

# COLENZO

The e-organ of the Colenso Society Inc.,  
32 Hawkestone St, Thorndon, Wellington:  
for the making-known the life and work of  
the Reverend William Colenso.

## SUNFLOWER SOAP. REGISTERED.



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*William  
Colenso*

His Life and Journeys

A.G. Bagnall & G.C. Petersen

Edited by Ian St George



Otago University Press  
— available now

# Colenso at the NZ Exhibition

On 12 November 1864 William Colenso wrote to James Hector, since 1861 director of the Geological Survey of Otago, and in 1864 organiser of the New Zealand Exhibition to be held in 1865 at that great and gold-rich city, Dunedin.

[Hector's work in Otago later brought his name and talents to the attention of the central government. In 1865 he was appointed director of the Geological Survey and Colonial Museum in Wellington].

Colenso's letter reads,

Napier, Saturday evening,  
Novr. 12<sup>th</sup>. 1864.

My dear Sir

I have just screwed down the 3 Cases of Sundries, intended for your Exhibition, of which I enclose an outline list.—

I had no idea, when I commenced, I should send you so many, or have had so much trouble and labour: one reason of my doing so much for you, (apart from my hearty cooperation) is, *my having heard* of but little being generally done in the N. Provinces. Of one thing I am pretty certain (both with regard to things now sent & essay,) that whether I shall please or not, *I have really "worked with a will."*

I wish—*on your account*—our Assembly did not meet so soon, as, Had I more time, I could have put up what I send more satisfactorily: I leave on Thursday (17) for Auckland.

Of the things now sent:—

1. They are all packed *well* by my own hand.

2. Of the *Books*: I had asked you about *Cook's Voyages*—but perhaps you overlooked it in your reply; I have however risked the sending them; as, if you have *not* got them, you will (I imagine) welcome them. I also send *Raoul* (as *his* plants & plates are mostly Mid. Island,—and the classic *Forster* (if only to compare the *first published* drawings of *N.Z. plants* with those in Hooker's *Fl. Nov. Zel.*),—*Owen's Moa & Apteryx* you wished, and I send with great pleasure: if *you can*, get them bound in one, (we have no B. Binders *here*.) I *will pay*, & so exhibit. I have enclosed a Copy each of 2 of my *early* publications on *N.Z. for you*; & hope you will do me the honor of accepting. I have also enclosed vol. II. of the *Tasman. Journal*, and a No. of the *Annals. Nat Hist.*, each containing my little Monograph on the *Moa*, (*both referred to by Owen in his large work*),—in fact, that in the "Annals", he himself sent thither to be printed;—that however in *Tasm. Jl.* is the more full and popular. If your Juries should note any of our *bonâ fide* *N.Z. pubs.*, I hope they won't overlook this. I regret not having a single copy left of that Monog. I leave it entirely with you to "*exhibit*" the "*Tasm. Jl.*", or "*Annals*" number, containing it, or not. You may smile at the lithographs in the *T. Journal* (i.e. those of the

Moa bones)—but *at that time* there was *no* lith. artist in V.D.L.!! The Books, &c., in Maori & Eng. printed in N.Z. were *wholly* done by myself, without assistant! Such (in those days) was not to be had in N.Z., and I had no alternative but to gird up the tighter.—

3. There are several choice & unique things in case 2.—(be sure to *open* the small round box, & small tea chest of *wet* sp. yourself.)—particularly

α. *The Bell.*

β. *The geolog. sps. Antarctic lands:* (the officers of that expedn. told me, “they were (to them) worth more than their weight in gold”—and I only got them through giving them of my own stores.)

γ. *The Land Shells* (N.B. those corresponding Land shells mentioned in Dieffenbach’s work, vol. II (Gray’s Catalogue), were *surreptitiously* published; I discovered them, and gave to others (*under promise &c.*) through whom they reached Gray!!

δ. *The Fishhooks, Cord, & Carved Box.*

ε. *The 2 specimens in spirits* (just put into *fresh* spirits (after 25 yrs.) & look as well as ever!

θ. *The Moa bones:* (I had also mentioned *these* to you, but you also overlooked it in replying: it *may* prove to be a different sp. from any known—at all events different from your Southern sps. I have several of the smaller bones of *the same specimen*, but I really cannot put up any more.—

Of the Geological sps. in Case 3, I fear *you* won’t think very highly. The N.Z. ones however are mainly from places where no professed Geologist has been; and I wished for *you* to see them—they might be serviceable. The one from Cape M.V. Diemen—the one from the *top* of Maunganui (Tauranga Harbour,—2 or 3 fossils from H. Bay, &c. please take care of—many are (to me) painful & pleasing mementoes of the long past! I should greatly like to have your skilled opinion on a few of them. I have still a lot more.

