



The Colenso Society  
32 Hawkestone Street  
Thorndon Wellington 6011

September 2014  
Volume 5 No. 9  
ISSN 1179-8351

# eColenso

## SS *Wonga Wonga*: Reminiscences on a life at sea recounted in 5 Chapters

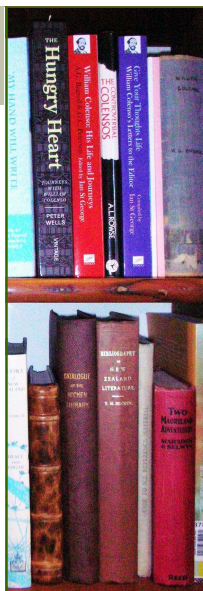
By Eloise Wallace

[reprinted with permission from *The Napier Athenæum, Journal of Literature, Seafaring and the Fine Arts* 2012; 1(9): 1]

### Chapter 1: “Gaze on the *Wonga Wonga* anxiously”

The SS *Wonga Wonga*: when I met her first she was in 1857; a most curious and beguiling little ship. She settled in my mind, compelling me to follow her about her ocean haunts. Enchanted, I was carried entirely away by sentimental visions of the life of a coastal steamship.[1]

I could taste the anticipation in a settlement appearing on the horizon after days at sea, the pleasure of taking passengers on a voyage to town, or into the wilderness. Entrusted with the treasures and trade goods of the colony – all, and who and what she might have seen – letters from far away places, old newspapers and new dresses, all sitting amongst wool bales, and casks of rum and Kauri gum. What adulation she must have received; arriving in port with an unexpected friend, or with a whole camp full of soldiers on board!



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*eColenso* is a free email publication which might be forwarded to interested others. Contributions on William Colenso should be emailed to the editor, Ian St George, [istge@yahoo.co.nz](mailto:istge@yahoo.co.nz).

I was anxious too, for as far as I followed her she was just a dream to me. No painting or picture had appeared, and from today, far from a world of barques and clippers and steamers, I realised I had no idea what she looked like. What if she was plain, or squalid or stupid?



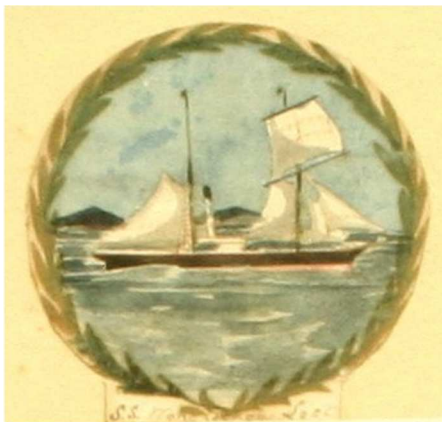
Still, she led me on and onward to a fateful day, 7 February 1863. When I got there I finally felt the thrilling pleasure of recognition, knowing her at her greatest hour, aid and witness to the wreck of the British man-of-war HMS *Orpheus*. She drifts there upon the wild, wide sea of Richard Brydges

Beechey's[2] painting of the wreck, gazing anxiously upon the stricken ship [Fig 1]. Her curious combination of masts and funnels upon a sleek, low hull; smoke lingering in the air, ensign fluttering atop – she was everything I had hoped for. I could feel her impotency in the face of such horror and I could imagine her life, in better days, on the beautiful but treacherous seas and harbours of New Zealand's coast.

## Chapter 2: Our fairy-like little steamer

Let us go back to her beginning – 1854 – the year the *Wonga Wonga* was built on the busy shipyards of the Clyde in Glasgow, Scotland.[3] She was styled an SS (screw-steamer), so that we might know her apart from a PS (paddle-steamer). Intended from the start for the Antipodean market she was named for an Australian woodpigeon.

In 1855 the *Wonga Wonga* arrived in Melbourne under sail. She was soon purchased by the Auckland Local Steam Navigation Company.



The ALSNC, one of the speculative share-holder enterprises the New Zealand colonialist so delighted in establishing, was intent on a scheme to open the channels of commerce into Auckland's hinterland via water-carriage. Steam was the way of the future, and the *Wonga Wonga*, they agreed, after an exhaustive hunt across the Tasman, was just the ship for the task. And so it was the little Scottish steamship arrived in Auckland. Her job, to ensure no land was 'left to waste its fertility in the aggrandisement of a grasping squatocracy, but [be] placed within the reach of the industrious cultivator.' [4]

Interest in this new asset ran high; reports of her earliest expeditions abound with effusive adjectives. In her first trial the *Wonga Wonga* was proclaimed a 'beautiful little steamer ... [who] gave great satisfaction to the practical gentlemen who accompanied her.' [5] On her first public outing later that week – an excursion from Queen Street Wharf for Howick, then onto the Bay of Islands – a 'new settler' wrote to the paper overflowing with admiration:

