



2010

COLENZO

A Monthly Newsletter and Historical Review

DEVOTED TO

THE ADVANCEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE OF WILLIAM COLENZO
AND THE INTERESTS OF THE PRINTING, BOTANICAL, POLITICAL, ECCLESIASTICAL,
SCIENTIFIC, ETHNOLOGICAL, LINGUISTIC, HISTORICAL AND RELATED TRADES.

JUNE



Wellington, New Zealand:

THE COLENZO SOCIETY, PROPRIETOR AND PUBLISHER

2010

Who were those ladies?

A fragment in the Hawke's Bay Museum and Art Gallery library collection consists of pages 5 and 6 of a letter from Colenso....

... "Grow also in Grace,"—and learn to feel the life of Christ to be the true one. GOD is everywhere, the just kind loving GOD and Father that Jesus spoke of, and notwithstanding countless oppositions He prevails.—

With this I send you a little book, written by an English poetess: it is but a little one! but it is from my own old library, one, that I have not infrequently derived mental pleasure from: and in it I put a small photo. of myself that may serve—in days to come—to bring to your remembrance an old man who highly respected you. I could send you instead a volume of more celebrated English poets—Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Morris,—but I have thought, that a volume by a talented English Lady would be the more acceptable, or, at all events, more properly presentable to a young English lady.—And with the book a small chq., which may enable you to purchase better and more suitable books, or anything else that is good and useful.— With kind regards, and respects, and best wishes,—

*Believe me to be,
Yours faithfully,
W. Colenso.*

The handwriting is that of his later years—say, after 1880. Women's suffrage was achieved in NZ in 1893, and this is a formal and respectful letter to a respected young woman, not a "good wife" (as he usually referred to the wives of his correspondents), nor a child (despite the gift of a cheque). It reads like a farewell letter (with a photograph to remember him by); perhaps she was sailing "Home" to England.

Colenso sent a photograph to JD Hooker in 1883, with the words, "A large photo. of myself taken here 2 years ago, and said to be 'an excellent likeness'". It is one of a number taken at that time, and a good example is that in the Te Papa collection—also formally and respectfully signed in his later handwriting, "Yours faithfully" (opposite: reproduced with generous permission from Te Papa Picture Library. Original [here](#)).

And who was the woman poet? Colenso was fond of the poets of the English romantic period, but although he often quoted verse (and wrote, in *In memoriam*, "In my longer journeys I always carried a few choice books with me, and among them a pocket edition of *one* of our Poets:—Ossian, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Thomson, Gray, Goldsmith, Burns, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Byron, Walter Scott, Longfellow, Tennyson, &c.") I can find no mention elsewhere of a "poetess" (but see Gillian Bell's "bio" on p.6). Was it Anna Laetitia Barbauld? in one of whose *Poems* (1773) an ingenuous youth visits the ruins of London, perhaps inspiring Macaulay's "New Zealander"—and in turn, one of Colenso's three "literary papers" of 1883.



Fernhills

Colenso used colloquial names as aids to remembering where he collected plants. Among them are names referring to sites near his Norsewood guesthouse: “Mortensens”, “Accommodation house (Accom. Hse; Acc. H.; Acem. Ho.)”.

Hans Peter Mortensen 1862–1846 was born in Norway; his family emigrated to New Zealand aboard the *Høvding* in 1872, and settled in Norsewood. His father Johann opened the Mortensen Accommodation House, where the Napier to Woodville coach changed horses, and where Colenso would stay when in Norsewood. The house, known as “Fernhills”, burned in 1888. Colenso corresponded with Hans until the 1890s (letters in Hawke’s Bay Museum and Art Gallery), and sent presents to the Mortensen children (Ball OE. *The families of “Fernhills” and their Garfield neighbours, pioneers of Norsewood*. Feilding, 1997).

Among the neighbours was an old Napier friend of Colenso’s, Andreas Olsen, who had bought adjoining land along Garfield road: he later collected many Ruahine specimens for Colenso. He was called “Painter Olsen” to distinguish him from Builder Olsen and Butcher Olsen.

The present house (driving north it’s the first on the right after Garfield Rd) dates from 1907, and has the same appearance as the original: the owner says there is an unusually high stud, and he believes the framework of the old house survived the fire and was re-used. A plaque near the house reads “With affectionate remembrance and thanks to our Pioneer Ancestors Johann Fredrik and Anna Maria Mortensen, Emanuel



Fernhills today

and Helena Frederikson, Elizabeth and Leonhard Andersen. Erected 1997". Dannevirke historian Michael Stone interviewed Bella (Elizabeth) Andersen in 2002 when she was aged 99 – she recalled conversations between her father and sister about Colenso coming to stay with her grandfather at Fernhills.



↑ Fernhills in Colenso's time (is that he, 2nd from left?)