A word as to what I have *not* sent, *i.e.*

N.Z. Botanical specimens

N.Z. sea, river, & Lake shells

N.Z. Fossils—

N.Z. entomological sps. &c

These I have *not* sent, wholly through want of time: my Fossils are not fit, being still in their matrices.—

I believe our Local Commee. have *lately* engaged a Mr. W. Faichney to go down and look after H. Bay things: but Mr. Wilkinson (to whom I shewed your & Mr. Mason’s notes,) would rather my small numerous interesting things were sent to *you*,—since you had so kindly undertaken, &c.,—but Faichney can take *all onerous* duty. I am sending an outline List of the articles to Mr. Wilkinson.

I shall insure them as follows, Case, no.1 £60: 2, £150. 3, £40 = £250.

The *Pine Cones*, *if wanted*, might be sold: a few I sold here at 4/- ea.—

If the essay I sent should be *well*-printed (*in extenso*, or nearly so), I should like to have, *extra and at my own expense*, 200 additional Copies struck off: could you also manage this for me?

If you should find time to scratch a line to me, do so to me at Auckland.—

Heartily wishing your Exhibn. every success. Believe me

Yours very sincerely

Wm. Colenso.

P.S.

Monday evg. 14<sup>th</sup>.

I now close. I have just seen Mr. Wilkinson, who strongly wishes to publish in our local Paper my *outline List* furnished him, in order, if possible, to induce others &c., and I have assented to his doing so. The 3 Cases are at the “Spit”—and will be carefully put on board the “*Queen*” Str. tomorrow. It has just occurred to me, that you *may* find the fresh (methyld.) spirits (which I put on the *Hatteria* lizard) discolored—as I recollect using a piece of new *red* sheep-skin (having no white) to tighten the large bung, & the motion may extract the colour—if *so*, and it requires new spirits, may I further trouble you to obtain such, &c., and charge to me: and let me know the *amount* of all expenses incurred for me, and I will remit.

I am also sending you in addition (and at Mr. Wilkinson’s request) a handsome Carved Paddle.—Yours faithfy

W.C.—

**The *Hawke’s Bay Herald* of 15 November 1864** would boast

We are gratified to learn that an interesting collection of exhibits is already supplied by a few of the settlers of this province—sufficient, at all events, to ensure our not being ignored altogether (as seemed at one time probable) at the New Zealand Exhibition. We subjoin a list of contributions up to the present time....

MR. WILLIAM COLENSO:—

Cook’s Voyages, great Government edition (*editio princeps*), 8 vols., royal quarto, and Atlas (elephant folio), maps and plates

*Flora Antarctica*, 6 vols., Royal quarto (colored plates)

Raoul’s folio Botanical work on plants of Middle Island, plates

Forster’s (classic) *Generum Plantarum*

Owen’s Monograph on the Moa

" " " *Apteryx*

Mr. Murray on Flax Plant, N.Z., (printed on paper made from it) 1838

Paper made from N.Z. Flax, 1838

New Testament, N.Z., printed at Bay of Islands, 1837

Common Prayer (complete), N.Z., printed at Bay of Islands, 1839

First book printed in N.Z. (Feb., 1835)

First English book do. do., (1836)

Specimens of earliest Printing (public papers) in N.Z., in 10 sheets (A.D., 1835-40), including Treaty of Waitangi, &c, &c.

First book printed for New Zealanders, 1833

Sundries—1st Sermon, 1st Almanacks, 1st Gazette, &c.

- 1 copy of a journey of a Naturalist in N.Z., printed in Van Diemen's Land, 1844
- 1 copy of *Filices Novae*, N.Z., printed in Van Diemen's Land
- 1 round Box, containing Chrystallised Volcanic Sulphur specimens from Islands in the Bay of Plenty
- 1 best Native Bordered Mat
- 1) " Black String ditto
- 1 Axe of State, from Island of Mangaia
- 1 Native Carved Tinder-box
- 6 "Moa" Bones (a set)
  - 2 Tarsi
  - 2 Tibiæ
  - 2 Femora
- 1 Saw, made of Sharks' teeth, from Byron's Island
- 1 Carved N.Z. Tablespoon
  - 6 Native Stone Axes (1 large one being of "green-stone" or "Jade")
  - 1 Antique Bell, with inscription in Javanese characters—obtained in interior of North Island in 1837
- 1 round Box, containing —
  - 1 pair N.Z. Helices ) 8 land
  - 3 pairs N.Z. *Bulimi* ) shells
  - Specimen of Tin Ore, Thames
- 1 Gold Seal, with a N.Z. engraved stone—A.D. 1836
  - 2 ancient Fish-hooks—human bone
  - Specimen of Cord, N.Z. manufacture (A.D. 1836) on reel
  - 1 Fancy Maori Basket
- 3 Geological specimens of furthest Southernmost land (valuable)
  - 1 ditto of Auckland Island
  - 20 specimens of Red and White Carnelian, from Thames and West Coast
  - Bitumen, East Coast (2 pounds)
  - 2 Whales' Teeth (H. Bay)
    - 1 large specimen Calcite, Caves, H. Bay
    - 1 large Paper Mulberry Cloth, from Pacific Islands
    - 1 large Mat (best quality but old) N.Z. manufacture
  - 1 Tea chest, containing—
    - 1 *Deinacrida gigantea*, in. sp. )
    - 1 large Guana-lizard, *Hatteria punctata*, do. ) in glass
    - 1 glass bottle Ambergris (H. Bay)
    - 1 " Maori Rouge, before burning, or Red Oxide of Iron
- 1 specimen Contorted Carnelian from West Coast
- 40 Cones of *Pinus Pinaster*, grown at Waitangi, Hawke's Bay
- 90 Geological, Mineralogical & Fossil specimens from North Island
- 12 Volcanic ditto ditto

