or fanaticism—is as bad as intemperate consumption.

To his disappointment his darling son smoked: 9 September 1893 to Wiremu Colenso:

As to your “Indigestion”: I am pretty sure it is to be placed to 2–3 things:—1. want of *sufficient good* exercise: 2. *too great use* of tobacco: 3. and (perhaps) tea, or coffee, or bacon & eggs, or some food—pastry, pancakes, ‘taty-cake, “sweets,” disagreeing with you, *try to find it out* yourself and *don’t* go to Doctors, neither be taking medicine now & then.

Sound advice then, as it is now.

*eColenso* is a free email Newsletter published irregularly by the Colenso Society.  
Please forward to anyone interested.

Back issues are at <http://www.colensostudy.id.au/>.

The editor invites contributions on any matter relating to the life and work of the Rev. William Colenso FLS FRS, emailed to Ian St George (istge@yahoo.co.nz).

The cover of this issue is based on an art nouveau postcard.

This issue of the Over-seas League's South West Area Bulletin No. 91 March 1958 (price, a penny ha'penny) was kindly lent by Gillian Bell. I wonder if any of those schoolboys, now aged over 70, are now members of the Society?

# OVER-SEAS LEAGUE

INCORPORATED BY ROYAL CHARTER

World Headquarters: One-Sea House, St. James's, S.W. 1

## South West Area News Bulletin

South-West Area—  
Dorset, Somerset,  
Devon, Devon  
and Cornwall

"It's sad that wherever ships could sail,  
It's found that many a mighty man,  
Pray God our greatest men are laid  
Through rotten bars of living grass."  
Tennyson



Headquarters  
Over-seas League, South-West Area  
14 Market Street, Torquay, Devon  
Phone—Torquay 4237

Bulletin No. 91

March, 1958

Price 1½d



David William Colenso



The New Zealand Memorial Column

### The Penzance Memorial

### PENZANCE AND NEW ZEALAND

In the last issue of the South-West Area News Bulletin we gave details of the visit of twelve senior post-primary New Zealand Schoolboys (aged 17 to 18 years) who will arrive in England on 8th April 1958 for a two months' tour of the United Kingdom.

We have since received the following communication from Mr. W. Colenso, a member of Penzance & St. Ives Branch :-

"From seeing the announcement in the Over-Sea Journal for November 1957 I offered that if the Over-Sea League would bring the New Zealand boys to Penzance I would entertain them for a couple of days in memory of my Great Uncle, the Revd. William Colenso, P.S.S., P.L.S. (London) who was born in Penzance in 1811, of an old Penzance family. He did so much for the Maoris, New Zealand and the Empire. Mrs. Crobble Garstin, who is a Committee member of the Penzance & St. Ives Branch has very kindly undertaken to organise the entertainment during the 2 days the boys are here."

We have been informed by Headquarters that transport arrangements are now being organised by a New Zealand Coach Company at a favourable rate and that the additional journey to Penzance can now be fitted in. This has now been arranged and the itinerary as far as the South-West Area is concerned has been amended to read as follows :-

24th to 26th April Torquay. A visit to Plymouth will be arranged.

26th to 29th April Penzance. On arrival in the evening the party will be met by Mr. and Mrs. Colenso and will later attend a Civic Reception by The Worshipful the Mayor of Penzance.

The programme it is hoped will include visits to Geower Mine (Tin), St. Michael's Mount at the invitation of Lord St. Lovan, Lands End and the Logan Rock with a Coastal Tour, also Chysaster and Gwithian ancient villages and the more modern Cornish Gliding (and Flying) Club at Ferrarport.

During the period of their stay in Penzance the party will stay as guests of Mr. Colenso at a Hotel near to his house.

29th April to 1st May Choltonham. More members of the party will be guests in the homes of Branch members. Programme will include a visit to Downton, an Aircraft factory; Gloucester Cathedral conducted round by the Dean; lunch with Dr. E.D.D. Davies in Gloucester; a visit to the Wild Fowl Trust, Slichbridge, and Berkeley Castle. A reception by the Mayor of Choltonham in the Mayor's Parlour.

#### THE REV. WILLIAM COLENSO, F.R.S., F.L.S., (London)

This famous Cornishman, born at Penzance on 17th November 1811, served an apprenticeship as a printer.

