



Philip Steer, "On Systematic Colonization and the Culture of Settler Colonialism: Edward Gibbon Wakefield's *A Letter from Sydney* (1829)"

Edward Gibbon Wakefield (1796-1862) was in Newgate Prison in 1829, nearing the end of his three-year sentence for the sensational and bizarre abduction of the underage heiress Ellen Turner, when he began to publish a series of letters in the *Morning Chronicle* purporting to be from a frustrated member of the gentry now living in Australia.[1] Soon revised, collected, and republished, *Wakefield's A Letter from Sydney: The Principal Town of Australasia* (1829) offered a manifesto for a new approach to settler colonialism that would spur the early Victorian renewal of British imperial expansion in Australia and New Zealand. If Wakefield's name is now largely unknown within Victorian studies, that reflects not only the contested status of his actions and character during his lifetime, but also the ambivalent position of settler colonialism within current literary, cultural, and historical scholarship. During the first half of the twentieth century, historians and biographers held up Wakefield as an archetypal great man of Empire, even as they consistently sought to rescue him from obscurity and/or opprobrium. In Wakefield's earliest biography—published as part of the "Builders of Greater Britain" series, alongside Sir Walter Raleigh and Rajah Brooke—R. Garnet concludes by imagining an epitaph that might one day be erected in his honor in the colonies:

The man in these latter days beyond comparison of the most genius and the widest influence in the great science of colonization, both as a thinker, a writer, and a worker; whose name is like a spell to all interested in the subject. (375)

In Richard Charles Mills' account, almost two decades later, Wakefield's bureaucratic achievements are likened to the bravery and derring-do of a hero of imperial romance—"Wakefield had first to convince a small band of followers, then to lay siege to the Colonial Office. . . . [I]t was only by his persistence, ingenuity, and great power of personal persuasion that he was enabled to carry on the campaign" (325)—while Paul Bloomfield's study from the early 1960s offers Wakefield's achievements as a patriotic counterblast to Britain's desire to enter the European Economic Community: "This strange, far-sighted man of enormous mental and physical energies—the author of much splendidly vivid modern prose—was the founder of an Empire and builder of the Commonwealth" (x). By this point, however, the historiographic tide had begun to turn. Michael Turnbull's slim volume, *The New Zealand Bubble: The Wakefield Theory in Practice* (1959), made a forceful case that, at its heart, Wakefield's entire interest in the colonization of New Zealand "had to encourage speculation" (17, original emphasis), and concluded simply, "Wakefield had some merit as a thinker and he was a publicist of genius. As a practical coloniser he was a menace" (36). His most recent biographer, Philip Temple, asserts acerbically, "In the political and social climate of the early twenty-first century, Edward Gibbon Wakefield and his family are the villains of all fashionable postcolonial scenarios of the past" (1). Wakefield's place within Victorian studies is currently limited to a bit-part role in the development of political economy; in Australian historiography, he occupies a similarly peripheral place as the England-based progenitor of South Australian colonization; in New Zealand, by contrast, the lasting cultural and political impact of Wakefield's New Zealand Company settlements, and their adoption by later settlers as a "myth of origin," have ensured that Wakefield and his legacies remain both more prominent and more fraught (Belich 279).

Standing at the head of several decades of publications, political advocacy, and private colonization schemes—efforts that emanated in Britain and extended to the furthest parts of the globe—Wakefield's rhetorical flight in *A Letter from Sydney* would have incalculable impacts on the indigenous populations and ecologies of Australia and New Zealand, "liberating future inhabitants from any sense of place in which native or indigenous things matter" (Park 37). In 1829, there were almost 62,000 British subjects in Australia, and in 1840, around 1,000 in New Zealand; by the turn of the century, Australia's settler population would number some 3,750,000, and New Zealand's about 770,000. By contrast, the Indigenous population of Australia would plummet from an estimated pre-contact level of over 300,000 to perhaps only 94,500 by 1900; in New Zealand during the same period, the Māori population would be reduced from an estimated 100,000 to only 45,500 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Statistics New Zealand). The vast global redistribution of the British population inaugurated by



systematic colonization would also alter radically the geopolitics of the Victorian era. The expanding populations of British settlers would influence thinking about the role and distribution of naval and military forces across the Empire with particular intensity from the 1870s onwards, culminating in the surge of colonial patriotism at the renewed outbreak of war in South Africa in 1899 (the second Anglo-Boer War) that saw the “self-governing colonies” rally to the British cause, to the tune of some 16,000 volunteer soldiers from Australia and 6,500 from New Zealand (Burroughs “Defence” 343). Wakefield’s theory was also taken seriously as a contribution to economic theory, most notably by John Stuart Mill, and Karl Marx would single out Wakefield in *Capital* (1867) as the “most notable political economist of that period” (830), concluding the first volume with a stinging chapter on “The Modern Theory of Colonization” that argued that the greatest value of systematic colonization lay in the insights it unintentionally offered into metropolitan capitalism:

It is the great merit of E. G. Wakefield to have discovered, not something new *about* the colonies, but *in* the colonies, the truth about capitalist relations in the mother country. . . .

