



# COLENZO

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AND DEDICATED TO THE LIFE AND WORK OF  
THE REVEREND WILLIAM COLENZO FLS FRs

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REGISTRATIONS NOW OPEN

## WILLIAM COLENZO BICENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

9-13 NOVEMBER 2011  
HAWKE'S BAY



WILLIAM COLENZO  
BICENTENARY

A CELEBRATION  
OF HIS LIFE  
AND IDEAS

HAWKE'S BAY  
9-13 NOVEMBER 2011

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*Printer of some of the most significant documents in New Zealand history, missionary, explorer and botanist, a free-wheeling politician and controversialist William Colenso was a maverick.*

*This year, on the bicentenary of Colenso's birth, Hawke's Bay Museum and Art Gallery will be hosting a celebration of his life and ideas with a programme of events, centred on a two day academic conference.*

The keynote speakers for the conference are author and science historian, Dr Jim Endersby of the University of Sussex and Peter Wells, author of the new book *The Hungry Heart – A Journey with William Colenso*.

Go to [www.williamcolenso.co.nz](http://www.williamcolenso.co.nz) to find out more about the full programme of events taking place, and to register for the conference.

HAWKE'S BAY **MUSEUM & ART GALLERY** NAPIER

Go to <http://www.williamcolenso.co.nz/Programme.html> for the full conference programme

### Sainsbury Logan & Williams: Lawyers Since 1875 a book by Stuart Webster

The year was 1899. The location was the fledgling town of Napier in the Province of Hawke's Bay.

William Colenso died on a Friday, was buried on Sunday after Church and Probate of his Will and Codicil was granted by Wednesday of that week.

Colenso died owning significant landholdings ...and "2 cases of Mission wine."  
The Executors named in his Will instructed Sainsbury & Logan to act on the Estate:

This book tells the history of that firm from its origins in 1875 through to the present day including some of its most valued clients.  
The Executors of William Colenso's Estate were amongst them.

Available for purchase on 10 and 11 November  
at The William Colenso Bicentenary Celebrations

RRP \$150

Cash, EFTPOS and Credit Card facilities available

Gold Embossed hardback with jacket, 416 pages, 650 images.  
Limited print. Signed by the author



# Dr Spencer

The August 2010 *eColenso* said this about Dr Spencer: “Later for a time (Colenso) used the skills and the powerful microscope of his GP friend William Spencer of Napier: ‘Not being satisfied with the comparatively low power of my own microscope, I applied to Dr. Spencer, who has an excellent and powerful compound one, (which he has also used so very effectually in describing the fresh-water Algæ of New Zealand in his papers in past volumes of “Trans. N.Z. Inst.,”) and Dr. Spencer has very kindly examined the fruit, etc., of this little plant....’ Colenso named *Plagiochila spenceriana* and *Peziza spencerii* for him.”

In the Mitchell Library of the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney, is a letter from Spencer to Colenso that showed not only a nicely reciprocal relationship between the two investigators, but an appreciative enthusiasm from the doctor for the aesthetics of his microscopy...

Napier, 3 Sept 1888

Dear Mr. Colenso,

*Many thanks for the packet of samples. I have looked over them & find No.1 A most interesting Hepatica.*

*2. Marked “something” is a bit of an alga: last year’s growth. Probably a Cladophora, but now quite empty of chlorophyll, so that I cannot diagnose it with certainty.*

*No.3 From Glenross. Deposit from bottom of ditch or pond. It contains vegetable matter in state of debris, together with fragments of silica – also many diatoms, mostly in fragments Pinnularia, Synedra, &c all fresh water species.*

*No.4. Stone with green mantle. Growing diatoms, lyemophora(?) very beautiful. I am putting a specimen up in balsam for future reference.*

*No.5. Brown stone. Algae. Palmellaceae.*

*Nos. 2. 3. & 5 I am trying to cultivate in order to make out with certainty.*



Dr Spencer's specimen

*At your leisure will you kindly tell me what the enclosed plant is. Is it not Ranunculus plebeius? It was sent down the country on account of its medicinal repute in cases of diarrhoea & is said to be superior to koromiko. You will be glad to hear that my son has gained honours at Univ. Coll. in Botany, Physics, & Chemistry, at the end of his first year.*

*With kind regards,  
Sincerely yours,  
W.I. Spencer*

In his 1885 “A Description of some newly-discovered and rare Indigenous Plants: being a further Contribution towards the making known the Botany of New Zealand” (*Trans. N.Z. Institute* 18: 256-287; read before the Hawke’s Bay Philosophical Institute, 14 December 1885) Colenso quoted from Dr Spencer’s “interesting and copious description, which, with much pleasure, I bring forward here:—

‘The elaters are very beautiful objects, they give one the idea of a double cord twisted into two helices; with a high power, a distinct but exceedingly fine membrane is seen surrounding the loops, not straight but following their sinuosities. The spores are circular, edges quite smooth, outline double, with cellular space between the two contours. Elaters, length  $\frac{1}{36}$ ”, breadth  $\frac{1}{1900}$ ”. Spores, breadth  $\frac{1}{950}$ ” to  $\frac{1}{1900}$ ”.’ (Dr. Spencer *in lit.*)”

W. M. Maskell had sought the doctor’s help too: “Several of the plants given in the following list have come to me in gatherings from Hawke’s Bay, and I must express my thanks to Dr. Spencer, of Napier, who has kindly forwarded these gatherings, and in other ways materially assisted me. Indeed, strictly speaking, I have no right to include these in my paper: but Dr. Spencer informs me that he is not able this year to publish

them. I understand that he proposes shortly to describe several new species in other families of Algæ.” (1882; On the New Zealand Desmidiæ. Additions to Catalogue and Notes on various Species. *Trans. N.Z.I.* 15:237).

“William Isaac Spencer, Napier’s third Mayor, held office continuously for three years and a half. He was an army surgeon, attached to the 18th Royal Irish Regiment, and came to New Zealand with the troops that took part in the second Maori war. Subsequently, on account of his eminent qualities as a surgeon and physician, he was induced by the people of Napier to resign his commission, and to practise his profession in their town. Dr. Spencer was also a diligent scientist, who kept well abreast of the times in all matters of science, and who gave occasional lectures on scientific subjects. Two of his sons are



William Isaac Spencer

following their father’s profession, and a daughter is the Lady Principal of the Napier Girls’ High School. Dr. Spencer died at Napier in the year 1897, at the age of sixty-five years.” (<http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc06Cycl-t1-body1-d2-d6-d4.html>)

In 1880 he was Vice-president of the Hawke’s Bay Philosophical Institute, and in 1890 its Chair. At one meeting, “Dr. Spencer, with the help of his large compound microscope, exhibited several curious and interesting specimens of *Diatoms*, obtained from the ocean-bed of the Atlantic, the West-India Islands, etc.; also some minute microscopic fresh-water *Algæ*, from Napier and its neighbourhood; illustrating the whole with descriptions and explanatory remarks.” He was elected a Fellow of the Linnaean Society. In 1880 he wrote “On life” (*Trans. N.Z. I.* Vol. 13).