↓ The plaque at Fernhills today



Brief Bios

Gillian Bell I am a great, great granddaughter of William Colenso & I was fortunate to be reared by his granddaughter, Edith Swabey in Osneloc House, Otaki. Sadly, William's name was rarely mentioned in our Victorian household. Edith had spent many years in the company of Elizabeth, both in NZ & Norfolk Is. & when the B&P biography came out, my granannie in her 80s with bad eyesight, spent hours transcribing Elizabeth's diaries to give us an account of her courageous life. I am fascinated by the interweaving of historical threads & I contrast the social life of William's future son-in-law, Will Simcox in the 1860s, hobnobbing with Bishop Selwyn while staying with his cousin, Sir William Martin & spending 3 years farming at Tukituki station with Colenso's difficult circumstances. In 1996, a book buyer told me that in an estate in Wellington, he had come across a book of poetry sent to a lady friend by Colenso in which he had enclosed a dried fernfrond. On showing this to a museum expert there was excitement because it was a specimen mentioned by William but never seen by botanists. I am humbled & very appreciative of those with the knowledge to bring my forebear into my life today.

Brian Molloy: Throughout my working life as a botanist the name William Colenso has cropped up at regular intervals whilst attempting to identify and classify many of our native plants, in my case conifers, grasses, orchids, and several other groups. While working in New Zealand from 1834-1899 Colenso made substantial collections of native plants, many of which he sent to J.D. Hooker at Kew to classify and name, together with his informative letters. Towards the end of his working life he turned to the naming and description of many of his collections. As a result he has left us with a valuable legacy of plant names and descriptions to consider on a case by case basis. Among his fellows Colenso's contribution to our understanding of native orchids for example is second only to that of J.D. Hooker of Kew, remembering that Hooker relied heavily on Colenso's collections in the first place. I am left in no doubt about the value of Colenso's contribution to New Zealand botany in its formative years.

Sue Scheele My particular interest in and appreciation of Colenso comes from the wealth of material he has left us that record his observations of Māori life and understanding of the natural world. In my work as an ethnobotanist with Landcare Research, his writings have been an essential resource in various projects, including the development of a web-based resource on traditional uses of native plants. Colenso's strength is in providing the interface between Māori and Pakeha knowledge systems. He was a fluent speaker of Māori and in his publications Māori cultural, biological and ecological knowledge is linked carefully to the scientific knowledge of the day. His epic journeys over the Ruahine range and through Te Urewera are still a joy to read for the acuity of his observations, and it is wonderful that through Ian's and the Society's work, such writings will be made available for the wider public to discover. I also enjoy the Hawkes Bay connection. My great-grandfather (Arie Scheele) arrived in Napier from London in 1873, and worked at the Daily Telegraph as a printer. I like to think he and Colenso would have met, but have no knowledge of that. They are buried nearly alongside each other in the cemetery on Napier Hill, so I can at least greet them both when visiting!

The seventh boy named “Colenso”

In our April issue we listed six of the seven boys whose second Christian name was “Colenso”. Beryl Eagle emailed, “I have a possible solution to the name COLENZO being used for the 7th time....see photos. The first one is of Elizabeth’s headstone, (such a small grave) placed at the foot of her daughter, Frances Mary SIMCOX. It is now nearly illegible, but I copied out the words many years ago and it reads

Elizabeth COLENZO
Born 27 Aug 1821
Died 2nd Sept 1904
Come unto me....and I
will give you rest.



“The second photo is of

John Colenso Heath
SIMCOX
Died Sept 3rd
1893 Aged 15
Blessed are the pure in
heart, for they shall see
God.

“These were taken last year, so show the present state. John was a grandson of William & Elizabeth, and I suppose William knew of his name being used at that time. John was sent home (to Otaki) from Wanganui Collegiate by train, with diphtheria. John born 8th August 1878. At time of his death, his father, Wm Henry SIMCOX, was the local Coroner and had to ‘do’ his own sons inquiry. Tough.”

The Knife Grinders' Society

At the annual meeting of the Wellington Philosophical Society on 14 March 1899 the Chairman “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 that motion, Hector stated that Colenso ‘was the founder, with the late Sir George Grey, of the New Zealand Society, upon which the Wellington Philosophical Society was engrafted.’” The Society appeared to have been inspired by the successful Tasmanian Society, and met first in 1851, to be replaced in 1867 by the New Zealand Institute, established by an Act of Parliament.

Bagnall and Petersen (p.415) rather doubted Hector’s account of Colenso’s involvement. Indeed, Colenso made no mention of it in his letters to the Hookers or elsewhere, and was otherwise preoccupied in 1851, so it does seem unlikely.

Nonetheless Colenso was for many years the rather obsessional life and soul of the Hawke’s Bay Philosophical Institute, the local branch of the New Zealand Institute, as the reports of its meetings in the *Hawke’s Bay Herald* and the *Napier Daily Telegraph*, as well as the 80 or so scientific papers he later authored in the *Transactions*, attest.