He discovered that capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons which is mediated through things. (932, original emphasis)

In contrast to Marx’s skepticism about Wakefield’s insights into colonial conditions, however, novels such as Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield* (1850) attest to the emergence of a new imperial imaginary out of the combined cultural and economic arguments at the heart of systematic colonization. Thus, in its wide-reaching political and cultural impacts, Wakefield’s *A Letter from Sydney* constitutes the entry point to what might be called, after Lauren Goodlad, a Victorian settler-colonial “geopolitical unconscious.” *A Letter from Sydney* and the project of systematic colonization illuminates the deep urge of the Victorians to remake the world in their own image, as well as the global exchanges and imaginaries that helped shape the culture of metropolitan Britain.



Figure 1: Edward Gibbon Wakefield, by Benjamin Holl. Public Domain. Wikimedia Commons.

The Theory of Systematic Colonization

Although the “free” (non-convict) settlement of Australia had been underway for several years at the point when Wakefield wrote *Letter from Sydney*, it was nevertheless an economic and political orthodoxy at the time that colonization was detrimental to the nation. Colonial commissioner John Bigge’s reports to the British government in 1822 had first made the case that the New South Wales economy ought to be reorganized around wool production and free settlement, but convict transportation remained by far the greatest contributor to the expanding British population in the southern hemisphere, peaking in 1833 when 6,779 convicts were sent into exile. (The subject was uncomfortably close to home for Wakefield in 1829: as his biographer notes, he was “aware that . . . only his Scottish marriage to Ellen Turner had saved him from transportation to Botany Bay” [Temple 126]). Despite the ongoing forceful exile of undesirable citizens, political economists were anxious about the consequences of British capital following the same route southward. David Ricardo had influentially argued in his *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817-23), drawing on the so-called Law of Markets articulated by Jean-Baptiste Say at the turn of the century, that the national economy was a closed system; as a consequence, it was believed that the export of capital through colonization would inevitably diminish Britain by



reducing the opportunity to employ labor at home. "Since capital provided employment for labour, any loss, waste or export of capital was to be deplored," so that the offshore investment of capital "could never be anything but detrimental to the exporting country" (Winch 76). Wakefield, by contrast, maintained that Britain was plagued by a "general glut of capital" because it lacked sufficient domestic avenues for its investment, leading to low returns at home or risky speculations abroad (Winch 78, original emphasis). Put in these terms, settler colonization offered a safety valve for these domestic pressures—or what David Harvey, drawing on Marx, terms a temporary "'spatial fix' to capitalism's internal contradictions" (305).

In *Letter from Sydney*, Wakefield approaches these economic questions discursively, adopting the guise of a "free" settler who has immigrated to Australia and invested in a sizeable property—originally 14,000 acres, but scaled up to 20,000 in the book version—containing abundant natural resources. However, the readers of the *Morning Chronicle* weren't fooled for long, if at all, as to the location of its anonymous correspondent. As the newspaper's editors would soon acknowledge, "The object of the ingenious writer, in throwing his views into the form in which they appeared, was to obtain for them the attention of a class of readers too little interested in abstract speculations to have profited by them, without some such contrivance" (2). Wakefield's "contrivance" constructs the colony as uninhabited and unappropriated "waste" land, a blatant misrepresentation that nevertheless reprises one of the most influential gestures of liberal political economy. In John Locke's *Second Treatise of Civil Government* (1690), which offers in part a speculative history of the emergence of civil society as the means of preserving individual property rights, he famously turns to colonial territory to imagine the prior state of nature out of which private property could first emerge: "Thus in the beginning all the world was America . . . for no such thing as money was anywhere known" (26). Wakefield's depopulated Australia resembles Locke's unappropriated America, yet that surplus "waste" land now proves surprisingly unable to provide a stable foundation for civil society. Instead, it gives rise to a number of apparent economic paradoxes that thwart the letter-writer's desire to profit from his investment. For one thing, his estate has proved worthless, with "no marketable value" despite its surfeit of natural resources:

It is a noble property to look at; and "20,000 acres in a ring fence," sounds very well in England; but here, such a property possesses no exchangeable value. The reason is plain: there are millions upon millions of acres, as fertile as mine, to be had for nothing; and, what is more, there are not people to take them. (103)