'After a few hours excellent steaming, we entered the Mahurangi river ... if your readers will fancy our fairy like little steamer, placidly reposing on the water, with a rich and undulating country stretching away till the prospect is bounded by the distant ranges of the Oma ... I cannot but congratulate the colonies of this Province, more especially of this City, on the possession of so excellent a steamer as the *Wonga Wonga* ... I do not think I ever trod the decks of a boat so well adapted in many respects for developing the resources of this colony. Let us then look upon this steamer as our own. Let us vigorously use her as a lever with which to raise our adopted country to the position to which the native energy of her colonists and her own intrinsic resources entitle her.' [6]

James Bowden [7], the first Captain of the *Wonga Wonga*, was by all accounts a popular and jovial commander, and so the two made a promising start. Together, they travelled the Auckland coastal routes, one week they would run from Auckland to Russell, Whangaroa and Mangonui and Mahurangi, the next they would go to Whangarei, calling at Bay of Islands and Kawau and make a second visit to Coromandel. A floating road of this sort was much cheaper than a terrestrial one, and as such the Auckland Provincial Council subsidised the running of the *Wonga Wonga* at £2000 per annum. [8]

Despite this subsidy and the popularity of the ship, the route was not a commercial success. Settlement in the outer-lying parts of the province was not yet well enough established to support her and the Council was unwilling to prop her up until that time came. Proving too much of a burden on shareholders she was sold in 1857 to the Wellington Steam Navigation Company. The WSNC intended her for a new regular trade route between Wellington and the fast growing settlements of Ahuriri and Taranaki on either coast of the lower North Island.

### Chapter 3: The Auckland Argonautic Expedition to Ahuriri

This is where I first encountered her, on the occasion of her maiden voyage south, stopping by Ahuriri as she made for her new home port of Wellington. Napier had been declared a port of entry just two years earlier. By 1857 about half a dozen ships, trading from Wellington, Auckland, Wairoa and Poverty Bay were calling each year. The *Wonga Wonga*, which arrived on 24 May 1857 was the first steamer to call.[9]

While most adult Ahuririans would likely have seen a steamship before, the very smoke on the horizon – such a symbol of progress and potential arriving at their own particular colonial outpost – must have made for an occasion of intense excitement. Of no less interest on this visit were the worthy passengers,[10] including one Edward Stafford, then Colonial Secretary, who disembarked intent on taking stock of the new town.

The accounts of this ‘Argonautic Expedition’ to Ahuriri, as it was dubbed by its passengers, are a delight, just one tale of a hundred such journeys made by the *Wonga Wonga*, and deserve recounting at length:

‘The District of Ahuriri having, for a length of time, been favourably before the public eye, and having, indeed, begun to assume no mean importance in relation to the other settlements of the Colony, the opportunity occurring through the *Wonga Wonga* was not to be lost by those who, either in connection with business or in pursuit of pleasure, were desirous of visiting a locality said to be so highly favoured.

Till within half-an-hour or so of starting, hardly one of the party knew that he should have a companion beyond the charterer and the twenty-five Merino lambs, the offspring of Mr. Rich’s celebrated ram “Shakespeare,” which Mr Bain was taking down for certain Ahuririans. Seeing that a large number of Ahuriri wethers had been bespoken for the return voyage a classical passenger of the Lempriere dictionary school, was pleased to call the trip “the Auckland Argonautic Expedition to Ahuriri.”

Wednesday, May 20 The *Wonga Wonga* with a full cargo of merchandise in the hold and 40 rams on deck, sailed at 5pm. Capt Bowden, with his “shining morning face,” having assumed his position on the bridge.

Sunday, May 24. 6 a.m. entered Hawke’s Bay — we could discern numerous dwellings extending along the coast in the neighbourhood of the town; also that portion of the latter which is built on the eastern side of Scinde Island. On rounding the Bluff ... the port opened to view, and the pilot came on board. It was dead low water, but, in a few minutes, we found ourselves guided through the narrow entrance of the harbour, and, after touching for a few minutes, safely anchored in a snug little basin rejoicing in the name of the “Iron Pot.”

When inside, a vessel may set the elements as completely at defiance as if in the London Dock — the harbour being, in fact, a dock of nature’s own construction. It is sheltered from the sea by a pebbly bank thrown up by the surf, presenting an

impenetrable barrier to the angry billows, and leaving but a narrow outlet — that by which vessels enter. This bank is termed the Spit, and numbers a good many buildings, principally of a business character.



Two or three years ago there were very few inhabitants in Scinde Island—now in the town and port there are about 60 houses, some of which are very neat structures, that belonging to Mr Tiffen of the land office particularly so, and the population is over 150.