# The interpretation of a dream

The nineteenth century died as it had lived, with controversy about a book. In *The interpretation of dreams*, published in 1899, Sigmund Freud became the Darwin of the evolution of the inner world. That most obsessive and Freudian writer Vladimir Nabokov would later refer disparagingly to him as “the Viennese mystic” but Freud changed the world forever.

When we are awake our preconscious will not allow disturbing unconscious information to pass unaltered into the conscious. A dream is an attempt by the unconscious to resolve a conflict; during dreams, the unconscious must distort and warp the meaning of its information. Images in dreams are therefore often not what they appear to be and need deeper interpretation if they are to reveal the content of the unconscious. Freud devised a method for such interpretation, which included the interpretation of symbols, understanding ego defence mechanisms, accepting that all dreams entail wish-fulfilment—and all the other elements of what would become psychoanalytic theory.

## The dream

In a letter dated 19 August 1890 William Colenso described to his friend Coupland Harding (in prose reminiscent of that Kafka would use twenty years later in *The Trial*) a dream —

*Last nt. or rather this mg. a long & repeated dream of you—& your merciless legal examiner Lascelles!!—You (at first) suffered so much under his fire—that you fainted in Ct., was carried out & brought back to witness box; long & wearisome it was: the audience even disapproving, & the Judge repeatedly remonstrating—the cause, myself! though what for? I don't know. You gave L. some ugly hits, which told, but which made him furious. No doubt all that arose from this trial, or hearing, repeated by you in this green book!—It was a scene, & a hearing!!—*

## The content

Robert Coupland Harding 1849–1916 was Colenso's enduring and intimate friend and correspondent. The two famously met at a book auction when Harding was a boy of eleven and Colenso a man of fifty. Harding and Colenso were both printers and they shared interests in typography, books, theology, history and general gossip.

Arthur Rowley William Lascelles was a Barrister & Solicitor of the Supreme Court at Napier. He was so assiduous in his examination of one witness that he was assaulted afterwards. The trial of his assailants was reported in the *Southland Times* of 21 July 1886: “Mr Lascelles seems to be one of a class of solicitors of which there are too many, and against whose infamous questioning of respectable witnesses, especially women, there is too often no protection.” (*pers. comm.* Stuart Webster; see ch.5 of *Sainsbury, Logan & Williams, Lawyers since 1875: advt p.2*).

The “green book” is Harding's *Typo*, many pages of which were set in coloured type or decorated with coloured graphics, often green. In the next paragraph Colenso wrote,

*But I should not write to you now about that long & strange dream had I not forgotten last night to pay you the enclosed: & this I may say was owing to your refusal to take 10/- for 2 c. “Typo”, 1892:—for, before you came, I had*

*determined to draw Chq. for £2. & to pay you all (3) together. This is for 1 dozen portraits, recd., & also for 3 copies of that Commission hearing....*

What Commission? The 26 April 1990 issue of *Typo* (vol. 4 No. 40) had carried this...

“A ‘Sweating commission’ is holding an inquiry in Wellington. The commission was appointed to inquire ‘into the mode and terms in and on which persons are engaged or employed in shops in wholesale and retail trades and manufacturing business establishments, and in hotels and other places of public resort,’ with further provision extending the inquiry to outside as well as inside workers for said shops or factories.”

The Commission had been triggered by complaints about the employment of boys in the printing trade; the Wellington Branch of the Typographical Association had in 1888 established a Boy Labour committee, and the Royal Commission on Sweating gave the union the opportunity to voice its concerns.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Colenso’s dream was contextualised by the report of the Sweating Commission hearing;<sup>2</sup> it depicted Harding (a boy doing a man’s work) in court, being questioned so “mercilessly” by the “infamous” Lascelles that (1) he fainted and had to be carried out, (2) the audience disapproved, and (3) the judge remonstrated. Harding proved an aggressive witness, which made Lascelles angry; and it was all, incomprehensibly, Colenso’s fault.

### **The associations**

Lascelles acted on occasion for Colenso, but in the dream he represents unfeeling and merciless authority. Harding replaced the family (became the son) Colenso had lost, but although in the dream he represents boy labour, he appears also to be Colenso himself—the uncharacteristic Freudian slip “*You...*” (1) “*was carried out ...*”, and the fault being Colenso’s, both supporting that identification. The young Colenso is therefore being grilled mercilessly by the authorities for his own wrongdoing, though the audience (the people) and the judge (God?) sympathise.

### **The wish fulfilment**

In his second edition Freud allowed for “anxiety dreams” where there is no wish fulfilment but the dreamer wakes in anxiety and distress. Perhaps this is a dream about Colenso’s forgiveness by his people and his God for his adultery and loss of his family almost forty years earlier, even though his erstwhile friends in positions of authority, McLean and Williams, had been merciless.

Colenso would later write of the nightmares that troubled him in his eighties...

*I dream horrid and long & repeated dreams.* (9 November 1892: to Harding); *I don’t sleep very well—disturbed by long & strange repeating dreams.* (21 March 1894: to Harding); *...scared by ugly Dante like dreams & demons!* (4 February 1896: to Harding); *...of late too much troubled with ugly-awful dreams.* (18 October 1897: to nephew William Colenso).

### **References**

1. Franks P. Print & politics. VUP, 2001.
2. Report of the Sweating Commission. Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives H-5, 1890.

# Gunn's ethnobotany of Tasmania

In the Alexander Turnbull Library is a photocopy (ref: qMS-0500) of a manuscript held in the Mitchell Library in Sydney where it is referred to as "New Zealand plants" and attributed to the Rev. William Colenso.

In fact it is not in Colenso's handwriting, and isn't about NZ plants. The writing is that of Ronald Campbell Gunn (1808-1881) and the manuscript is about Tasmanian (VDL = van Diemen's Land) plants.

I have looked at all Gunn's published botanical work (including his and James Backhouse's 1835 *Index plantarum*) that I can find, but this Ms does not seem to match anything published. It takes the form of handwritten "topic pages" describing many Tasmanian plant species and their medicinal properties; it appears to have been written for WJ Hooker (1785-1865), who is mentioned sometimes in the second person (as if in a letter), sometimes in the third person. There are two versions (sometimes exact duplicates) of many pages. It mentions Tasmanian seeds sent to UK by JD Hooker who was in Tasmania between 1840 and 1842.

I have looked also at Gunn's letters to Kew, and I cannot find this. Gunn does mention "my Memoranda" in one letter to WJ Hooker, but I can't be sure what that refers to.