In 1834, he left for New Zealand as a Missionary Printer for the Church Missionary Society, taking a Printing Press with him. He arrived at Pahiier, in the Bay of Islands, in December 1834, set up his Printing Press and printed the first book ever printed in New Zealand. The most important of many he completed alone and under such difficulty was the New Testament in Maori.

In 1840 he welcomed Capt. Hobson when he came to proclaim British Sovereignty. He was present at the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi and printed the first copies of the Treaty and the best account of what happened there.

As an explorer of the interior of the country he was pre-eminant, making long and arduous journeys through the North Island, during which he not only mapped the country but collected many specimens of botany and natural history new to science.

He was the first European to climb a mountain in New Zealand and find the Alpine Flora. In 1845 he, with a party of Maoris, crossed the Rushine Range. When they came to the edge of the bush and forced their way through the belt of sub-alpine scrub and suddenly found before them thousands of completely unknown flowers, he was so excited he stripped off his clothes including his shirt and tall hat to carry specimens in, got them safely down to camp, managed to dry and preserve them and finally sent them to the Kew herbarium (London) where they can still be seen. There is a genus "Colensoa", a sort of lobelia, called after him and dozens of species have Colensoi as their second name.

He was the first to investigate the Moa mystery from a scientific angle in New Zealand.

In 1845, Colenso was ordained and was sent by Bishop Selwyn to set up a Mission station at Awariri, now known as Nawia, and was the first white man to live there. It was whilst there that he made the romantic discovery of a lost tribe of Maoris who lived in the forest recesses beyond the Rushine Ranges, living in the style in which the Maoris had lived when Capt. Cook discovered the country. He was the first white man to cross the Rushine Mountains. In January 1923, a memorial to Colenso's memory was erected on the spot at Tu Awara where he preached to this isolated tribe over one hundred years ago.



# Did it catch or was it lit? firefighting in the Colony in Colenso's time

by Gordon Sylvester and Ian St George

*Gordon Sylvester was a professional fire fighter and senior station officer with 10 years as a qualified fire investigator. His fire service career spanned 30 years. A recent conversation with one of William Colenso's great grandchildren Jim Colenso drew the comment that the Colenso house fire at Waitangi in 1852 was deliberately started: that was what he was told in the family circle.*

New Zealand colonists had a range of daily challenges. Sometimes unexpected events impacted on their homes and lives. The civil authorities, where they were established, tried to address problems such as law and order, but fire fighting and fire fighting equipment were not available. In some areas buildings were “protected “ by cladding with corrugated iron in an attempt to “fire proof” the exterior—and in some measure to prevent the spread of fire to other structures. It was never successful in towns.

Both Wellington and Auckland had fire fighting facilities usually provided by Insurance Companies. In 1854 the first volunteer Fire Brigade was formed in Auckland. There were disagreements between the two groups whenever a fire was discovered and of course no agreement was ever reached as to who would put the fire out. But that is another story.

Firefighting equipment was restricted to buckets and wet blankets. No mechanical equipment was generally available until the late 1880s. Hawke's Bay in the 1850s had little or no fire fighting equipment. The use of fire engines was still in its infancy in England; they used riveted leather “pipes” as hose. Thus any suppression activities were controlled by removal of household effects and possessions, before any control of the fire itself was started—when enough people arrived to form a bucket chain from a water supply. This was almost universally unsuccessful owing to the heat generated by the fire, and the flammable nature of the building material. The inability to provide sufficient water to cool the building from the roof downwards was also a serious issue, and aided the rapid destruction of the building.

The other problem was the ability of the fire to spread to other structures and herbage by radiated heat and the action of winds carrying embers some distance from the source of the fire—a very real problem even in this modern age.

In 1849 William Colenso commented to the CMS about fires in Mission dwellings in the past, listing the following:—

*The wooden house of Mr. Parker of Paihia;  
The wooden house of the Archdeacon at Turanga;  
The wooden house of the Rev. R. Maunsell, at Waikato;  
The wooden house of Rev. G. Kissling, at Auckland; were all destroyed by fire!  
The Archdeacon's when on the eve of finishing!! Mr. Maunsell's after he had only been in it a fortnight!!!*

To comprehend the speed and devastation of those early fires we need to look at several factors involving construction of a house and living conditions of the settlers.