Wednesday, May 27. — At 5 p.m. the steamer was warped out of her snug quarters into the stream. The *Wonga* went out at full speed amidst the reiterated hip, hip hurrahs of the large body of settlers who watched her departure. We need not add that the cheers were lustily returned.’[11]

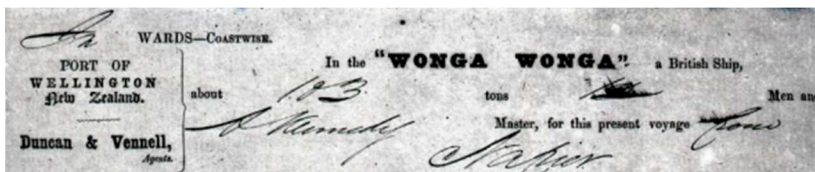
The introduction of the *Wonga Wonga* to the Napier route was not without controversy. Much of the local population was agitating loudly for political independence from Wellington and the instigation of this particular service was, while a potential economic boon to her inhabitants, also construed as an attempt to bring the outer edges of the province under her thumb by the subversive means of a regular mail run. Savvy Aucklanders seized on the squabbles and set themselves up as friend and ally to Hawke’s Bay – banking on the economic opportunities that might arise. As one Aucklander said of their arrival aboard the *Wonga Wonga*:

It was, in fact, in one sense, an invading force—an army representing common sense, and good faith, and sound legislation asking advantage of the opportunity

furnished by the spirit of commercial enterprise, and setting off to the relief of a young but thriving pastoral community from ‘the thralldrom in which it has up to this time been held by the aforesaid fussy knot of politicians, who instead of being called “the three F’s,” have been recently christened by some of their less ardent admirers “the three Buzz-flies of the Beach.”

And the result of the expedition shows that in more than in one respect the “Greeks” of the North are likely to succeed in bringing off the “Golden Fleece” of this fine district from the loud-talking and loud promising but little doing “Trojans” of the Empire State.[12]

While we might recognise the already reassuringly well entrenched prejudices of an Aucklander to a Wellingtonian in such a quote, their prediction was right. Whatever pressure the passengers brought to bear on Stafford aboard the *Wonga Wonga*, and whatever heated discussion, scheming and threats were evoked by the first men of Napier in Munn’s hotel – where they had laid on a slap up meal on the night of the ships arrival for the visitors – worked. Stafford succeeded in passing the ‘New Provinces Act’ just one year later in 1858, an act to which Hawke’s Bay was the first to avail itself.



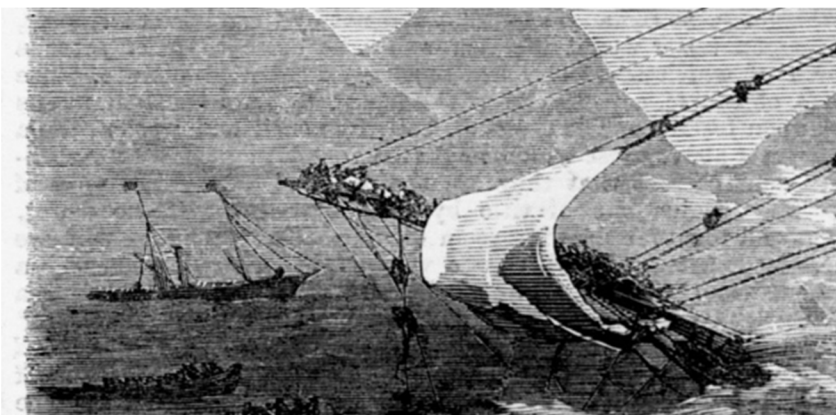
It wasn’t all trade for the *Wonga Wonga* in her new Wellington posting.[13] There were pleasure trips too. On New Year’s Day in 1859 it was the *Wonga Wonga* that took passengers to the inauguration of New Zealand’s first lighthouse at Pencarrow Head near Wellington. As she anchored off the head the 65 settlers crammed on board danced to a Hanoverian Band, and as dusk drew near the light was lit, amid cheers, by Wellington’s provincial superintendent, Isaac Featherston. [14] In May 1860, on one of her voyages up the West Coast the *Wonga Wonga* struck on the bar at Wanganui and was stopped for repair for six months. Soon after she was contracted by military authorities to use as a troop conveyance during the Taranaki Wars, and it is military business we find her engaged in, on February 1863, returning from her regular run up to Manukau.

#### Chapter 4: The still sleep of death

The 7 February 1863 was a fine and sunny day. Early that afternoon there were two ships in the harbour of the Manukau. One was leaving: the *Wonga Wonga*, captained by William Renner, starting her return voyage to Taranaki, carrying military dispatches. The other, HMS *Orpheus*, a 21gun Jason-class corvette was arriving with reinforcements and supplies for the relief of the naval sloops HMS *Miranda* and HMS *Harrier*.