Why is it among the Colenso papers at the Mitchell? Colenso and Gunn corresponded after Lady Jane Franklin's visit to NZ in 1841, and possibly Gunn sent him this as a model for his own 1865 "Essay on the Botany, Geographic and Economic, of the North Island of the New Zealand Group" (*Transactions of the New Zealand Institute* 1868; 1: 233-283)—but if so, why the duplicates?

The Mitchell has the Colenso letters to Robert Coupland Harding (1849-1916) and possibly Colenso later gave Gunn's Ms to Harding—but Colenso did not mention it in his letters to Harding (who was too young to have received it directly from Gunn—at least at the time Gunn wrote it—certainly before WJ Hooker's death in 1865). My guess is it was not among Harding's Colenso papers, but was acquired independently by the Mitchell and for some reason wrongly attributed to Colenso.

Colonial plant collectors would inform Kew about how local plants were used by indigenous people for medicines, and there was some secrecy around "economic botany" communications, presumably because of the potential for profit and the first mover advantage from the discovery of new medicines. Gunn's work may have been kept quiet for that reason.

Lassak & McCarthy's *Australian Medicinal Plants* says, "The assumption that the Tasmanian Aborigines had no knowledge of herbal medicine... is unlikely to be entirely correct and may simply reflect our lack of knowledge of them owing to their early extinction."

I expect Gunn's work will be welcomed by the Australian Bushfood and Native Medicine Forum.

# The Colenso plaque in old Napier Cathedral

OTJ Alpers wrote in *Cheerful yesterdays* (Whitcombe & Tombs, 1930), “At the end of the second year of my apprenticeship, when the results of the annual examinations appeared in the newspapers, I received through my friend, the Inspector of Schools (Henry Hill), a most kind letter from a complete stranger congratulating me on my success, enclosing an order for several guineas on a local bookseller, and hoping I should ‘choose wisely.’ He proved to be the Rev. Wm. Colenso, cousin of ‘Pentateuch’ Colenso, Bishop of Natal, the well-known writer of books on mathematics and famous—or must I say notorious—for his daring flights in theological controversy.

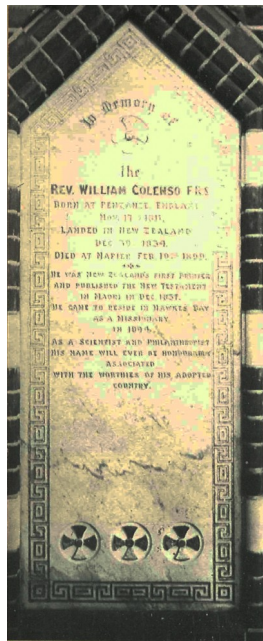
“The Napier Colenso had lived for many years in retirement, devoting himself to botanical researches. Occasionally, too, like his more famous cousin, he made excursions into the stormy regions of Higher Criticism. For a time he was, in consequence, out of favour with his Bishop and the authorities of his Church. But shortly before his death, when he was an old and venerable-looking man, I heard him preach in the Napier Cathedral. On a tablet to his memory it is recorded of him that he printed on a hand-press brought out with him from Home the first translation into the Maori language of a portion of the New Testament. And so, at the end, there was peace.

“When I called upon him to thank him for his gift he talked to me for a long time about his difficulties and struggles as our pioneer printer. He had much trouble to conceal from his Maori converts the lead he had brought out to the Mission for casting into type wherewith to print the gospel of peace; the Maoris used to steal it and melt it into rifle-bullets ! He recalled also, I remember, that he had spent Christmas Day, 1842, with the great Charles Darwin on board the *Beagle* in the Bay of Islands. This, he said, started him on what he regarded as his life’s work—the classification of New Zealand ferns.

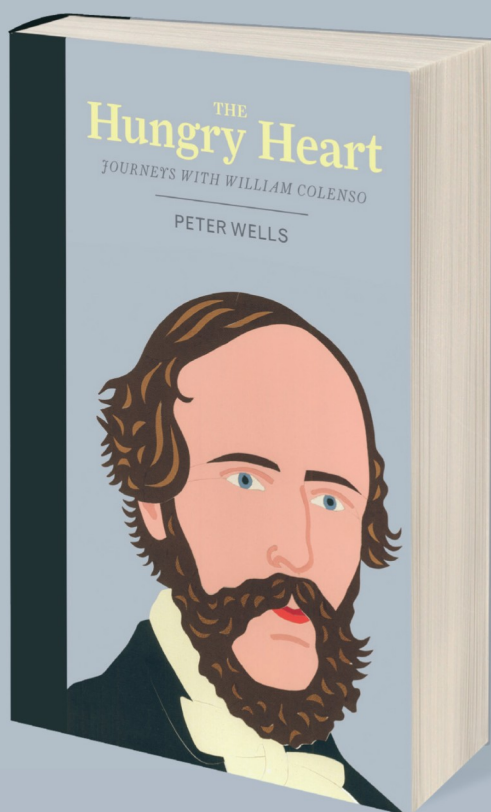
“I spent nearly half of his gift on Macaulay’s ‘History of England.’ To this day it remains unread, and all but the first fifty pages are uncut.”

The Cathedral plaque is pictured in AH Reed’s *The story of Hawke’s Bay*. It was destroyed in the 1931 earthquake and fire; the inscription read...

“IN MEMORY OF THE REV. WILLIAM COLENZO, F.R.S.  
BORN AT PENZANCE, ENGLAND, NOV. 17TH. 1811.  
LANDED IN N.Z. DEC. 30TH. 1834. DIED AT NAPIER FEB.  
10TH. 1899. HE WAS N.Z.’S FIRST PRINTER, AND  
PUBLISHED THE NEW TESTAMENT IN MAORI IN DEC. 1837.  
HE CAME TO RESIDE IN HAWKE’S BAY AS A MISSIONARY  
IN 1844. AS A SCIENTIST AND PHILANTHROPIST HIS NAME  
WILL EVER BE HONOURABLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE  
WORTHIES OF HIS ADOPTED COUNTRY.”