Remember that Māori lived in very flammable whares without mishap because they learnt to keep fire well away from the sleeping areas. The settlers on the other hand quite probably wanted to show their civilised natures, choosing to live in conditions close to those back in Britain.

They were accustomed to brick or stone houses in Britain. In New Zealand with its lack of bricks and brickworks they had to rely on the most common building materials, timber, and quite often simulated a brick or stone facade with timber detailing.

Initially those early houses would have been of two or three rooms: kitchen/living room and bedrooms. As they could afford it, rooms for other uses were added—even to building a new house to show off their prosperity. Quite often they would have been clad with rusticating “weather boards” to allow water to run off the sides of the house. Ceilings would have been quite low to preserve heat.

Often a chimney went to the point of penetrating through the centre of the house so as to get some benefit from the heat going up the chimney. The problem here was the heat generated over a long period of time. This heat very slowly started to carbonise the timber close to the chimney—i.e., the roof structural timbers.

This process is termed pyrophoric action. The moisture is driven from the timber and it starts to form into charcoal. Dependent on the type of timber (i.e. hardwood or softwood) there is a point when the timber spontaneously ignites. The fire remains undetected as the smoke is enclosed by the structure, or may be confused with smoke from the chimney.

Almost invariably the fire seat will be inside the roof above the kitchen fireplace. The first indication will be a crackling, as if of the actual fire, and then it will develop into a large fire at height inside the enclosed space—perfect conditions for it to spread quickly, to consume the entire structure, especially if there is a breeze.

The smell of smoke inside the rooms would not necessarily raise any alarm as the kitchen fire would be dampened down but still burning.

This scenario will allow access to the rooms underneath and some salvage will be possible until the ceilings fail and allow the products of combustion to fall into the room, causing the fire to spread rapidly with the extra oxygen and fuel available.

Colenso was a compulsive diarist and recorded the events of the fire and the efforts to control it. His letter to the CMS dated 31 Jan 1853, reads (in part),

*... on Saturday the 8<sup>th</sup>. instant, about 3pm, having less pain than heretofore, I was in my little detached Study in the end of my garden writing. As I wrote I thought I smelt something burning, but, as the Natives are almost always setting fire to the bush on all sides, I took little notice of it. The smell however becoming stronger, I dropped my pen & went into the garden; here I saw smoke coming from the direction of the dwelling house, toward which I immediately went. On my way thither I heard Mrs. Colenso (who was running toward the Study by another path,) screaming out that the house was on fire! And, almost immediately, on clearing the trees I saw, that the fire had already got possession of the*

roof, and, that there was no hope!! I sickened at the sight; but rushing in, we, aided by two native girls, did, what we could. In a few moments some Natives from the neighbouring Village, (all who were there,) who had seen the fire perhaps before ourselves, had also joined us. But, owing to the extreme dryness of the materials, and the very high W. wind which unfortunately blew, (the fire, also, originating at the extreme W. end of the building,) we had scarcely 5 clear minutes for saving any portion of the property within.—And what we saved is scarcely worthy of mention in comparison with what has been destroyed. We only saved:—from the dwelling house,—Mrs. Colenso's workbox & desk, a barrel organ, a part of a Table, 1 little worktable, a few chairs, an old Sofa, the loose bedding which was in use upon two bedsteads, our cloaks, the drawers of 2 chests of drawers, with most of the Clothes which happened to be in them, 2 footstools, a hearth rug, Fender & fire irons:—from the Surgery;—(of Medicines in use & on the shelves—out of nearly 200 bottles and Jars, only,) scales and weights, 1 Bott. of Laudanum; 1 ditto Carb. Ammonia, 1 pot of opium, and a bottle of Sulphur—and a box of sundry medicines not in use:—from the Carpenters Shop;—a very few tools which happened to be in the Tool Chest, (& not, unfortunately, of the most useful ones) a Vice, 2 saddles, and a box containing a few Medicines.—The fire burnt so rapidly, being heightened considerably by the violent wind which blew, which so filled the rooms & neighbouring air with the densest smoke and burning heat; that we were obliged & quickly to abandon all hopes of saving any thing more. In less than 30 minutes all the buildings were down, although the fire burnt strongly until the next day, and, in some spots, till Monday Morning.