The *Orpheus*, following an out of date chart, entered the harbour and attempted to cross its shifting sand bar in just the wrong place. The signalman on duty, 21-year old Edward Wing (son of the Harbour Master, Captain Thomas Wing who was at that time returning from guiding the *Wonga Wonga* out of the harbour) signalled the ship to change course. On board the *Orpheus*, quartermaster Frederick Butler, who had entered the harbour once before also realised the navigation error and rushed to alert senior officers of the improper cast. Their efforts to avert disaster were too late. Despite a last minute attempt to try and correct the course of the ship, the bow of the *Orpheus* struck sand at 1.30pm. Her engines seized, she heeled over exposing the portside to waves, and soon started filling with water.



Captain Wing, some distance away, saw the ship roll unnaturally toward land and thought she must be aground. Captain Renner too, saw the vessel labouring heavily and getting no reply to his signals offering assistance, returned to investigate. As they separately made their way toward the ship, they came upon the pin-nace and the cutter from the *Orpheus*, which had been launched (along with the ship's papers and money) to go for assistance.[15] Captain Wing boarded the *Wonga Wonga*, the corvette's boats were taken in tow and they proceeded on together to the ship. They finally reached the *Orpheus* at 6pm, picking up five men from the sea along the way.



The *Orpheus* was by then almost buried in the water, seas breaking clear over her and half-way up the rigging. The only chance to save anyone still aboard the wreck was from the bowsprit and jib-boom, which still overhung deep water. The boats came as close as they dared in order to pick up all who ventured to jump and swim for the boats, and could escape the eddies and undercurrents swirling around the ship. By 8pm the masts began to break, the deck soon after, throwing most of the remaining crew on board into the sea and to their deaths.

As night fell the *Wonga Wonga* steamed to nearly a mile distant, anchoring in a safe place outside the breakers. She remained there overnight burning blue lights, blowing her steam whistle and ringing her bell, looking for the survivors by the light of the moon. Passengers on the *Wonga Wonga* would never forget this most heart-rending and dreadful scene:

‘The men died like brave men, but there was nothing brave in this final scene of the acted drama of their lives. The surviving men, who clung to the fore and mizen rigging echoed the death cry of their companions, and in a few minutes most of them slept, with their fellows, the still sleep of death.’[16]

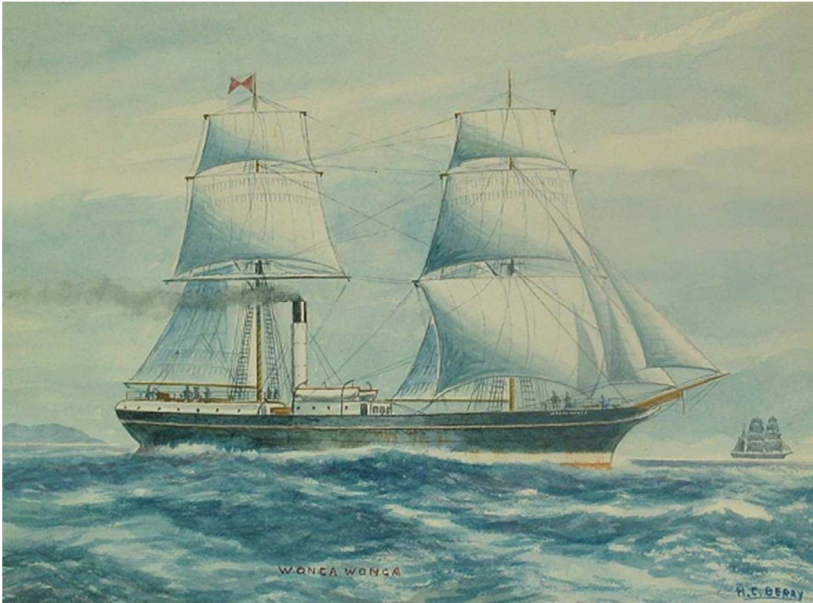
The long night continued on. Fragments of spars and large masses of wreck could be seen drifting inshore with the tide, clinging to which were a number of sailors, who were picked up, in the last stages of exhaustion. By daylight the wind had subsided and the sea was perfectly calm. At first light the *Wonga Wonga* steamed close to the wreck, nothing was visible but the stump of one mast and a few bare ribs.

The tragedy – New Zealand’s worst maritime disaster – cost the lives of 189 sailors and marines, out of a total 259 hands. Most who died that day were very young, boys between 12 and 18 years old. The survivors (eight officers and 62 men) were taken onboard HMS *Miranda*, with all of the officers eventually being sent to Portsmouth to appear before a court martial. Three enquiries were held after the wreck, but the Royal Navy was unwilling to admit the culpability of its officers and much of the blame was laid on Edward Wing for not guiding the ship into the harbour. There were some initial grumblings that *Wonga Wonga* had not returned to the wreck fast enough, and could have done more to save survivors, but all eye-witnesses agreed that Captain Renner acted as best he could in aiding the men of the *Orpheus*.