# THE Hungry Heart

*JOURNEYS WITH WILLIAM COLENZO*

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PETER WELLS

In bookstores 11 November



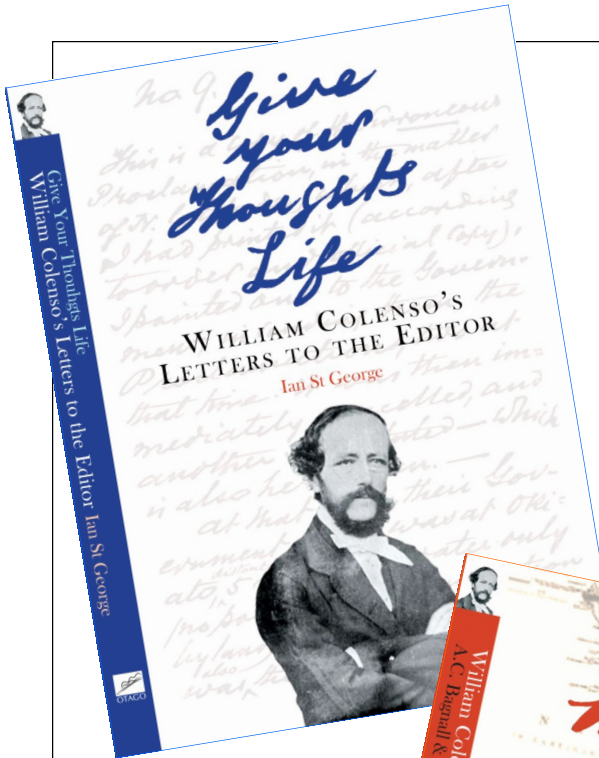
## TRIVIA QUIZ

# The hungry heart

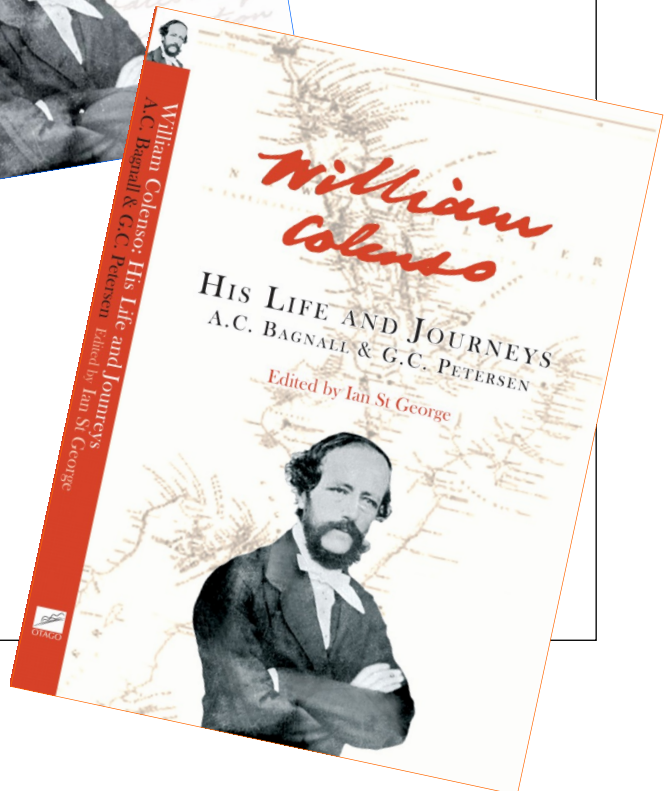
The first two correct responses answering the questions below will receive a copy of Peter Wells' new Colenso book *The hungry heart* to be published by Random House on 11 November. If there are no completely correct answers, the two entrants with the highest scores will win. Please email your entry to [ian.stgeorge@rnzcgp.org.nz](mailto:ian.stgeorge@rnzcgp.org.nz) as a 5-letter email reflecting your answers (e.g., "acbab" if you think "a" is the right answer to Q1, "c" to Q2, etc.)

1. How many letters did Colenso tell Harding that he wrote in the last year of his life?
  - a. 1081
  - b. 126
  - c. 874
2. Which newspaper was disparagingly called by a rival editor, "Colenso's organ"?
  - a. *Napier Daily Telegraph*
  - b. *Hawke's Bay Herald*
  - c. *Napier Evening News*
3. Of what did Colenso write, "I utterly disbelieve that myth"?
  - a. the parting of the Red Sea for the Israelites
  - b. the legend of Pania of the Reef
  - c. the emigration of Māori from Hawaiki.
4. Who first suggested a Maori Department in the New Zealand University?
  - a. George Grey
  - b. William Colenso
  - c. Donald McLean
5. What activity did Colenso compare to "the skulking cowardly shooting of a man from behind a bush with a crape mask over the face"?
  - a. shooting native pigeons
  - b. writing anonymous letters
  - c. robbing the Napier-Waipawa coach

from  
Otago  
University  
Press



later  
this  
year...





The  
**Annual General Meeting**  
of  
**The Colenso Society**

will be held at 1 p.m.  
on Thursday 10 November at the Napier  
War Memorial Conference Centre

## **Agenda**

Present  
Apologies  
Convenor's report  
Secretary's report  
Treasurer's report and setting 2012 sub.  
Election of officers  
General business



# Elizabeth Colenso (nee Fairburn)

## Missionary Daughter 1821--1904

By Gillian Bell

Reverend John Butler's journal has this entry, "Kerikeri, Wednesday August 29 1821. This morning Mrs Fairburn was safely delivered of a fine girl. Mrs Butler attended her which I am happy to say, mother and child are likely to do well". And later, "September 30th, Divine Service morning and evening, christened Mrs Fairburn's child, Elizabeth Fairburn". The young parents, William Thomas and Sarah Fairburn had arrived in New Zealand with Samuel Marsden on his second visit in 1819, he as a carpenter and she as a teacher. Marsden had long known Sarah as he baptised her in 1798 and he had also married the young couple at Parramatta in 1819. Their baby Elizabeth, the first surviving New Zealand-born missionary daughter, was to have a background that would equip her for a challenging life of "service before self".

Sarah Fairburn, her mother, was the eldest daughter of Richard Tuckwell of the Rum Brigade and Elizabeth Buckner, both of whom had arrived on the convict ship the *Pitt* as "free settlers" in 1794 and Tuckwell took up land at Parramatta, becoming a butcher. Sarah would have known of the trials of the new colony and more than likely would have met Maori and heard the language from the young men learning agriculture, carpentry and English on Marsden's properties.

She was 22 when she met William Thomas Fairburn. He was born in Deptford Kent in 1795 into a well-to-do family and was educated, practical and a trained carriage builder with an expressed desire for missionary work. He sailed for Sydney around 1816 and joined the Church Missionary Society (CMS) when Marsden engaged him to build a house in New Zealand for the Rev. John Butler. Marsden firmly believed in the CMS philosophy of laymen with practical skills and kindness paving the way for Christianity and today, there is a board in Kemp House with pencilled instructions to Mr. Fairburn "to not forget to come on Tuesday". The CMS station was in disarray without strong leadership and the lack of fluency in the native language resulting in Māori treating the settlers with little respect. The Fairburns returned with their son and daughter to Sydney for the 1822 General Muster and this would be the last occasion that Sarah would see her Tuckwell family although a brother came briefly to Paihia.

When Henry Williams arrived in NZ in 1823 to assume leadership of the CMS, the family was accompanied by the Fairburns, described as "a quiet couple" that the natives were pleased to see again. The two families with 3 children each under five, had to share the cramped raupo-built "beehive" with only curtains for divisions between the 2 small rooms each family had. Cooking was over open fires with breakfast with the Fairburns and dinner with the Williams. As well as learning the customs of Maori to whom the Gospels of peace, equality and forgiveness were new concepts, each night an hour was devoted to learning the native tongue as it was a CMS rule that prayers and services had to be in Maori. The adults struggled while their children spoke Maori from birth and Elizabeth said she always found thinking and writing in English quite difficult.