Having saved what little we could from the Dwelling house, we hastened to the Study, for the safety of which we now had considerable fears. I have already stated, that this little building was at the end of the garden, between which & the dwelling house were a number of Apple and other fruit trees, interspersed with living screens of bamboos, willow, elder & acacia trees, some of which were upwards 20 feet high; (without these living screens we should not have had any fruit during the whole of our residence here, owing to the nearness of the place to the sea, and the violent winds which often prevail.) With a heavy heart and faltering step I tottered into the study—for it contained much besides books & papers, (there being all my dry and Natural Specimens. Printing Press, Type &c., &c.) and I feared the worst. In my extremity I momentarily knelt and implored the Almighty to spare this Zoar—this little one—already, as it were, beyond all human aid. By this time the few Natives, mostly women, who thronged the door, were very clamorous, shouting the utter impossibility of saving the study, and entering, demanded what they should carry out. The danger was indeed most imminent: the flames and heat borne by the wind being so great that we could hardly stand at the study door, and the immense flakes of fiery material which flew about falling every where and setting fire to the dry grass, &c., on all sides, fearfully increased the danger. While Mrs. Colenso was getting every blanket & woollen rag, even to the saved Hearth Rug, dipped in the neighboring Creek, wherewith to cover the thatched roof, the Natives were busy in lopping off branches from some of the trees for the same purpose, while I (being obliged to make a hurried selection,) brought out my desk, boxes of Mss.,

*Register Books & Communion Plate,—a few extra Medicines, & a copy of Encyclopædia Britannica,—while some kindly officious native upsetting my Type, left it to save the Cases! At this moment the cry was raised of the Study roof being on fire! I rushed out, and, Oh! My GOD! It was indeed the case!! On fire in two places; up above our reach burning rapidly away. That moment I shall never forget. With my heart sunk below Zero, and eyes full of tears, I silently cried to GOD, and with the energy of despair, threw up a wet blanket towards the flaming roof. The wind returned it upon me. I threw it up again; it was again blown back. The natives, said, 'twas useless; the fire increased so fast.—I again threw it up ; and oh! as if spread out by angels' hands, the wet blanket opened fully and covered the large patch of flame, which it kept under until a boy had mounted by the chimney, (our ladder and all our timbers & poles being then, burning.) The second patch which was still blazing away, I now succeeded in pulling out with a garden rake. We now covered the roof with the wet woollen articles, and leafy boughs, and, although we experienced much anxiety, even until after midnight, this building was preserved. Blessed be the name of the LORD! The fences were now burning rapidly communicating the fire by cross lines to every dry thing which would burn, of which, alas! at this (our driest) season there was no lack. Seeing no other way of stopping the fire we broke down some of the fences, in which work, including that of extinguishing, I was, although worn out and in pain, employed till near midnight—the natives having left us before Sunset.*

*The few articles which we had saved we conveyed into the end of the weather-board store, (a building roughly boarded, not lined nor even planed,) in which we also took up our abode. Here we spent a melancholy Sunday; not having saved so much as a single cup or plate, knife or spoon, a bit of salt, or any article of food.*

*Early on Monday morning I dispatched a Native to the Europeans living at Ahuriri (6 miles off), from whom we got a little salt, and a part of a steel wheat mill (they not having any flour); and having in the meanwhile, got out some Earthenware and Ironmongery, and some little stoves, (which being supernumerary were fortunately apart in the weather-boarded store,) in the course of a day or two we got into a kind of homely "bush" housekeeping, feeling our inconveniences, but thankful that they were no worse—that GOD had in mercy remembered us in our low Estate.—*

*By this unfortunate fire I (as well as the Society) am a great loser. All the many Household and domestic articles of Furniture of nearly 20 years gathering are gone! besides many stores,—such as,—Tea, Coffee, Sugar, Salt, Arrowroot, Sago, Flour, Oatmeal, Rice, Biscuit, Wine, Hams, Bacon, Pork, dried fish, preserved meats, &c., in tins, Oil, Turpentine, Candles, pieces of Calico, Sheeting, Print, &c., &c., as well as all kinds of Wearing Apparel; about 100 vols. of Books, Silver Watch, ditto spoons, Clock, 2 steel wheat mills, new Harness, all my wet Natural Collections in Spirits & Acid, &c., many Medicines, Carpenter's, Sawyer's, & Mason's tools, a quantity of sawn & seasoned timber—many fruit trees, including upwards of 200 fine 2-year old grafts and plants:—altogether (and exclusive of the value of my Natural Collections, fruit trees, &*