## **Chapter 5: On the unfortunate loss of your steamer**

Just three years later, the *Wonga Wonga* was to meet a similar fate to the *Orpheus*. On the 2 May 1866, at 1.30 in the afternoon she approached the bar at the mouth of the notoriously difficult Grey River on the West Coast. Conditions were good, it was a fine, calm day and the *Wonga Wonga* at first appeared to have crossed the sandbar safely. But, all of a sudden on meeting the freshet in the river, she ran into a hollow in the sea, took the ground and lost her helm.[17]





There was to be no loss of life, only the small tragedy of a maimed and crumpled little steamship. Then Captain, George Mundle was named blameless in the unfortunate incident. Tenders were called for the *Wonga Wonga's* re-launch but finally deemed impracticable, it was just her most valuable undamaged parts – the hull machinery and lower masts – that were in the end salvaged and sold. Popular to the last, the merchants and tradesmen of Greymouth addressed their sympathies to Mundle in a public letter:

‘Dear Sir, – We avail ourselves of the occasion of your leaving here, after the unfortunate loss of your steamer, the *Wonga Wonga*, to express the sympathy we entertain for you on the occurrence of that disaster... The loss to the trading and general community of this place of the services of a vessel so well suited to their wants is much to be regretted.’ [18]

### Afterword

So, it was to be a short life and an inglorious ending for the *Wonga Wonga*. Still, I couldn’t have imagined such a tale as hers on the occasion of our first encounter across the archives. She travelled alone across the world’s widest oceans; moving restlessly about New Zealand, pulled by forces of commerce and politics, and war and pleasure. Across the country, from Whangarei to Greymouth all would have recognised her, awaited her and appreciated her. Through her each place and each person was connected: the enterprise, the creativity, the words of other men, could

all be got and given, if one was patient, and so the *Wonga Wonga* made the world small.

It was a legacy all the more remarkable for its fragility, each voyage denying the ever present threat of disaster, until that last. In the spirit of the very best romantic protagonist, the sea took her young, her remains wash under the waters that surround us – just another New Zealand shipwreck, one of thousands lost about the coastline – ravaged by the sea, plundered and dispersed upon the banks of a muddy river under the cold summer sun of the south, ten thousand miles from Scotland.

### References

1. Excerpt from poem *Wreck of the Orpheus* by a College Boy, Nelson, April 1863. *Otago Witness* May 2 1863 p 8
2. Richard Brydges Beechey (1808 – 1895) Anglo-Irish painter and Admiral in the Royal Navy, son of the painter Sir William Beechey.
3. The *Wonga Wonga* was built by JG Lawrie & Company of Whiteinch Glasgow. With a gross tonnage of 152, her 2-cylinder steam engine was capable of 30 horse power. 105 feet in length, she could accommodate 27 passengers.
4. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 Dec 1854
5. *Daily Southern Cross*, Volume XII, Issue 802, 6 March 1855, Page 3
6. *Daily Southern Cross*, Volume XII, Issue 805, 16 March 1855, Page 3
7. Captain James Bowden (1820 – 1863) had a high reputation in Australian and New Zealand waters as a master mariner. His final command in the New Zealand trade was that of the ill-fated *Lord Worsley*, which was wrecked off the coast of Taranaki in 1862. After the wreck he went to Australia to command a steam collier *Pluto*, in June 1863 the vessel and crew disappeared without a trace.
8. *Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle*, Volume XVI, Issue 5, 14 April 1855, Page 3
9. Brett, H. *White Wings* vol 2, The Brett Printing Company Limited, Auckland, 1928, page 95
10. Passengers aboard the *Wonga Wonga* for the voyage included Mr Stafford, Colonial Secretary, Mr Bain of Bain, Grahame and Co, Rev D Bruce of the Scotch Church, Mr J Alexander Smith, Secretary of the Auckland Museum, a representative of each of the Auckland journals
11. *Daily Southern Cross*, Volume XIV, Issue 1036, 2 June 1857, Page 3
12. *Wellington Independent*, Volume X, Issue 12012, 20 June 1857, Page 3
13. Inward Manifest, Museum of Wellington City and Sea Collection
14. New Zealand History Online
15. *The Daily Southern Cross* Monday February 9 1863
16. *The Daily Southern Cross* Monday February 9 1863
17. *Wellington Independent*, Volume XXI, Issue 2361, 15 May 1866, Page 4
18. *Wellington Independent*, Volume XXI, Issue 2361, 15 May 1866, Page 4