At the same time, his gentrified ambitions have been dented by a failure to retain laborers, servants, and artisans in his employment, because they have all been seduced by the chance of acquiring land for themselves. "There is no such class as a tenantry in this country," he laments, "where every man, who has capital to cultivate a farm, can obtain one of his own for nothing" (104). On top of all this, Australia's colonists are seen to be developing the antisocial characteristics of what he dismissively terms a "new people," as exemplified by the existing settler populations of North America:

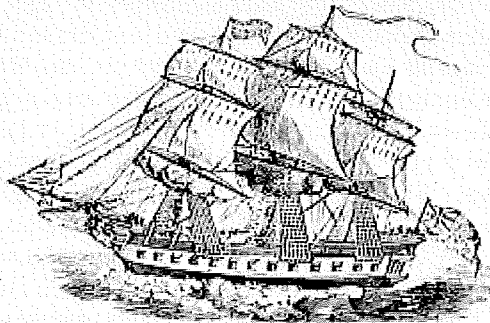
[A] people who, though they continually increase in number, make no progress in the art of living; who, in respect to wealth, knowledge, skill, taste, and whatever belongs to civilization, have degenerated from their ancestors; . . . who, ever on the move, are unable to bring anything to perfection; . . . and who delight in a forced equality, not equality before the law only, but equality against nature and truth; an equality which, to keep the balance always even, rewards the mean rather than the great, and gives more honour to the vile than to the noble. (151-2)

Reflecting on his disappointments, Wakefield's settler comes to the conclusion that the same cause lies at the root of all these problems: what appears at first to be the colony's greatest asset—its seemingly limitless expanse of "waste" land—proves to also be its greatest weakness, because it produces a catastrophic disproportion between land and labor. "We are in a barbarous condition," he concludes, "like that of every people scattered over a territory immense in proportion to their numbers" (119).



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Figure 2: First Scottish colony for New Zealand. [Reprinted] Copyright People's Palace Museum, Glasgow Green [ca 1981]. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. Ref: Eph-C-IMMIGRATION-1839-01. Used with permission. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22730739>.



Wakefield's spatialized account of the settler colony derives from reworking the "stadialist," or "four stages," theory of societal development codified during the Scottish Enlightenment.[2] According to this stadial schema, the emergence of private property is indexed to modes of "occupation" or appropriation of the soil; as Adam Smith laid out in his lectures on jurisprudence, "1st, the Age of Hunters; 2dly, the Age of Shepherds; 3dly, the Age of Agriculture; and 4thly, the Age of Commerce" (14).[3] The ongoing vitality of stadial thought in early Victorian economic theory can be glimpsed in J. R. McCulloch's *Principles of Political Economy* (1825), which similarly asserts: "The *third* and most decisive step in the progress of civilisation—in the great art of producing the necessities and conveniences of life—is made when the wandering tribes of hunters and shepherds renounce their migratory habits, and become agriculturalists and manufacturers" (68, original emphasis). The importance of this conceptual framework for *Letter from Sydney* is evident in its concern with the "migratory habits" of the settler population, and its association of mobility with a failure to establish either a functioning economy or a cultured society. Indeed, Wakefield finds this stadial logic at work across all colonial environments:

But this state of things is not without many precedents. It has occurred in every waste country, settled by emigrants from civilized countries. . . . [T]his colony would never be anything but a half-barbarous, Tartarian, ill-cultivated, poverty-stricken wilderness, until, in the course of nature, some hundreds of years hence, the population should become more dense[.] (112)

At the same time, however, *Letter from Sydney* also deviates from stadial theory in important ways. Rather than reiterating the idea of a gradual, irreversible evolution of a society from a nomadic to a settled state, Wakefield presents both developmental stages as being available *simultaneously* to a colonial population. Civilization is not simply produced by the active renunciation of a wandering state, as McCulloch would have it, but is strongly shaped by environmental factors. Relatedly, this means that social development is able to go into reverse in a settler-colonial environment, degenerating *spontaneously*, though not because of exposure to indigenous "savagery" (Wakefield's account is willfully blind to any indigenous presence) but due to the absence of the spatial conditions necessary for "civilized" life. Colonial conditions "render men's minds as narrow as their territory is extensive, preventing not only the native growth of liberal feeling and polished manners, but also the importation from abroad of those attributes of civilization" (122). This thought experiment, as conjectural as stadialist theory itself, provided the basis for Wakefield's revisionary critique of the spatial logic of political economy, and from this the foundations of a new economic model of settler colonization.