*plants,) my loss is, to say the least of it, above £300. Your loss, in addition to that of the premises, is that of the Medicines, the Pulpit & Desk Cloths, a few stores, such as, a bell or two, Slates & slate pencils, the oars and Sail of the Station boat, some extra window sashes unglazed),—but several of the foregoing you have not yet fully paid for.*

*In addition to the dwelling house and portion of the Garden destroyed—there has been also burnt, the little barn behind with its contents, and all the small outhouses and offices, and a great deal of the house field and garden fences. The fire burnt with great fury, insomuch that all glass, and every brass article has been remelted, including even heavy bells of 12–14 lbs weight. I believe that there is nothing whatever, which can be of any Service hereafter, save the bricks in the 2 chimnies, which are still standing.—*

Colenso's is a classic case of a situation where poor knowledge, high fire index, domestic living conditions, long dry grass, high air temperatures, lack of water, and building materials all combined to create a situation he and the other residents had no hope of controlling.

Even in this modern age the same process is still going on inside the enclosed spaces of buildings—usually associated with incorrect installation of chimneys, gas heaters etc. It is the prime reason for inspections of these installations while under construction is an integral part of consent process.

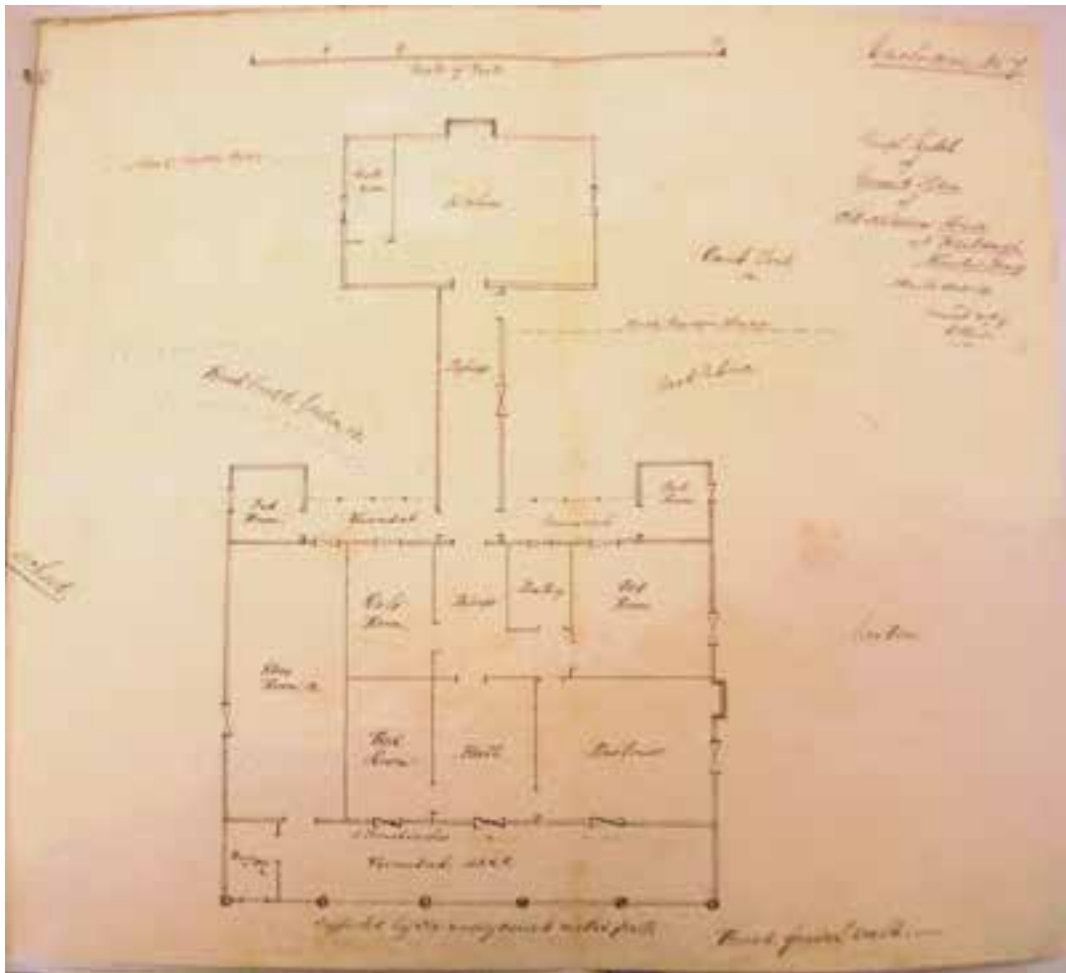
Colenso commented on the thatched roof of his detached study catching fire from embers blowing in the wind. Interesting as it is the earliest comment I have seen about roof materials. I presumed the roof would have had a timber covering, corrugated iron being scarce and expensive, until it was locally manufactured from tinsplate brought in as cargo. The house roof was also thatch.