Daily life at Paihia was filled with tension with personal threats to the missionaries, tribal wars, lawlessness at Kororareka, food shortages and needing to be constantly on

guard against the pilfering of their precious utensils and livestock. On one occasion a mob burst in on Sarah with her children and in the melee, 3 year old Elizabeth was trampled underfoot and the wives feared for the lives of all. The shortages of the simple necessities, flour, tea, salt, soap or potatoes was an ongoing worry as they were largely dependent on supplies brought in by the *Active* from Sydney. Miscarriages and confinements, fevers and sickness, sick and dying infants tested the households but forged the bonds which Elizabeth would deeply appreciate in later life.

She watched her father as a shipwright working on the mission ship, the *Herald* on the Paihia waterfront and at the launching in 1826 off the Paihia foreshore, the wives and children stood on a raised platform surrounded by 3-4000 Maori who had come from far afield to “sell” their labour in pushing this huge “waka” into the water. When Henry Williams calmly knocked away the dogs and the vessel slid effortlessly into the water, the crowd around the missionaries, after a moment’s stunned silence, erupted into wild haka while some threw spears at this “taniwha”, making the missionary families very conscious of their small numbers. The *Herald*, after many useful supply-gathering voyages, was wrecked at Hokianga in 1828. William Fairburn, swept overboard and thought drowned, was found next day by Captain Mair washed up on the beach, his lungs full of seawater and stripped by the Maori. It was several weeks before he was strong enough to walk home to his family at Paihia.

The Bay was continuously witnessing the departure and return of war parties and the same with the whaling and trading boats across at Kororareka. Although mission children were sheltered as much as possible, they still witnessed the returning taua parties with their slaves, prisoners and baskets of flesh and heads. The 6 year old Elizabeth, while playing on a headland above the beach, saw an act of cannibalism about which she spoke only reluctantly when an adult. Her father was often absent accompanying Henry Williams on dangerous missions to Thames and Tauranga to try and broker peace between tribes bent on “utu”. She helped the women folk preparing supplies and was aware of the anxious worry during the absence of the menfolk for weeks at a time. Sarah Fairburn taught at the native girls school and Elizabeth was expected to have responsibilities for teaching and caring for the younger children so her sense of duty and obedience was born here in her early life. Later she would stay with Marianne and Jane Williams and attend the boarding school for the missionary girls. Elizabeth was 13 when the missionary printer William Colenso arrived in Paihia and she would have been more aware of him than he of her. No doubt the blunt Cornishman’s reputation was known to her as, being dogmatically evangelical, he had not endeared himself to Henry Williams on arrival.

In 1834, William Thomas and Sarah Fairburn left Paihia with some of their children and belongings in an open boat for the new mission at Puriri, Thames. Letters sent to Elizabeth at school in Paihia by her parents, while affectionate, remind her of her duty to God and not to forget silent prayer or her Bible. The site at Puriri was damp and swampy and with their health affected, plus the continuous fighting amongst the tribes, there was a shift to the warmer, more peaceful Maraetai site in 1838. The family saw few Europeans and relied on each other for company. Sarah’s health was now in decline and at 16 Elizabeth, no longer on the missionary allowance, took charge of lessons for the infants and girls schools in a way that impressed visitors such as William Hobson and Bishop Selwyn who arrived unexpectedly at Maraetai when his ship was blown past

the Bay. Mrs Felton Mathews, writing in her journal of their pleasant and hospitable stay with the Fairburns, said that their house was roomy and comfortable although built in the native style of “rapoo” and “Mrs Fairburn, an Australian, gave a dismal account of their terrors and sufferings when they first settled among these savage tribes.” She also saw Miss Fairburn’s school of about 50 where she was told the natives learnt quickly the numeracy, literacy and practical skills which eventually enabled Maori to find it more profitable to work in Auckland than at the Mission which increased the work-load for the remaining residents.

In 1840, Elizabeth accompanied her father to the Treaty signing and Fairburn was entrusted with a copy to be signed by local chiefs and witnessed by him. He later wrote to the CMS pointing out that his daughter had worked “without reward for 4½ years in an unpaid capacity” and that he himself and his wife (although only in their 40s,) no longer had the stamina for mission life. Under threat of dismissal over his land claim and after 23 years of service, the Fairburns left Maraetai for a wooden house in the barren deserted area of Otahuhu. Depressed and dispirited, Fairburn found solace in liquor and was reliant on his sons for an income as missionary children either worked for the CMS or farmed. Elizabeth had a gift and passion for teaching but unmarried women were not employed by the CMS and in her isolated life, her social contacts with Europeans of whom there were only around 2000 in NZ, had been very limited by circumstances; at 21 she had led an unsophisticated life. Her information on marriage would have come from the Service of Holy Matrimony in The Book of Common Prayer rather than shared information.

Back in Paihia, William Colenso after years of hard and lonely labour at the printing press which had transformed the missionaries’ task, had applied to the CMS for leave as



A watercolour sketch by Elizabeth Colenso, showing daughter Fanny & son-in-law Will Simcox, with goats, at the ruin of the Mission Press, Paihia

he was entitled to do, to return to Cornwell to see his parents, become ordained and find a suitable wife amongst his kinfolk This was denied him on the grounds his work for the Mission was more important and so he had sent a formal proposal of marriage to the eldest daughter of Henry Williams which was rebuffed on the grounds of his health, Colenso at that time recovering from a life-threatening illness. Two years later, after reviewing the available missionary daughters and on the suggestion of Rev. Maunsell, William sent a similar proposal to Elizabeth Fairburn which was accepted. She was now 22 and William 10 years older.

Bishop Selwyn had already encountered the outspoken, evangelical printer and his desire for ordination so he could work in the mission field and he encouraged Colenso in this marriage, saying Elizabeth would be most welcome at Waimate where he had plans to make his Bishopric the great teaching centre of the South Pacific. In his marriage proposal, William had emphasised that his first and foremost desire was for a suitable partner to help in his mission work and that the Church must always come first. It was a year before he met Elizabeth at Otahuhu and then beset by doubts, both agreed to wait a year or until William's ordination. This did not suit the Bishop and he sent Colenso back immediately to Otahuhu to the Fairburn's surprise, "to complete their business and return to Waimate". There is no record of Elizabeth's response to this precipitate marriage but the overheard domestic scene that discomfited William on the eve of the marriage, may have been doubts being expressed by the family. But how could they or William disobey the explicit wishes of the autocratic Bishop and not risk their personal ambitions? That it was a marriage of convenience can be seen now with 21st century minds but the participants sincerely believed affection would follow, especially so for Elizabeth, "under the guidance of Him who cannot err". On marriage, her father settled property (now the Pakuranga Highway) on his daughter and any children but William on principle, declined the offer of land at Otahuhu.