His relationship with the *Herald* began well: the old printer rolling up his sleeves and helping the newly arrived proprietor James Wood with the first issue. Wood and he became political opposites, however, and by 1881 Colenso would write to his friend David Balfour (28 March 1881), “You... will never again see a line of mine in the *Herald*—indeed, I have *not looked at one* for this year!!” He wrote later to Andrew Luff (14 October 1883), “As you take in the ‘*Herald*’ you will have seen their usual ‘skit’ upon us—or rather me—which creates some talk here & fault finding w. them (W. & Pirani) and tends to do them harm; all hands are now tolerably sure that those skits are manufactured in their office.” “W” is Richard Thomas Walker, by then editor of the *Herald*, and probably the author of the “skits”: a series of satirical “letters to the editor” on Colenso and the HBPI (*Hawke’s Bay Herald* 8 February, 17 May, 10 October 1883, 6 February 1884). Henry Charles Pirani was compositor at the *Herald*. Here is the 10 October 1883 effort...

THE KNIFE GRINDERS’ SOCIETY.

[REPORTED BY THE INDEFATIGABLE SECRETARY.]

I have noticed that of late you have not had any Report of the Proceedings of this Society,—a fact that I am quite sure your Readers, one and all, must have much deplored. I have also noticed,—(and have done so with much pain,)—that such reports as you have had have not been so faithful as if I had written them. I have, therefore, determined to do violence to my modesty and furnish the reports myself. I will not, however, stoop to the subterfuge (for so I call it,) of writing of myself in the third person;—that is, saying, “The Secretary read this,” or “The Secretary did that.” No, that may do for ordinary scribblers; but such a man as I am can well afford to boldly use the personal pronoun “I;”—*my* Efforts in preparing the renowned *Moresco Lexicon* would alone justify such a course. Then, again, the attitude I have always taken in

regard to the interesting Race, the Morescoes,—not alone in reference to their language; but, also, their traditions, their character, and their many lovable qualities—has raised me so much above the common herd as to entitle me to ignore those puerile considerations which restrain people from asserting themselves in Public print, and I can say plainly *Ego hoc feci*.—(By the bye, it has always seemed to me that the Capital letter *I* does not sufficiently represent its important signification. Only one letter of the Alphabet to represent the Individual speaking? Surely that is not enough! In Latin they have three. And how much better it sounds!)

But to proceed.—The Knifegrinders held their Ordinary Meeting on Monday night. There was not, I regret to say, the usual crowd or Members present, and still more to my regret the Chief Knifegrinder was absent, and consequently the Chair was occupied by the Vice-Chief. It is of course, under any circumstances, a gratification to me to read, or speak, or lecture to an audience however small, but the gratification is much enhanced when there is a goodly Assemblage, and to observe, as I pause and look smilingly around me, the admiring faces of my auditors,—particularly the ladies, who, I assure you, veritably simmer with delight at the words of wisdom which fall from my lips. In consequence of my pleasure in this respect having been limited on Monday night, it was decided to have another Meeting in November;— it being understood by all the Members that the *principal*, if not the *only* object of the establishment of the Society is that of ministering to the admiration of my undoubted Talents and Great Acquirements, more especially in the Art of Knifegrinding.

The Lecture with which I favored the Meeting on Monday night was certainly long, but, as usual, it was *highly interesting*, and it was listened to from beginning to end with *breathless attention*! It related, chiefly, to the changes which take place in the Material out of which Knives are composed; and to the differences between the various blades in use in the progressive ages of the Globe.

The better to illustrate the Lecture I set the Knifegrinding wheel going, and turned out some beautiful *Specimens* for the delectation of the Meeting.

A vote of thanks, in which I joined heartily myself, was unanimously accorded to me at the conclusion of my Lecture.

Then came the most delightful part of the proceedings, and which I had purposely kept in store till the last, so that I might go home brimful with pleasure at having Myself admired. It had happened that only a few days before I had borrowed from the Vice-Chief Knifegrinder a copy of the *Toledo Blade*, published in Germany, and in it I found an article speaking in highly commendatory terms of the *Moresco Lexicon*, written by me (the Indefatigable Secretary), of which so much was heard formerly—specimens of the same having reached London and Germany. “This,” I said, “is what this great serial says about ME!!” I then laid on the table two copies of my great Work, for the enrichment of the Society’s Library. There was a general buzz of admiration, which sounded oh! so sweetly in my Ears that in the exuberance of my feelings I sat down in the Vice-Chief’s lap, and only found out my mistake when he gently allowed me to slide down on the floor.

***Peraxilla colensoi* (Hook.f.) Tiegh.** Named *Loranthus colensoi* by Joseph Dalton Hooker in honour of the Rev. William Colenso (Hooker JD 1844: In *Icones Plantarum*; London. t.633). Painted by Georgina Burne Hetley and published in *The native flowers of New Zealand*. London 1887--1888.



Colenso is a free email Newsletter published irregularly by the Colenso Society. The editor invites contributions on any matter relating to the life and work of the Rev. William Colenso FLS FRS.

Such contributions should be emailed to ian.stgeorge@rnzcgp.org.nz.