Colenso described the whole Te Awapuni complex in a 10 December 1862 letter to the Colonial Secretary, but he never disclosed its compass orientation,

“the Mission house... was a strong, well-built, commodious house; the main part of the building being 50 x 36,—neatly reeded in imitation of cane-work, and highly ornamented with native carving;—(some of the posts were nearly two feet across,—all of them were of hard-wood, and dubbed down smooth with the adze;)—containing 12 rooms and two large corridor-like passages, floored, (including its large verandah 46 x 8) with *kauri* and *totara* timbers; having 16 windows all glazed, three of which were 6 folding french sashes,) and 17 doors, and two excellently well-built brick chimnies, (which, spite of earthquakes, are still standing and good). A house, which all who saw it admired, and which the Bishop of New Zealand more than once said, he very much and greatly preferred to a weather boarded one .... there were also, (*besides* the weather-boarded store, and snug study, already mentioned,)

1. *A totara framed raupo house*, 27 x 14, having 3 rooms, 4 glazed windows, and 3 doors, and a good chimney; used for Maori male domestics—(this building was twice erected).

2. *A school-house*, for women and children, 40 x 20, having 4 glazed windows, a door, and a pair of gates, and neatly enclosed within a palmed totara



Colenso's sketch ("an accurate ground plan of it, faithfully taken from the old original") of the main dwelling house at Waitangi Mission (National Archives 1863/2384), on which the drawing by WG Harding for Bagnall & Petersen was based. Sadly both lack any information on compass orientation, so we do not know which is the west side of the house, where the fire started.

2. *A school-house*, for women and children, 40 x 20, having 4 glazed windows, a door, and a pair of gates, and neatly enclosed within a paled totara fence.

3. *A roomy store-house*, (or “rua”,) for potatoes, pumpkins, etc., raised on four strong posts, native fashion.

4. *A boat-house*, also twice erected.

5. *A privy* properly finished.

6. *A stock-yard*, all totara, brought from the interior.

7. *A goat-house and yard*.

8. *A fowl-house and fence*.

9. *A well*, dug, enclosed, and arched over with totara slabs.

10. *A house for bees and for garden tools*.

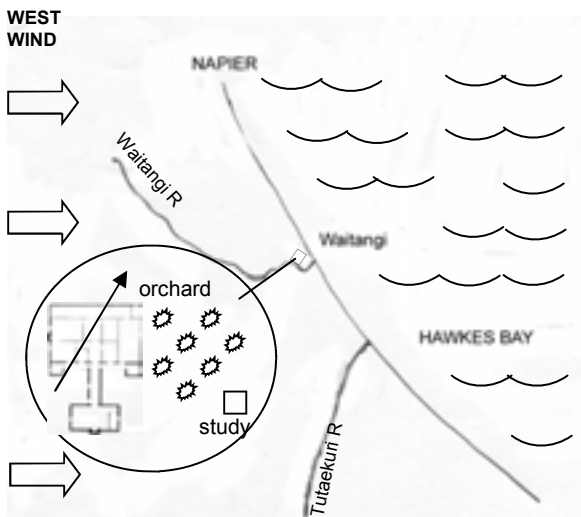
11. *4½ acres of fields, garden and orchard ground, and court and farm yards*, well fenced in 8 compartments, having also 8 gates.—

Together with *many choice fruit trees and perennial roots* of various kinds, purchased at Auckland and the Bay of Islands, and *grass and clover seed* from England.”

There were two brick chimneys—one in the kitchen and one in the parlour. The kitchen was “detached”, connected by an enclosed passage. It was near the study so it is unlikely the fire started there.