On April 27th 1843, at the family home and in the presence of Elizabeth's father, brothers and sister, Rev. Churton hurried through the Service of Matrimony before walking back over the scoria to Auckland. With little ceremony, the Colensos proceeded to Paihia and had a short holiday with "kind Mrs Busby", although William noticed the absence of felicity from the Paihia residents except for a few Kawakawa natives who came to greet him.

May saw the Colensos unpacking in the two-roomed cottage at Te Waimate and Elizabeth found she was to be in charge of the Bishop's ambitious Maori Girls Boarding School. A number of half-wild girls to whom time and hygiene were unknown, had been brought in from surrounding pas and they required constant direction which they resented while Elizabeth got constant inappropriate interference from the newly-arrived English wives of the Bishop's entourage. William, too as Selwyn's Professor of Maori, was in charge of teaching newcomers Te Reo, printing for the Bishop and studying for ordination. He began to feel more and more resentful that his ordination was being delayed because there was no replacement for Elizabeth. He became impatient and sarcastic with his pupils and had many clashes with Selwyn over High Church dogma during his Ordination studies. Embittered and frustrated at being passed over, Colenso felt trapped in this uncongenial situation and communicated this to the CMS in London.

For Elizabeth, her dear mother had died in September, she was 5 months pregnant and



her work was 7 days with no time to relate to her husband or to at least form a basis for friendship. Writing to Charlotte Brown in August she says, “my dear kind husband has been away for more than 2 weeks, sent by the Bishop to visit natives at Whangarei. How we long to be far away from kainga pakeha”. William wrote of his wife’s work load, “had she not been strong and well used to the Maoris and fitted for her work, she must have sunk under it”. While at Waimate, a young girl Ripeka was brought by her mother, grandmother and uncle and given into Colenso’s care as a house girl.

It was with relief that William received the Bishop’s directions to journey to the East Coast and see the site of his future mission station at Ahuriri and as he was away for 4 months, he was absent during Elizabeth’s life-threatening confinement with the birth of their daughter, Frances Mary. Because 19th century women drew a discrete but firm veil over these matters, it is only speculation that from this experience came Elizabeth’s later desperation to reach the Turanga mission for the birth of their second child. Although both parents adored their baby daughter, they became increasingly distant with each other and little of the hoped-for affection developed. Bishop Selwyn put irksome and humiliating conditions on William before his ordination as a deacon on September 22nd 1844 so much so that, in his formal farewell with Selwyn, William told his Bishop that he was “conscience bound to tell him he had nothing to thank him for”. While the supplies and livestock for the new mission were loaded on the *Nimrod* in Auckland, Elizabeth and Fanny spent time with her family at Otahuhu, conscious of the coming separation.

The voyage to Ahuriri took a week of sea sickness and rough weather and the family on arrival on December 30th, 1844, found that their raupo house on damp, cold and swampy land, had no windows, doors or chimney and the silt-covered floor evidence of the last flood. The next few weeks were spent unpacking, with Elizabeth drying out teaching materials soaked during the rough landing and at 23 and pregnant again, becoming the “mata minihere” and teacher of a new mission station. Within a month, William felt things were sufficiently in hand for him to leave the mission to Elizabeth and Keir the carpenter, to go and visit his parish down to Wellington and to gather his beloved botanical treasures.

After his return, in May he was struck down with a virulent malady (makutu, some said) which required Elizabeth to nurse him for 8 days and nights and when he recovered, he was so weak, he could barely stand. Nevertheless, although it was July and winter, Elizabeth was adamant she must get to Turanga and the medical care of William and Jane Williams. The horrendous trek took nearly 3 weeks with William taking 8 days on the return journey as the Bishop was due to visit. After the birth of a son on September 23rd, Elizabeth stayed on, enjoying the congenial company and helping with the mission pupils until returning in early 1846. By then, a weatherboard house and storehouse had been built which were raised up above flood level because as Māori told them “only eels lived there”. William had a two-roomed beautifully decorated Māori-style “wharetuhituhi” built out in the backyard where he could sort and prepare his botanical specimens, write his correspondence, receive visitors and sleep there undisturbed by domesticity.

There are no records specifically written by Elizabeth available but reading William’s prodigious writings at the time and also 30 years later plus Fanny’s recollections, it gives

some indication of their daily toil and personal dilemmas. In his 1883 Autobiography, William says he received a letter from Elizabeth written from Turanganui after the birth of their son, saying she would not be responsible for anything of that nature (birthing) occurring again considering their circumstances. William did not approve of the large families of his fellow brethren so he accepted her decision. He also received a letter from Jane Williams urging him to get a European couple from Wellington as company for his household which, he told Archdeacon Williams, he received with indignation because his meagre financial situation was known to them. From this time on, the Colensos were not living as man and wife but cooperated for mission duties with William writing later that Elizabeth was a “first rate hand with the Maori”.

The next 5 years passed with Colenso’s incredible traversing of his domain and his botanical discoveries during which the Mission station was Elizabeth’s responsibility with no respite and Fanny remembers they never had the company of another white woman. At times Elizabeth with her knowledge of the Maori, must have felt William’s forceful, dogmatic approach and condemnatory castigating of backsliding would alienate his flock. On one occasion during an altercation, she and the children hurried to his assistance, wading the river as there was no canoe. When the situation imploded with the birth of Wiremu in May 1851 to their house-girl Ripeka, Elizabeth was more affected by the betrayal of the Cause for which she had laboured so hard as much as her disgust at William’s hypocrisy and exploitation of his position with Ripeka who was a much loved household member; but to her, deserting her post and abandoning the natives, would only compound the confusion around this calamitous situation.

For William, his responsibility and affection for his natural son came before any other consideration and many were the scenes of distress both for the natural mother and Elizabeth during the emotional turmoil of the next year. By September 1852, Elizabeth had sent for her brother John who arrived and escorted Fanny and Latty to Auckland, taking with him William’s 25 paragraph confession to Bishop Selwyn. With Elizabeth now providing safe care of baby Wiremu whom she had come to love with motherly instinct, William continued to undertake trips to his far flung flock, although he was fast losing mana as the rumours spread, reaching to the ears of Governor Grey, and with Ripeka still very unhappy and moving between mission and pa. Several earthquakes were felt that year and yet again the Mission station was subjected to the silt-laden flooding with humans, dogs and cats huddled on the veranda as water swept through the house. By November, Elizabeth, ill with fever, recognised she was worn out and weakened and rather than engage in protracted discourse, she wrote a letter to William explaining she had felt her strength declining and saying she wished to leave as soon as possible by a boat at Waimarama. Before that could happen she would endure more stress, when in January, the Mission house was burnt to the ground along with their orchard and she and Wi had to make do with sleeping in the study.