William Colenso was rather fond of her too. Here he suggests Provincial Councilors (ie, himself), cart horses and the steamer should be properly esteemed: “A strong cart horse in a stable eating oats, and outside drawing a heavy load, is in very different positions; so also is our little steamer the *Wonga Wonga*, when inactive in harbour, and when going against wind and tide: working for the good of the community, both are admired and both useful. Just so it is with your Representatives whom you have chosen and sent into the Provincial Council.” (Tracts for the times No. 12, *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 30 April 1859)—*Ed.*

## Ducking the missionary

*You may recall this excerpt from eColenso April 2011. I have recently read Colenso's own account of the incident, which follows —Ed.*

***From Rochfort J 1853. The Adventures of a Surveyor in New Zealand, 42–44.***

The morning of the wedding-day set in wet and miserable, and Mr. C(olenso), the Protestant missionary, would not marry the couple at McCain's, although he had to pass by that very morning; but obliged them to walk seven miles, through the bush, to a native church: so we determined to pay him out for it. On his way back he had to pass the house again, and to be ferried across the river. We got out Mr. P.. k's five-oared whale-boat for the occasion; and A(bbo)t, who was staying there, and myself, gave one of the schooner's seamen two bottles of grog to give him a ducking, which was accomplished in the following manner.

A(bbo)t and I each took an oar in the whale-boat to see the fun. As soon as we grounded on the opposite side, which was about twenty yards from the shore, Jack jumped out of the boat, touched his hat, and said "I'll carry you ashore, Sir." Mr. C(olenso) answered by getting on his back.

Jack took about half a dozen steps, when he pretended to fall down, throwing Mr. C(olenso) over his head, where he lay at full length like a half-tide rock. The missionary did not trust himself again pick-a-back, but got up and walked ashore, having received a wholesome practical lesson on the folly of putting people to unnecessary trouble.

***From Colenso's Journal, 13 May 1852.***

This afternoon, an American Carpenter, residing at Ahuriri, called, to request me to go there to marry a couple—the man an Englishman, the woman a half-caste girl who had lately arrived at that place from Wellington. I agreed to publish the Banns & to Marry them, provided, that the guardians of the girl first gave me a certificate of there being no impediment; but I refused to marry them at Ahuriri, the only dwelling there being a Public house; at which the man made some demur,—partly, perhaps, owing to his being an American.

***7 June***

This morning I married the Englishman & half cast girl, whose Banns I had called; 10 Europeans accompanied the couple from Ahuriri. This is the *first* marriage I have performed in the English language during my residence here.

***9 June***

I reached Ahuriri an hour after sunset, and my two Natives being a long way behind, I requested the white men to put me across in one of their boats, which they expressed themselves very willing to do. While the boat was getting ready I conversed with Mr. Alexander, who was also going across, who told me, that all the Settlers to a man were greatly incensed against me, believing that I was continually setting the Natives against them, and opposing their prosperity in every possible

way; and that they either had written, or would write, to the Governor against me; assuring him, that all I had ever told the Natives (which the Settlers might construe as being inimical to them,) was;—not to work on the Sundays, nor to stay away from Divine Service; not to encourage the travelling, or strolling, of the Settlers to their native villages on the Sunday; and not for the Teachers and Monitors to become “Trading-masters” at their respective villages for the whites. By this time the boat had returned from a vessel lying a little way off in the stream, whither she had gone to get an efficient crew and oars to put us across. Getting in, with Mr. Alexander & some others, among whom was a Mr. Abbott, (a Settler near Waipukurau, who had attended the marriage at Petani last Monday, and whom I had called upon to sign the Register as a witness, and to whom on returning I had given some apples for himself and party,) we shoved off, and soon found the tide to be almost too strong for us. After pulling lustily for half an hour, we got fast upon a shoal, where we remained some time, the crew being unwilling to jump out in them cold, frosty & dark night, nor did they care to do so, until Mr. Alexander had himself pulled off his stockings and boots, and set them an example. After some more hard rowing against the stream, we grounded on the mud off Te Onepoto, Mr. Alexander’s place (it being nearly low-water); when he wished to carry me on shore, which I refused to allow. Upon this one of the crew came to carry me; he had, however, scarcely taken three steps ere he suddenly *flung me* (as if I were a bag of wheat,) *into the water!* I had had my suspicions aroused, and was consequently wary, and holding fast, *he*, also, came down, & *under* me, so that he had a complete ducking. This caused the fellow to curse and swear most awfully, and he strove hard to seize me by the legs, and draw me into the deep water just beyond. I, however, disentangled myself, & saying, “Young man, you have purposely upset me, I am certainly not obliged to you for it; were I not a Minister I would assuredly serve you out;” I waded to the shore in a miserable plight. Mr. Alexander was greatly vexed, and had I not interfered would, I think, have summarily punished the man upon the spot. The night was pitch dark and freezing fast, and I was so cold that I could scarcely move. Mr. Alexander strove hard with me to induce me to remain, or, at least, to change my clothing, but I refused both, and walked to the Station (6 miles) reaching it by ix. p.m., wet and cold; Mr. Alexander kindly going with me a mile, or more, over the roughest of the ground.—