14 specimens Copper Ores, Cornwall, Great Britain

26 ditto Tin, Lead, Iron, Antimony, Mundic, Manganese, Uranite, Blende and Serpentine, from Cornwall, Great Britain



## THE AUCKLAND SUPREME COURT

# WILLIAM COLENZO

## CAN YOU ASSIST PLEASE?

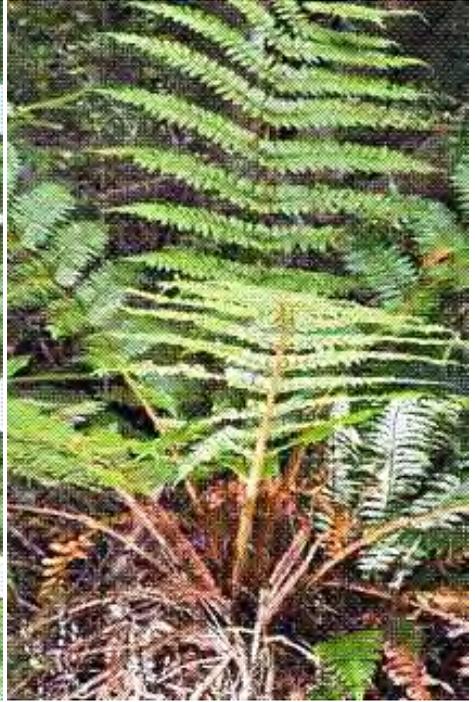
Colenso wrote in his autobiography, “But it would require many words to give you a correct outline of what strange and false charges I have had to meet and *to bear*; 1 was that I had turned Mrs. C. out of doors; another that I had cast her off with the 2 children; another that I was living disreputably with Mao. women; another that I was a complete drunkard and common card player with the low whites, but I have never cared to answer these—I have lived them down! (another that I was unfit to be the trustee of my own 2 children: and this last abominable story was even sworn to in the Supreme Court at Auckland: and there are many other heavy charges).” [1]

The two children Fanny and Latty accompanied their maternal uncle John Fairburn to Auckland in October 1852. Elizabeth Colenso left her husband and went to Auckland to live with her children in the spring of 1843.

The Supreme Court hearing therefore was probably in 1844 or later. Court reports were not formalised until the 1860s, and one must rely on newspaper reports before that. I can find no reference to the Colenso hearing in “Papers Past”.

It would be good to find a report of the hearing: does any reader know of it?

1. Bagnall AG and Petersen GC. William Colenso: his life and journeys. 2nd edition edited by Ian St George, 2012. Appendix G. Otago University Press. (see advert. this issue).



*Cyathea colensoi*: photographs by Jeremy Rolfe

# Colenso and the New Zealand Society

At the Annual Meeting of the Wellington Philosophical Society on 14 March 1899 the Chairman Sir Walter Buller drew attention to the loss the Society had sustained by the death of the late Rev. W. Colenso, and Sir James Hector moved, "That a record be made in the minutes of the great services rendered by the deceased gentleman." In speaking to the motion he said (among other things) that he (Colenso) "was the founder, with the late Sir George Grey, of the New Zealand Society, upon which the Wellington Philosophical Society was engrafted...." [1]

There is no other report of Colenso's part in the founding of the New Zealand Society, and indeed Bagnall & Petersen wrote,

There seems... to be little basis for the statement that Colenso, with Grey, founded the New Zealand Society in 1851. The society was constituted in July, 1851, and the rules published at the time did not mention Colenso as being associated with the sixty members in any capacity. Following the inaugural meeting on 2nd July the society met twice monthly for the rest of the year, at the end of which time it had elected two honorary members, one of whom was William Swainson. The other, unnamed in the brief history of the society prepared by Robert Pharazyn, who will be remembered as Colenso's opponent in the first political struggles, may have been the deacon of Ahuriri. The omission is certainly peculiar, although at the time the society was organised Colenso was preoccupied in Ahuriri and would not have attended any meetings. [2]

## 1851: The New Zealand Society

The Society, whose formation was "in great measure owing to the zealous exertion of its Secretary, Mr. Mantell" [3], and whose constitution would be "very similar to that of the Royal Society of Van Diemen's Land", held its first meeting on 5 July 1851,

...at which upwards of fifty members were present.

Mr. Raymond having been voted into the chair, the acting Secretary of the Committee for the foundation of the Society read to the meeting the following abstract of its objects.

1. The development of the physical character of the New Zealand Group, its natural history, resources, and capabilities.
2. The collection and preservation of materials illustrative of the history of its native inhabitants; their language, customs, poetry, and traditions.
3. The publication of such papers on these and other subjects as may be deemed by the Council of sufficient importance.
4. The formation of a Library of Standard Works, and of a Museum in illustration of the above subjects.
5. The establishment in the sister settlements of corresponding societies in furtherance of the above objects.