Then came the dreaded visit of the Bishop with a five hour argument because William would not surrender the toddler to Ripeka now living at the pa. Finally the Bishop’s solution was that Elizabeth should take the child with her to Otahuhu and Elizabeth agreed as this at least gave some authority to her leaving her husband. To begin with, moved by compassion for William’s distress, her letters are full of encouragement, urging him to make it “a duty to not give way to grief.” Once in Auckland, the reality of

pakeha society was distressingly shown to her when none of her family or friends were prepared to condone the transgressions of her husband which had irreparably damaged the missionary cause, by accepting Wiremu into their homes. Elizabeth needed to teach to provide for her children's education but obviously no CMS position was open to her while Wi was in her care and despite weeks of effort to find a solution and on advice from others, Wiremu went north to his grandparents to William's rage and heartbreak. It was several years before Wiremu returned to his father for schooling in Napier and eventually going to sea and his Cornish relatives.

By this time, with distance and normality in her life, Elizabeth wrote a very clear letter to her husband detailing her feelings about the unhappiness, humiliation and grief she had felt for years and that because of his self-righteous criticism of her "abandoning her duty" to Wi and lack of remorse for the damage he had caused, she no longer wanted any more to do with him. Some 45 years later, William in his will left her 100 pounds as a "Token of forgiveness as she had left him of her own free will."

Elizabeth now went to the Ashwell's Mission station at Taupiri where to avoid embarrassing the CMS, she was designated "assistant" to the grateful Mrs Ashwell and from where she wrote to Mr Joseph Newman apologising for the warmth of her letter but asking why she cannot appoint her own agent to collect the rents from her farm as she needs to pay for Latimer's schooling. Her next independent move was to take her two teenage children to England for their education in 1860 but on arrival at Tilbury, she was mortified when the porter on locating Mrs Colenso's luggage asked her archly if she was "THE Mrs Colenso?" as William's cousin, Bishop W.J. Colenso of Natal was causing discomfort to the Church by implying monogamy did not suit the Zulu. The Colensos enjoyed visits to the Continent, meeting up with other family members and travelling on a paper passport issued by John Earl Russell, Secretary for State for Foreign Affairs, 1863 requesting any assistance to be rendered to her.

In the 5½ years in England, Elizabeth assisted the CMS in the translations of the Bible from English into Maori and was responsible for the final reading of the Bible before printing, described as "a monument of laborious and well-directed piety". She was very involved with visiting Maori groups, translating documents, providing healthcare and arranging grants from the Aborigines Protection Fund for those left without support. The English were keen to impress loyal Maori groups and Elizabeth as a translator, accompanied them to many important outings such as the Aldershot Revue, a trip to Osborne Castle on the Isle of Wight by Royal Yacht and an audience with Queen Victoria. Later at Windsor Castle with a private audience with Queen Victoria, she explained that Maori was her first language. On one occasion at a concert at the Crystal Palace as Carlotta Patti finished singing and was bowing and smiling, the tattooed chief Wharepapa sitting by Fanny, leapt to his feet, thumped his taiaha and called out in Maori, "Come back! that voice is not human, it is the voice of a bird" whereupon there was alarm in the audience and Elizabeth, calling out in Maori, urged him to sit down! With her interest in teaching, she visited the Ragged Schools set up for poorer children and made sure her own children were educated at the progressive schools of Queens College and Bruce Castle. A group of Christian Persians approached her to petition the High Chamberlain on their behalf to avoid persecution of their adherents and the network of CMS missionaries and parish life was also very much part of the Colensos'



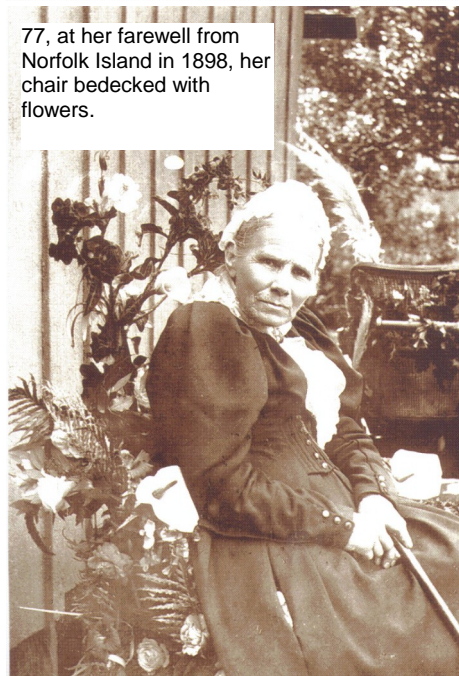
**Elizabeth Colenso**  
at 40: with nephew Edwin  
Fairburn at Stuttgart, 1861.



Paris, 1863.



At 60: the teacher,  
Norfolk Island, 1880.



77, at her farewell from  
Norfolk Island in 1898, her  
chair bedecked with  
flowers.



London life. Details of financial accounts and expenses, records of letters sent and received, books lent and donations to mission groups as diverse as the Irish Mission and the Jews Society were carefully recorded by the conscientious Elizabeth.

Back in Auckland in 1867, Elizabeth spent 2 years working in the Devonport Parish before returning after 24 years to the Mission house at Paihia where she immediately started a school at Ti Tii for Maori to which she canoed each morning. Practical as always, she kept a list of her goat's kidding with an aside of "poor Brownie died in the heavy storm" and "Betsy the pig, salted hams, July 1873". She thought nothing of the two hour ride to Pakaraka to visit Mr. and Mrs H. Williams and mentions the breaking-in of her young horse. In 1875, Bishop Selwyn's son, Rev John Selwyn who was born at Te Waimate soon after Fanny, asked Elizabeth at 54, to go to the Melanesian Mission on Norfolk Island to relieve for seven months, and ever willing, she agreed. Twice a year, native men and women were brought in the Mission schooner *Southern Cross* from the Solomans, Torres Straights and Santa Cruz Islands to learn skills and great was the excitement in the school when the schooner was sighted off shore and the shout went up "aka nina" (our ship). Only five years before Elizabeth arrived, the first Bishop of Melanesia, Samuel Coleridge Patteson had been killed in the Santa Cruz Islands in retaliation for a "blackbirding" raid by unscrupulous labour recruiters.

Because of the rockgirt forshore, on arrival at Norfolk Is, stormy weather prevented any hope of disembarking into the Islanders' longboats for two days but Elizabeth's first impressions on arrival were ones of great delight: "The walk down the hill in the early morning through the cool air is the height of enjoyment. The absence of the world and its wearisome conventionalities is a happy feature. What is in the future for me I know not; if only Thou wilt guide my steps, all will be well". Only once does she give way to her past hurts in her diaries when she asks the "Heavenly Father to bless all those who have shown kindness to me and touched thereby the deep springs which were well nigh frozen by the unkindness and ingratitude of those who have ever had care and kindness shown them. Little do those about us know what a deep fountain of sorrow is hidden beneath the surface; a wounded, bruised and battered spirit touched to the core when kindness and courtesy is shown by strangers, withheld by those whose bounden duty it was to show every kindness and attention".