#### **14 June**

From Cranmer (Te Hapuku’s son) I heard, that the man who upset me in the sea on the night of the 9<sup>th</sup>. inst., had been hired to do so by Mr. Abbot, for 2 bottles of rum! This information Cranmer got from a native of his named Pahoro, who lives with the whites at Ahuriri.—I had heard the story before, but I did not believe it; I rather supposed, that he subsequently got the rum for doing so, but not as a previous price for a planned thing.—Cranmer wished me to allow him, or his father, to retaliate on Mr. Abbot, when he should cross the river at their village, (which he must necessarily do on his way backwards & forwards,) but I strictly charged him not to do anything of the kind.

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# Onomatopœia at Waitangi

I was taught pathology by Professor D'ath. I once met a man whose right thumb had been cut off: he was a left handed butcher named Butcher. Some people choose occupations to suit their names.

So what does James Busby do? Busby busily buys bees.

## ***Hawke's Bay Herald*** **10 December 1895.**

SIR,—I was not a little surprised (I may say, and amused!) in reading in your paper of the 7th instant a letter written from England to you, purposely and fully stating that “Bees were introduced into New Zealand in 1845!” and that there is a silver medal extant attesting it, of which a photograph was also sent to you. I am sorry (in a certain sense) to have to upset the pretty picture you, and your English correspondent have given us, but now for the plain dry facts, without! alas! the embellishments of a silver medal, or of a photograph, or of “a deserved recognition.” Our Scotch friends truly say: “Facts are chieftains that winna ding, an’ cana be disputed.”

(1.) When I came to Hawke's Bay, on my second visit, to reside in 1844, I brought my hive of bees with me.

(2.) That special hive was made in the Bay of Islands

for me, containing a swarm from the bees of my esteemed friend Mr James Busby, of Waitangi, (for many years British Resident there down to the time of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi), Mr Busby having introduced bees into New Zealand a few years before.

(3.) I may add that Mr Busby had reared several hives of bees, and with many others, I had gone from the Paihia mission station (near by) to Waitangi, to see the bees at work; as Mr Busby had also the new addition to the old-fashioned box hives, of a glass vase, or room, fixed on the top. And I had also partaken of the new honey in its comb made there, and kindly distributed by Mr Busby to his friends as a novelty.

(4.) The Rev. W.C. Cotton, (mentioned in the English letter to you, and who arrived in the Bay of Islands with Bishop Selwyn, in 1813,) was a great bee-lover, and had written a nicely illustrated book on bee-



keeping. He had a hive of bees at Waimate, from Mr Busby's, in 1842-3.

(5.) There being no flowering plants producing honey around me at Waitangi in those early days, and I getting tired of artificially feeding my bees, and fearing to lose them all if I let them go, there being no shelter, and the fierce westerly winds very strong, I sent them by special messengers to the "Big Bush," (then standing between the modern towns of Hastings and Clive,) and they were liberated there; they did well; and from them I believe all the bees of this provincial district, and farther, are descended.

(6.) Moreover, I think there were bees at the old Church Mission Station at Poverty Bay prior to 1844, and a swarm from Mr Busby's hives. The present Bishop of Waiapu, or his brother, Mr J.N. Williams, of Frimley, could no doubt satisfy you on this head.

(7.) Such a medal with its pseudo inscription would be sure to evoke much controversy in "days to come," if not now so clearly explained and shown to be untrue. But, in my saying this, I mean only in the one primary sense, of the first introduction of bees into New Zealand, and without any refer-

ence to the sending them hither direct from England.

Thinking over the whole subject brings to mind several somewhat similar matters of hoary antiquity, aye, and of modern times, too; in which men and manners, acts and dates, sculptures, inscriptions, writings and medals, have been handed down to posterity, causing no little research and controversy. And then, as to the "honour"—well (without quoting Shakespeare), at such times a quaint distich from Goethe's *Faust*, where, in the inimitable scene on the Brocken (blasted mountain-top), in the Walpurgis-night, Mephistopheles accosts one of the old witches riding on a sow, saying—

Honour to whom honour is due:  
Here, Mother Baubo, is honour  
to you.

I am, &c.,  
W. COLENSO.

Napier, December 9th, 1895.