The following resolutions were then put and carried unanimously: Proposed by Mr. Mantell, and seconded by Dr. Monteith:

"That his Excellency Sir George Grey, K.C.B., Governor-in-Chief, be requested to

accept office of President of this Society.

Proposed by Capt. Rhodes, and seconded by Mr. Roberts:

That his Excellency Lieutenant-Governor Eyre Lieutenant-Colonel M'Cleverty, Mr. Justice Chapman, and Archdeacon Hadfield, be elected Vice-Presidents.

Proposed by Mr. J.H. Wallace, and seconded by Mr. J.M. Taylor:

That Captain Rhodes be appointed Honorary Treasurer.

Proposed by Mr. Stokes, and seconded by Mr. Waitt:

That Mr. Mantell be elected a member of the Society.

Proposed by Mr. Roberts, and seconded by Mr. J.M. Taylor.

That Mr. Mantell be appointed Honorary Secretary.

Proposed by Mr. Roberts, and seconded by Mr. Moore.

That the First Council be elected for six months.

Proposed by Mr. Mantell, and seconded by Dr. Monteith.

That the following be the members of the first Council:— Mr. Fitzherbert, Mr. J.

Woodward, Dr. Featherston, Mr. W.W. Taylor, Mr. R. Hart, Mr. Raymond, Mr. Roberts, Mr. Lyon.

Proposed by Mr. R. Hart, and seconded by Mr. Mantell:

That W. Swainson, Esq., F.R.S., (now absent from the colony,) be elected an honorary member of the Society.

Thanks to the Chairman were then proposed by Mr. Fitzherbert, and carried unanimously. [4]

A correspondent (signed “Æ”) to the *Wellington Independent* was outraged, presumably at being left out...

Sir,—A. Society, assuming the name of the “New Zealand Society” has been prematurely organized by a few individuals in this settlement in consequence of some correspondence which had taken place between certain individuals here and others in Sydney. The gentlemen of New South Wales who have thus propounded their wishes for a cooperation in the promotion of scientific and natural science, knew nothing, comparatively, of the estimate in which those to whom they had applied are held in this colony. The number of persons entitled to the appellation of scientific, in Wellington, is comparatively very small indeed;— probably that number may be reduced to a unit, certainly it would not extend very far beyond this, in any arrangements which might be made of these digits in expressing either quantity or quality. In the selection already made one unit may certainly stand conspicuously forward in natural science, in the name of Sir George Grey, K.C.B., as President. In addition to this, with the exception of His Excellency Lieut.-Governor Eyre, we know of none entitled to any distinction bearing upon the subject in question.... from the acknowledgement of the parties themselves who have been actively engaged in attempting to establish the foundation of this society, a packed majority of their own creatures has been invited by ticket to attend the preliminary meeting of members, so as that no possibility shall ever after occur that any Council shall be elected, the elements of which may be made up of persons favourable to progressive information. (signed) Æ. [5]

Sir George Grey addressed Æ in a lavish speech (in which he made no mention of Colenso),

I am told that some, dissenting from the views I have above expressed of the learning and talents of many in this colony, think that the amount of knowledge that we individually and collectively possess is so trifling, that the attempts we propose to make to preserve it, to increase it, and transmit it to others, are useless and uncalled for. [6]

William Colenso was not at the meeting, nor was he mentioned in any newspaper report associated with the Society, nor is he mentioned in correspondence and lists of members held at the Turnbull Library [7] (despite a claim to the contrary [8]). In May 1851, two months before that meeting, his illegitimate son Wiremu was born, and his troubles were just beginning.

Swainson declined the honour of Honorary Membership, so at the meeting on 22 October 1851 Dr. Mantell FRS and Professor Owen FRS were elected honorary members. [9] They were probably the two Pharazyn was referring to—Bagnall & Petersen appear to have been wrong in deducing that Pharazyn (whom Colenso regarded as an upstart) had omitted his name.

After 1851 the Society met sporadically in Wellington, but Colenso was never numbered among those present, nor ever mentioned in the newspaper reports. He had last visited Wellington as a missionary in 1849, and as a parliamentarian from 1861 to 1865 he travelled to the capital, Auckland, returning to Wellington only in 1862 and in 1865 for the last time.

### **1867: Revival**

In October 1867 the *Evening Post* reported,

A very neatly got-up little pamphlet of eight pages has been put into our hands by Robert Pharazyn, Esq., the acting secretary of the New Zealand Society. This is a scientific society, constituted in July, 1851, “for the development of the physical character of the New Zealand group, its natural history, resources, and capabilities.” The pamphlet describes in terse and well-chosen language its career from that time to the present, which does not seem to have been a brilliant one, as it has lingered through a feeble existence until now, when it is all but defunct, its property having been transferred, since 1865, to the Colonial Museum. It is with a view of reviving an interest in this, which might become a most useful institution, that his Excellency, who is the president of the society, has invited its members and a large number of scientific gentlemen to a conversazione at Government House on Friday next. [10]

The *Wellington Independent* carried a report of that glittering conversazione, “to which upwards of four hundred invitations were given. There were at least three hundred persons present, and the evening passed off in a most agreeable manner.” [11]

The article listed many of those attending. William Colenso was in Napier. He had been defeated by McLean in the election for the House of Representatives two years earlier: he wrote to Catchpool from Wellington in August 1865, but that was his last visit.