Elizabeth liked the place, the work and the staff, describing the "kaiwhakahaere" (superintendent) as someone of "sound judgement and common sense". This man was Dr. Robert Henry Codrington M.A.,D.D, a man much loved by all and of exceptional character. A well-travelled scholar and a great linguist and ethnologist, he had turned down the Bishopric as he preferred to work as a friend to the natives brought to the Mission and he and Elizabeth forged a strong friendship of mutual respect for many years. She helped him with his seminal work on the Mota language which became the "lingua franca" for the Mission and at which she herself became fluent, her knowledge of Maori helping with the phrasing and sentence construction of Mota. The Dr. was a skilled gardener and in organising the Mission grounds, he shared his knowledge and if Elizabeth did not appreciate William's botanical enthusiasm, her diary contains copious notes on the growing of begonias, coleus and compost-making and in the 1890's he gave her an exotic bulb from India which to everyone's amazement, produced five flowers. Photography with glass plates

was another skill Dr. Codrington taught to Elizabeth.

As she rode around the island admiring the flourishing tropical gardens, Elizabeth described this scene, “this island is beautiful, the 5 cliff-edged headlands covered with pines, oaks, various coloured earth and rocks, while below the white surf breaking on the black rocks and small sandy beaches, the light coloured blue of the nearer sea and the whole backed by the deeper blue of the further, makes an entrancing picture”.

The 180 Norfolk Islanders who had settled there from Pitcairn in 1851, were themselves happy, gentle people with beautiful singing voices who welcomed the Mission and their medical help in their isolated location where there were frequent accidents and emergencies often associated around the Islanders whaling fleet of five boats. Watching a whale being flensed one day, Elizabeth saw the tackle give way and the flensing knife slice through Jacob Christian’s leg and although the doctor amputated below the knee, the young man died within the week of gangrene. She quickly settled into Mission life, teaching the 3 Rs, writing constantly to thank supporters for their help and directing the making of uniforms which required her to cut out garments of stiff denim which left her with damaged thumb joints. In spring it was time to make arrowroot which was a drawn-out process but when illness struck such as dysentery or fever then it was used and the surplus was sold in NZ. One night she records working till 3 a.m. making guava jam and the abundant fruit and vegetables growing in the warm climate gave a healthy diet. Another innovation for the Mission was Elizabeth’s recipe for potato yeast which gave a leavened bread and she also acquired a camp oven for the kitchen while each spring saw the interiors of buildings and furniture washed with anti-ant solution and wooden surfaces were scrubbed white with sand.

There was always constant drama happening on the island and Elizabeth was given a box of Homeopathic medicines to use which had been given to the Islanders’ leader Mr. Knobbs, 25 years earlier in England and which Fanny Simcox used years later in Otaki. Elizabeth’s saddest task was being with the dying despite desperate efforts to help them. She made the coffin-lining when Bishop John Selwyn’s wife died of puerperal fever and seven months later, lined a coffin for his baby daughter. She was with Sarah Palmer (nee Ashwell) when she too died while her husband was away on the Mission schooner up at the Solomon and Santa Cruz Islands. But there were also babies born needing to be washed and dressed while mothers recovered and many were the happy weddings, picnics and parties the whole Island enjoyed. Her gift at a wedding was cupboards and stools made out of candle and biscuit boxes covered in chintz as her background had taught her to be practical and resourceful with whatever was to hand. She lived in which ever mission house was vacant but on being asked to shift yet again, she writes “I am so weary of moving about: shall I never have a settled home anywhere?” but always a biblical verse provided solace, “this is not your rest”. “Like a shag on a rock with outspread wings, ready to take flight at the slightest alarm,” she did eventually settle into the empty Bishop’s house for the next 22 years and her diaries are a fascinating read for the immediacy of a working missionary’s life.

In 1880 she returned to NZ for a visit which meant four or five days on the lurching, rolling cockroach-infested *Southern Cross* before reaching Auckland and then a wait for the coastal vessel *Rotomahana* to take her to Napier for and a visit to Jane Williams’ family at Hukarere. From Napier it was a train journey to the rail terminus, followed

by coach to Woodville, a change of horses and on through the fearfully narrow Manawatu Gorge, a wait for a train to Foxton and a night at White's Hotel followed by a 6 a.m. start by coach and if the sand was hard, a good trip down the beach to Otaki to be met by her son-in-law Will Simcox in his waggonette and finally Fanny's house with five excited grandchildren. As Fanny looked thin and overworked, Elizabeth later took the two eldest grandchildren, Edith (13) and Martin (11) back with her for nearly a year at Norfolk. On this visit back in NZ, Elizabeth planted two Norfolk pine trees still growing today, one beside the Mission house on the Paihia foreshore, the other at Rangiaetea Church, Otaki when she attended the 40 year celebration for the arrival of Christianity in the district. Attending church in the impressive Rangiaetea she was pleased the congregation refrained from spitting on the floor after her remonstrations and on this occasion, she met again Renata Kawepo who had been the principal native teacher from the days at Ahuriri nearly 30 years before. At Christmas in 1891 the William Thomas Fairburn family met together on Christmas day at John Fairburn's home in Otahuhu for the first time in 47 years; the last time had been on Elizabeth's departure for Ahuriri. Their ages were Richard (72), Elizabeth (70), John (68), Edwin (64) and Esther (62). From about this time, Edith Simcox and occasionally other family members, began to spend more and more time helping their grandmother and like her, falling in love with island life and the people.

Elizabeth visited from Norfolk Island every few years, catching up with her many Auckland friends. A frequent visitor at Bishops court, she made her mark on New Zealand church history and was accepted as an evangelical missionary in her own right. By 1898, now 77 and crippled with arthritis which necessitated her being moved in a bathchair and not wanting to be a burden, she resigned and was reluctantly farewelled from the Mission, to retire to Otaki where she still did translation work while living with Fanny. She died in 1904 and is buried on the Mutikotiko hill at Rangiaetea. Her granddaughter Edith who spent many years with her grandmother and wrote a biography of reminiscences from Elizabeth's diaries, opens with these words,

*This is story of a woman, sincere, humble, unselfish and generous.  
One who lived for others and never spared herself in any way.*

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The Paihia Mission House c. 1885



Christmas 1891: from left,  
Ronald Fairburn, Esther Hickson, Edwin Fairburn, Elizabeth Colenso, John Fairburn.





Lorna Julyan sent these portraits of her great-great-great-grandparents Robert Julyan and Anne Veale Thomas Julyan: Anne was the sister of William Colenso's mother, Mary Veale Thomas Colenso.

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

The cover of this issue is based on a book cover design by Aubrey Beardsley.