The parlour? It was 3 pm on a hot dry Hawke’s Bay 8 January—we would not expect a fire to be on. But the fire started at the “extreme west” end of the house, the wind was blowing from the west, and sparks then set fire to the study roof and the orchard, obviously downwind to the east of the house. That suggests the parlour chimney was in the west wall, and the kitchen to the south (Colenso’s drawing upside-down—or perhaps even more clockwise rotated).

An orientation like that is supported by Colenso’s account of a flood. He wrote of the sea “awfully roaring and lashing over the high bank in front of the house”, and later,



The way Waitangi may have been in Colenso’s time, the Waitangi river disemboguing to the SE of the Station, and the Tutaekuri further SE again. The Māori village was “across the river”—presumably SE across the Waitangi. The “front” of the house faced the bank of gravel behind the beach, the floodwaters (ARROW) were allowed out seaward through the French doors of the verandah, the wind was westerly on the day of the fire. The orchard and study were E of the house.

“the waters began to enter the house, and soon rushed through.... I then threw open all the doors and windows (French casements) to give the flood free egress” (letter to the editor of the *Hawke’s Bay Herald*, 16 January 1894). He once said he could see W. Morris’ house at Cape Kidnapper from his verandah.

The shore runs NW to SE here, and the “front” of the house more or less faced the sea. Floodwaters obviously flow towards the shore, and he opened the French doors (marked on his plan) onto the (front) verandah to let the water out.

Was there smouldering pyrophoric charcoal in the ceiling space above the parlour fire, to be blown into life by the strong westerly? January nights can be cool: the Colensos may have had a fire in the parlour, at the extreme west end of the house, the night before.

Or was there smouldering resentment toward the man who had so strongly condemned his parishioners for adultery and who now confessed it? Colenso had many enemies at this time, and his punishments of Māori for sexual misconduct had been a ritualistic burning of their clothes.\* There is no shortage of possible arsonists to light the fire deliberately in the extreme west end of the house, the place most distant from his study, and that most likely to promote rapid spread.

Peter Wells, who has studied this more than any one, is in no doubt: “Why did Colenso not see what seems perfectly obvious, that his mission station was torched as a way of telling him he was being expelled?” (*The Hungry Heart* p.241).

As far as we can tell Colenso never openly suggested arson—but there is a curious paragraph in his 1862 letter to the Colonial Secretary: “Bp. Williams in par. 5 of his letter, further states, that ‘The original raupo house was *in some way* burnt down.’ Unfortunately for me *I was not in it at the time of its taking fire*, but an intimate friend of Bp. Williams was, and therefore *he may know more* of that calamity than I do.” (Colenso’s emphases). Who was Williams’ “intimate friend”? Did Colenso suspect that Williams had ordered the arson?

Colenso family tradition says it was lit.

*Years later Colenso would write to RC Harding, (12 April 1889): “Here today Inglis came to see me, & to tell me, that he was at Ahuriri, w. Purvis R., on the day of the fire at Waitangi; (both with McLean in his new fine house) and that they 2 climbed up to the top of the hill to see that fire.”*

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\*For instance, these excerpts from the Journals Colenso sent to the Church Missionary Society...

- “Joel, also, informed me of the misconduct of John Te Maire, a Communicant, of his case having been investigated & his clothes burnt.”
- “He informed me... of the immorality of Te Iho, a young man and a Candidate for Baptism, whose clothes Abraham had burnt.”
- “... they took all I said very quietly, and acceded to my demands;—to cut off Isaac and Priscilla from their Society for a little while, and to publicly burn some of each of their clothes, to shew their abhorrence of their conduct, as well as a warning to others.”



# The 1856 Paihia house fire

By Peter Wells

Early in February 1856, Jane Williams witnessed the burning down of the house at Paihia she had lived in with her husband William Williams in the 1830s. The house had also been William Colenso's residence for a while and it was of some importance in his life. It was a remarkable coincidence that Jane Williams was there—she was awaiting the sailing of a ship to take her home to Gisborne after visiting her family—and Jane Williams described the unhappy event.

It is worth pointing out the parallels with the burning of Colenso's mission house at Waitangi in 1853. The missionary women acted with admirable sense, soaking blankets and placing them on the roof. Clearly this was something instilled into them. And Jane's supposition that the source of the fire was 'from the ashes of a native pipe' was one Colenso shared in relation to his own personal inferno.