### **Colenso and Grey**

George Grey served as Governor of New Zealand twice: from 1845 to 1853, and from 1861 to 1868. He was clearly the driving force behind the original New Zealand Society in 1851 and its revival under the New Zealand Institute Act, 1867. James Hector came to Wellington in 1865 after Colenso’s last visit.

Sir James Hector was not a man to make an inaccurate report to his Wellington Philosophical Institute colleagues, so the questions remain, was Colenso involved in the founding of the Society? And where did Hector get his information?

Colenso knew Grey well—hardly surprising considering the range of their mutual interests.

Could he and Grey have hatched the idea of a society together before 1851? There was ample opportunity—the two corresponded and Colenso mentioned several long evenings spent together in 1848 and 1849,

*9 May 1848: An invitation had come from the Governor for us to dine with him the next day, which Mr. Cole had accepted for himself & me.*

*10: Evening, to Government House, received most cordially by His Excellency. Remained till a late hour; the Governor closely talking all the evening. He seemed much interested in the welfare of the Natives, though of opinion they must necessarily fall before the stream of Colonization....*

*12: The Governor having expressed a wish to see a copy of my little work on the “Moa”, and not having one here, I sent him a copy of my “Ramble”, also, printed at Hobarton.*

*15: Received today a kind present from the Governor, a copy of his Travels in 2 vols. Wrote him....*

*16: This morning I received the Governor’s answer to mine of yesterday; His Excellency wished me to call on him this evening.... Evening, went to Government House, and remained till a late hour....*

*17. Afternoon, the Governor and his Private Secretary called.*

*31 March 1849: Mr. Cole brought me a pressing invitation from the Lieut. Governor, to make his house my home, &c., in the event of my now proceeding to Wellington*

*5 April: Zachariah also brought me a letter, from the Lieut. Govr., containing a most kind and pressing invitation to take up my quarters at Govt. House.*

*10: Returning to the Town and meeting Mr. Cole, we called upon the Lieut. Governor, who repeatedly pressed me to make his house my home, even to shewing me the rooms which had been put in order for me, and pressing me to bring all my (ragged) Natives with me! But, for various reasons, I considered myself bound to refuse all his proffered kindness, although in so doing I may possibly have done myself injury. From Govern. House I went to see Archdeacon Hadfield....*

But by now Colenso’s conscience would not allow him to stay with Grey, whose plans for the wholesale purchase of Māori land in the Wairarapa, Colenso considered wrong. Although he continued his missionary journeys in Hawke’s Bay and the Wairarapa until his removal by Bishop Selwyn in November 1852, Colenso did not visit Wellington again until 1862 as a Member of the House of Representatives. [12]

The Philosophical Society of Australasia was founded in Sydney in 1821. It became the Royal Society of New South Wales by Royal Assent in 1866. Who had corresponded with Sydney as “Æ” asserted in July 1851?

Was Colenso’s 1850 letter to Ronald Campbell Gunn in Tasmania important?

I think I saw in some Paper, brief mention made of a new Scientific Society having sprung up among you. What is it? Is it a Phœnix; arising from the ashes of its sire, of which it will not be ashamed, and which it is gloriously to surpass? or, is it a kind of anti-association? Seeing that our Colonies may almost be termed, the very prolific hot-bed of opposition.— [13]

The Tasmanian Society became the Royal Society of Van Diemen's Land for Horticulture, Botany and the Advancement of Science. Colenso was a founding corresponding member: he wrote in 1892, "There are just 3 Corresponding Members left of Sir John Franklin's original Sc. Socy. founded 1840,—Sir G. Grey, Sir J.D. Hooker, & W.C.!" [14]

A branch was formed in Launceston in 1853, and perhaps it was the planning for this that Colenso asked Gunn about. Certainly the NZ Society based its Rules on those of the Tasmanian society.

Here's an informed guess, almost entirely lacking evidence: Grey and Colenso, men of shared intellectual interests and each a corresponding member of the Tasmanian Society since 1840, informally discussed the formation of a New Zealand Society in Wellington in 1849. Colenso's opposition to Grey's land purchases and his troubles at home prevented his further participation and Grey was acknowledged as the Society's founder in 1851. During the 1865 to 1867 discussions between Grey and Hector about reviving the Society, Grey recalled Colenso's early involvement, and Hector in due course reported it to the Wellington Philosophical Society after Colenso's death in 1899. Hector was only 65 in 1899, so it seems unlikely his memory was faulty.