*Others say,*

The murmuring of innumerable  
bees (Tennyson)

Buzz! Buzz! Buzz! I wonder why  
he does? (AA Milne)

## But Busby's bargain backfires....

By 1838 the British Resident James Busby had imported several hundred sheep and two bullocks, and was developing a vineyard, extensive vegetable gardens, and a forest nursery at Waitangi. In 1839 he made further substantial land purchases near Waitangi and at Waimate, Ngunguru and Whangarei.

In the Alexander Turnbull Library (MS-0588) is a little red book,  $\frac{1}{4}$  red morocco, red linen, which contains part of William Colenso's rough diary for 1839. It contains a te reo vocabulary, a head count of local villages, directions, school rolls, sketches, a couple of feathers and two ferns—as well as diary entries 1839–1842.

One is dated 13 December 1839 and lists the price paid for a piece of land.

At Taika in Wangarei Bay, (I) witnessed in tent the Signing of Deed of Conveyance of Land to Mr Busby—signed by myself, by a man named E. Shannon and several others as witnesses. Tirarau, Motutara, Karekare, Tutahi, Amooteriri, Pou,

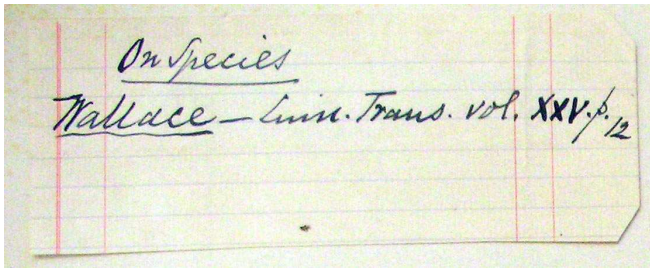
Payt. 40£ in gold  
60 Blankets  
10 Coats  
10 Trowsers Blk  
25 do—— white  
20 shirts  
25 do—— white  
4 cloaks  
5 gownpieces  
15 Hdkfs  
3 Hakimana (single barrel guns)  
20 Hoes  
20 Karauni (? meaning)  
20 Patiti (hatchets)  
15 Iron pots  
20 adzes & axes  
2 Bags shot  
5 cannisters powder  
80 lbs Tobacco  
1 Box pipes  
Gift to Tirarau 1 Dble barrel gun

Busby's landholdings lost value by the decision to move the capital city to the Waitemata and by Hobson's proclamations that all land purchased before January 1840 would be subject to investigation. He declined a position in Hobson's administration.

In the end though, Busby got tangled in litigation over his land titles: the New Zealand Banking Company seized his Waitangi property and Governor Grey expropriated his (this) land at Whangarei.

## Alfred Russel Wallace

Te Papa has ten of Colenso's botanical notebooks. Nine contain handwritten transcriptions of his formal descriptions of plants and one is a diary of his collecting excursions in Central Hawke's Bay 1883–1885. Among the pages of several are rough notes, aides memoires and drafts, written on scraps of paper, newspaper wrappers and the backs of envelopes. One has this entry,



This refers to Wallace AR 1865. On the phenomena of variation and geographical distribution as illustrated by the Papilionidae of the Malayan region. *Trans. Linn. Soc. Lond.* 25: 1–71.

The paper used butterflies as a model for testing evolutionary hypotheses, and included a revision of the swallowtail butterflies of the region, as well as the description of some 20 new species. In a very important section, Wallace laid out what is perhaps the clearest Darwinist definition of the differences between species, geographic subspecies, and local “varieties.” He also discussed the relationship of these taxonomic categories to what is now termed “reproductive isolation.” [1]

Colenso was therefore not only reading Darwin (and later preaching Darwinism from the pulpit), but appears also to have been at least aware of the work of Alfred Russel Wallace, who independently conceived the theory of evolution through natural selection.

1. Mallet J 2009. *Gayana* 73 (2): Suplemento.

## The Wairarapa penguin

Colenso's Journal, 24 February 1846, north of Castlepoint,

Leaving Waipupu we travelled on till late, not finding any water until long after Sunset; halting for the night in a gulley among the cliffs. Caught a very large Penguin on the beach, in the dark; it was as big as a goose, had crested eyebrows, and was the first of the species I had ever seen.

Fiordland crested penguins (*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus* G.R. Gray, 1845) now breed patchily in South Westland (including Bruce Bay and Open Bay Islands), many sites in Fiordland, Solander Island, Codfish and Stewart Island and outliers. Historic accounts and fossil records suggest they were more widespread in the past, ranging up to the southern North Island and probably common in parts of the northern South Island

(<http://nzbirdsonline.org.nz/species/fiordland-crested-penguin>).



Have you seen/heard the BBC programme that features Jim Endersby talking about Colenso?" <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04b2wzn>

For a movie tour of Osneloc, the house Frances Simcox née Colenso built in Otaki, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZmejyeGOeY>