As Jane Williams comments the fire left the walls so shaky that they would eventually cave in, providing the ruin which anyone can see today.

... on Friday night a sad catastrophe happened. The stone house, the walls of which you remember were built by William's own hands some six and twenty years ago, was destroyed by fire. It was rather singular that I should be there to witness the fate of my husband's work, which had cost him so much labour.

The fire was discovered about 11 o'clock just as Marianne and her daughter were retiring to rest. They had some difficulty in rousing the inmates who were all fast asleep... the crew and Master of the *Osprey* were... very active, and were chiefly instrumental in preserving Christopher Davies' house from the effect of the burning material which were continually falling on the roof, impelled by the brisk wind which blew direct from the flaming house, but had not the two Mariannes, and Mary Ann Preece, with one or two natives, made almost incredible exertions in getting blankets saturated in water laid on the roof before others could get to their assistance, that the house must have gone too. Humanly speaking the family living in the building were by the help of their neighbours able to save nearly all their property, but of course some of it was sadly damaged. The calamity originated it is supposed from the ashes of a native pipe. The walls remaining are so shaky a condition that I expect they will have to be taken down.

In the Winter 2012 issue of *Heritage* magazine I comment, in an article on the pathos of these incredibly important ruins saying "This Paihia site is arguably as important as any in New Zealand to the beginnings of the experiment of Pakeha living alongside Maori" yet they lack any governmental or Historic Places Trust recognition.



## Tribute To Memory Of Rev. W. Colenso, Famous Missionary

TAIHAPE, Monday (P.A.).—A roadside memorial to the memory of the Rev. William Colenso, missionary, author, botanist and explorer, was unveiled at Mokai, Taoroa, 21 miles east of Taihape, yesterday.

Not far away was the site of Te Awarua Pa, which Colenso first visited in February, 1847. He was the first white man to cross the Ruahine Ranges from Hawke's Bay to Rangitikei, then known as Inland Patea.

The unveiling ceremony was performed by Mrs F. E. Swabey, oldest surviving grand-daughter of Colenso.

On behalf of the Colenso Memorial Committee, Mr V. Smith, chairman, who is also chairman of the Rangitikei County Council, welcomed the visitors, and an address was given by the Rev. M. A. Bennett, of Manawatu.

A resume of the life and work of Colenso was given by Mr T. G. Petersen, of Palmerston North, and by Mr R. A. L. Batley, of Taihape, who is an authority on the history of Inland Patea.

A grand-nephew of Colenso, Mr William Colenso, who has recently arrived from England, also spoke.

From 200 to 300 people watched the ceremony.

◀ Pam Hyde kindly copied this for us. She discovered the clipping inside her great grandfather Henry Suter's copy of Colenso's Presidential address (*Hawke's Bay Philosophical Institute Anniversary address by the President, William Colenso*. R.C. Harding, Napier. 1888. 35p.)



▲ William Colenso (grand-nephew) at the unveiling of the plaque, Mokai Patea 1951.

**G**ordon Sylvester wrote, "Item 15 in the Colenso household list (*eColenso* June 2012) includes 'Shoe Last, Wax, Hairs, Awls' with the shoe stuff. I might be able to add a little there. Assuming Wm repaired his own footwear, the Hair and Wax more than likely will have actually been Pig Bristles. These would have been combined with the wax and linen thread to create a cobbler's thread. This was rolled from several lengths of linen thread with a bristle at each end so as to make a double ended thread. This thread was then passed through the two or more pieces of leather and a loop introduced to act as a lock and pulled tight. During my apprenticeship as a Bespoke footwear worker I had to make and use such a thread in repairing or making new inner soles and sewing on the welts. I was described as proficient."

**O**n 22 November 1848 Colenso and his party were at Te Hawera, in the Bush district between Eketahuna and Woodville. He wrote in his journal, "After breakfast I married 4 couples, all elderly people.... The wedding feast this day was principally composed of large Parrots, of which there were upwards of 50, cooked (as they always are) with their big heads on, looking so hideously queer as almost to baulk the appetite of the novice." The kakapo survived a further 100 years or so before becoming extinct in the North Island.



*Blechnum colensoi*: a striking fern of permanently wet places. Note the slim fertile fronds—  
Photograph by Mike Lusk

## William Colenso: His Life and Journeys

*A.G. Bagnall and G.C. Petersen,  
edited by Ian St George*

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