## References

1. 1898. *Proceedings NZ Inst.* 31: 723.
2. Bagnall AG, Petersen GC 1949. *William Colenso: his life and journeys.*
3. Wellington Extracts. *Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle*, 2 August 1851, p.97
4. New Zealand Society. *Wellington Independent*, 5 July 1851, p.3.
5. Original correspondence. *Wellington Independent*, 5 July 1851, p.3.
6. New Zealand Society. *New Zealander*, 12 November 1851, p.2
7. Alexander Turnbull Library, MS-1070, MS-Papers-0121, qMS-1726-1730.
8. Grant, S. (2005). God's governor: George Grey and racial amalgamation in New Zealand 1845-1853 (Thesis, Doctor of Philosophy). University of Otago. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10523/348>: "Several missionaries were also members, including William Colenso and Octavius Hadfield." p.72. Hadfield was a member and became a vice-president, but I can find no evidence for Colenso.
9. Wellington. *Lyttelton Times*, 8 November 1851, p.6
10. *Evening Post*, 2 October 1867, p.2
11. Local and general news. *Wellington Independent*, 5 October 1867, p.4
12. Colenso to JD Hooker 13 September 1862. In St George IM 2009. *Colenso's collections.* NZNOG, Wellington.
13. Colenso to Gunn 17 September 1850, ATL MS-Copy-Micro-0485-1.
14. Colenso to RC Harding 27 June 1892. ATL qMS-0497.



*eColenso* is a free email Newsletter published by the Colenso Society.  
Please forward to anyone who may be interested.  
The editor invites contributions on Rev. William Colenso FLS FRS.  
Such contributions should be emailed to Ian St George, [istge@yahoo.co.nz](mailto:istge@yahoo.co.nz).  
The cover illustration of this issue is from an advertisement  
in the *Hawke's Bay Herald* during Colenso's time.

Past issues may be seen at <http://www.williamcolenso.co.nz/about-william-colenso/news/>

# Did Samuel Butler read Colenso's journals?

Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* was published in 1872. Butler graduated from St John's College in Cambridge, then worked in a poor parish in London preparing for ordination as a Church of England priest. He began to question his faith, and emigrated to New Zealand where he lived 1859–1864, working as a sheep farmer on Mesopotamia station. This experience formed the inspiration for his satirical novel published in 1872. After New Zealand he had returned to London where he lived until his death.

## Butler 1872

The book begins in an unnamed colony with a journey into the interior, recognisable as the Canterbury foothills in the Rakaia/Rangitata headwaters. The hero has just been deserted by his native guide, Chowbok. Here are some excerpts...

There was an awful river, muddy and horribly angry, roaring over an immense river-bed, thousands of feet below me....

I advanced a few hundred yards farther, and found that I was on the brink of a frightful precipice, which no one in his senses would attempt descending. I be-thought me, however, to try the creek which drained the coomb, and see whether it might not have made itself a smoother way....

I looked at this rift in great doubt; then I went a little way on either side of it, and found myself looking over the edge of horrible precipices on to the river, which roared some four or five thousand feet below me. I dared not think of getting down at all, unless I committed myself to the rift, of which I was hopeful when I reflected that the rock was soft, and that the water might have worn its channel tolerably evenly through the whole extent. The darkness was increasing with every minute, but I should have twilight for another half-hour, so I went into the chasm (though by no means without fear), and resolved to return and camp, and try some other path next day, should I come to any serious difficulty. ... Presently I found myself on an open grassy slope, and feeling my way a little farther along the stream, I came upon a flat place with wood, where I could camp comfortably; which was well, for it was now quite dark....

I took off my clothes, and wrapped my inside blanket about me, till my things were dry. The night was very still, and I made a roaring fire; so I soon got warm, and at last could put my clothes on again. Then I strapped my blanket round me, and went to sleep as near the fire as I could.

I dreamed that there was an organ placed in my master's wool-shed: the wool-shed faded away, and the organ seemed to grow and grow amid a blaze of brilliant light, till it became like a golden city upon the side of a mountain, with rows upon rows of pipes set in cliffs and precipices, one above the other, and in mysterious caverns, like that of Fingal, within whose depths I could see the burnished pillars gleaming. In the front there was a flight of lofty terraces, at the top of which I could see a man with his head buried forward towards a key-board, and his body swaying from side

to side amid the storm of huge arpeggiated harmonies that came crashing overhead and round. Then there was one who touched me on the shoulder, and said, "Do you not see? it is Handel!";—but I had hardly apprehended, and was trying to scale the terraces, and get near him, when I awoke, dazzled with the vividness and distinctness of the dream....

I should think that the river-bed, on to which I now descended, was three thousand feet above the sea-level. The water had a terrific current, with a fall of not less than forty to fifty feet per mile. It was certainly the river next to the northward of that which flowed past my master's run, and would have to go through an impassable gorge (as is commonly the case with the rivers of that country) before it came upon known parts....

As soon as I got to the river side I liked it even less than I thought I should. It was muddy, being near its parent glaciers. The stream was wide, rapid, and rough, and I could hear the smaller stones knocking against each other under the rage of the waters, as upon a seashore. Fording was out of the question. I could not swim and carry my swag, and I dared not leave my swag behind me. My only chance was to make a small raft; and that would be difficult to make, and not at all safe when it was made,—not for one man in such a current....

Next day I began gathering the dry bloom stalks of a kind of flag or iris-looking plant, which was abundant, and whose leaves, when torn into strips, were as strong as the strongest string. I brought them to the waterside, and fell to making myself a kind of rough platform, which should suffice for myself and my swag if I could only stick to it. The stalks were ten or twelve feet long, and very strong, but light and hollow. I made my raft entirely of them, binding bundles of them at right angles to each other, neatly and strongly, with strips from the leaves of the same plant, and tying other rods across. It took me all day till nearly four o'clock to finish the raft, but I had still enough daylight for crossing, and resolved on doing so at once.

I had selected a place where the river was broad and comparatively still, some seventy or eighty yards above a furious rapid. At this spot I had built my raft. I now launched it, made my swag fast to the middle, and got on to it myself, keeping in my hand one of the longest blossom stalks, so that I might punt myself across as long as the water was shallow enough to let me do so. I got on pretty well for twenty or thirty yards from the shore, but even in this short space I nearly upset my raft by shifting too rapidly from one side to the other. The water then became much deeper, and I leaned over so far in order to get the bloom rod to the bottom that I had to stay still, leaning on the rod for a few seconds. Then, when I lifted up the rod from the ground, the current was too much for me and I found myself being carried down the rapid. Everything in a second flew past me, and I had no more control over the raft; neither can I remember anything except hurry, and noise, and waters which in the end upset me. But it all came right, and I found myself near the shore, not more than up to my knees in water and pulling my raft to land, fortunately upon the left bank of the river, which was the one I wanted. When I had landed I found that I was about a mile, or perhaps a little less, below the point from which I started....

I thought of Chowbok.... I had set my heart upon making him a real convert to the Christian religion.... Indeed, on one occasion I had even gone so far as to baptize him, as well as I could, having ascertained that he had certainly not been both christened and baptized, and gathering (from his telling me that he had received the name

William from the missionary) .... He had a prayer-book—more than twenty years old—which had been given him by the missionaries....

I was thinking of this, and proceeding cautiously through the mist, when I began to fancy that I saw some objects darker than the cloud looming in front of me....

I had come upon a sort of Stonehenge of rude and barbaric figures, seated as Chow-bok had sat when I questioned him in the wool-shed, and with the same superhumanly malevolent expression upon their faces. They had been all seated, but two had fallen. They were barbarous—neither Egyptian, nor Assyrian, nor Japanese—different from any of these, and yet akin to all. They were six or seven times larger than life, of great antiquity, worn and lichen grown. They were ten in number. There was snow upon their heads and wherever snow could lodge. Each statue had been built of four or five enormous blocks, but how these had been raised and put together is known to those alone who raised them. Each was terrible after a different kind. One was raging furiously, as in pain and great despair; another was lean and cadaverous with famine; another cruel and idiotic, but with the silliest simper that can be conceived—this one had fallen, and looked exquisitely ludicrous in his fall—the mouths of all were more or less open....

### Colenso 1846

On 23 April 1846 William Colenso was journeying west up what is now the Esk valley, from Hawke's Bay toward Taupo. He reported in his Church Missionary Society journal,

During the morning's march, we came suddenly upon 2 large carved male & female figures, nearly as large as Life, placed upon the brow of a steep hill, dressed in Native mats, with earrings of green jade & white feathers, eyes of mother-of-pearl, and anointed with red ochre and oil!....

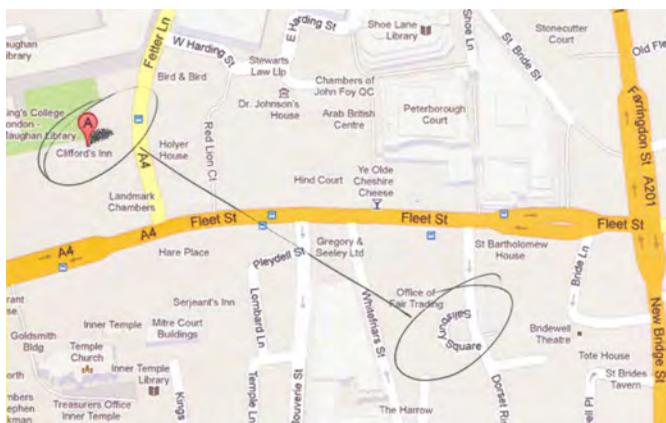
Being desirous of crossing the River Mohaka before night, we lost no time in descending, and, in 2 hours, arrived at the banks & ford of a small stream, which ran under a steep cliff of 40 feet & upwards, and suddenly disappeared. Here I was carried across, and commenced ascending the opposite hill; the pathway being near the edge of the cliff, and, wishing to keep from it, I moved off a foot or two to the left, when I was horror-struck on perceiving that I had moved towards and nearly over a perpendicular precipice of 200 feet!! down which, and immediately below the place we had just crossed, the small stream silently fell into the gloomy depths beneath. I retreated with swimming brain, scrambling up the slippery pathway fast as I could, and felt thankful when I found myself safe on the level ground at the top. The narrow tongue of land between the two precipices and up which the pathway leads, is, in the place where I had so nearly gone over, scarcely more than 6 feet wide! The cliffs are of white clay, and appear to be daily crumbling down; nothing grew upon them. The fall is a very beautiful one, and the highest I have yet seen in New Zealand. A small wood of fine trees is just below it, through which the stream runs into the large and rapid River Mohaka, a short distance off. (A man and his pig were nearly lost a few days ago at this spot: the pig went over, the man was saved.) A quarter of an hour after we crossed the Mohaka, which here runs between deep cliffs; the water was breast high, and we crossed with difficulty. On the opposite shore we found a small shed open on all sides, in which we passed the night. Lay down in my clothes, and started several times at terrific dreams, in which I thought I

was going over the fall!—such an impression do little matters sometimes make, when they come unexpectedly, upon a person's nerves....

29 April.... By Sunset we arrived at the River Mohaka, and found it to be as we feared—much too deep to be crossed. The River is, moreover, very rapid, owing to the great descent in these parts. Bivouacked for the night, as before, in the old shed on its banks.

30<sup>th</sup>. Early this morning the Natives proceeded to make a *Moki*, (raft) of *raupo* (*typha*), which they did by lashing 3 immense bundles of dry *raupo* into one. This done, we had Prayers & breakfast; when we had to twist a long rope of *Harakeke* (*phormium*), which took us till 10 o'Clock. All being now ready, we launched our raft, placing upon it our baggage, clothes, & dogs, and (being provided with a long pole) getting upon it myself. The Natives proceeded to tow it up the stream a little way through the still water, so as, when sent forth, it might the more readily be carried obliquely by the current to the landing-place on the opposite shore. The morning was cold and raw, and the water about 8 feet deep. The poor Natives shivered much, but the excitement of the moment kept them, in some degree, from feeling the coldness of the air. The moment, however, had arrived, which was to decide our fate—the raft was committed to the current—and, in a few seconds, was rapidly borne down towards two large stones, over which the water was rushing. This was what we had feared. The Natives holding fast the rope, swam against the stream, pulling, and striving, and shouting to the utmost—I working away with my long pole—when, through GOD'S mercy & blessing upon our united exertions, we just cleared the dreaded stones by about an inch! and, in another moment, were safe in the still water of the opposite shore.

### Butler reads Colenso at Salisbury Square?



Butler did not start *Erewhon* until six years after he took up residence at Clifford's Inn in London. The name J. Colenso must have been in the news almost every day as the Church wrestled with the unruly bishop, an earlier Fellow at St John's. Where would Butler go in 1870 to remind himself about New Zealand? W. Colenso's journals were in the

Church Missionary House at Salisbury Square just a few hundred yards away across Fleet St. Butler would have had easy opportunity to refresh his mind about New Zealand matters there.

It is entirely plausible that he modified Colenso's material to lend authenticity to his fictional adventure.

It has been suggested his earlier book, *First year in Canterbury settlement* informed this, but there is no similar passage there.

There is a connection in Julius von Haast, whom Butler had known in Canterbury after 1861 and later in London, and with whom Colenso corresponded between 1864 and 1887. There is no reference to Butler in any of Colenso's letters to Haast.

On the other hand Rebecca Watts, research assistant with the Butler Project at Cambridge, emailed, "I can't find anything to suggest that Butler read William Colenso's journals or visited the Church Mission House in Salisbury Square. My impression—though I am by no means a 'Butler scholar'—is that Butler's time in New Zealand purged him of his involvement in all things Church-related, such that when he settled back in London in the mid-1860s his focus was his painting (and he had quite a rigid routine of working at home and visiting his art school, Heatherley's, in Newman Street; it wasn't until the later 1870s that he began regular visits to the British Museum Reading Room). The writing of 'Erewhon' appears to have been an unwanted distraction for Butler, and I don't believe he did any research in drafting and revising it." [R.Watts, *pers. comm.*]

Colenso had read Mungo Park and Dixon Denham and appears to have modelled the prose in his traveller's tales on those British adventurers in Africa [1]. Lydia Wevers emailed, "By the 1860s much of this exploration literature had become standard fare and I would think it a bit more likely that Butler had read Denham or Park—also full of ravines and barbaric figures." [Wevers L, *pers. comm.*].

Savage statues in the wilderness, precipices, rivers, waterfalls, dreams, rafts, missionaries, baptisms, native guides that desert, a native baptised William by a missionary: even if these are the essential elements for such travellers' tales, and even if Butler's fiction changes the sequence and makes the river faster and deeper, the precipices higher, the statues more numerous and more hideous and the dream more vivid, the coincidences seem close enough to justify the question.

### Reference

1. Wevers L 2003. Adventures of the printer. In *Country of writing: travel writing in New Zealand*. Auckland University Press.

And now I must say Goodbye, with  
best wishes for you & yours & a  
Happy New Year & *many of them*.\*



\* Colenso to Andrew Luff 16 December 1877.