If proposing an economic justification for settler colonialism required Wakefield to attack Ricardian economic orthodoxy, then his particular view of colonial territory and its ability to dissolve British social structures necessitated revising Adam Smith's influential account of the division of labor. Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) begins with the principle that economic growth is propelled by the division of labor, as it introduces differentiation and specialization into processes of production. This first comes about, Smith argues, through the innate dependence of the individual on others for securing her everyday needs: "As it is by treaty, by barter, and by purchase that we obtain from one another the greater part of those mutual good offices which we stand in need of, so it is this same trucking disposition which originally gives occasion to the division of labour" (119). Wakefield's response, sketched out in *Letter from Sydney* and elaborated in later publications, is to argue instead that any division of labor is predicated upon the prior aggregation, or "combination," of population. Put another way, whereas Smith believes that it is the atomizing division of labor that drives the civilizing process, Wakefield ascribes to population density the same generative function: "concentration . . . produce[s] what never did and never can exist without it—civilization" (134). As the historian of urbanization David Hamer argues, Wakefield's understanding of concentration "was certain normally to involve a high measure of collection of population into urban communities" (103). The successful transplantation of a British society into colonial space therefore depends upon establishing a correct balance between the population and the territory it inhabits, and for that reason the term "proportion" recurs throughout *Letter from Sydney*. "What, then, are we to do," the letter-writer asks, "to obtain that desirable proportion between the demand and supply of labour, without which, I say, no country can flourish?" (113).

Wakefield's answer to the problem of proportion is to propose an economic mechanism capable of driving the "systematic" progress of colonization: imposing a "sufficient price" on "waste" land that would constrain artificially its availability to settlers. In contradiction to early Victorian economic orthodoxy, laissez-faire must



therefore be suspended in favor of government intervention in order to establish economic growth in the colonies (Winch 94). Wakefield lays out his case in the shortest chapter of *Letter from Sydney*:

In all new countries the government alone has the power to dispose of waste land. . . . [N]obody would cultivate without a title; the government alone can give a secure title; and it is, therefore, impossible to use waste land without the active assistance of government. Does it not follow that government might, by restricting the amount of grants, establish and maintain the most desirable proportion between people and territory? . . . The proportion between people and territory does, in new countries, depend altogether upon the will of the government. Every new government, therefore, possesses the power to civilize its subjects. (158-9)

As Jonathan Lamb argues, the sufficient price effectively condensed into a single economic transaction the history of development that, according to stadial theory, separates waste land (and its nomadic denizens) from the civilized practice (and practitioners) of agricultural settlement: "In its price land was to bear the value of its improvement. Its history as a civilised space, and as an instrument of civilisation, was telescoped into the single transaction by which it became settleable" (89). Ascribed by Wakefield with almost magical powers, and undoubtedly the most controversial aspect of systematic colonization theory, the sufficient price nevertheless remains the absent center of *Letter from Sydney*. As Wakefield's colonial correspondent disarmingly admits,

Thus it becomes clear, that the object in view may be attained by fixing some considerable price on waste land. Still, how is the proper price to be ascertained? I frankly confess that I do not know. I believe that it could be determined only by experience[.] (159)

This indeterminacy continues in the book's appendix, "Outline of a System of Colonization." Wakefield introduces the sufficient price as the system's first principle, yet it remains literally a blank space in the text: "*It is suggested*, That a payment in money of _____ per acre be required for all future grants of land without exception" (178, original emphasis). That blank marks the intersection between Wakefield's theoretical claims about colonization and his practical efforts to profit from the invasion of Australia and New Zealand. The cheap purchase of land from indigenous vendors (or, even more expeditiously, its appropriation at no cost whatsoever) and its subsequent high-priced sale would not only place a spatial constraint on the settler population, but also bankroll the immigration process itself. As Miles Fairburn observes, the sufficient price "had to serve two purposes which were not necessarily compatible; the costs of sustaining the appropriate level of free immigration may have required a 'sufficient price' quite different from that needed to keep the average labourer landless for the prescribed period" (par. 9).

Systematic Colonization in Action: The South Australia Company and the New Zealand Company

Throughout the 1830s and 40s, Wakefield was at the forefront of the growing enthusiasm for settler colonization, authoring a dizzying array of publications, founding and participating in multiple colonizing organizations, and lobbying the government as it framed its colonial policy. Peter Burroughs asserts,

Wakefield's major contribution to the subject of colonization was to present his ideas in an attractive and entertaining manner and to force them to the forefront of public attention by a skilful campaign of propaganda conducted by members of the National Colonization Society and other sympathizers in the press, in pamphlets, in parliament, and at public meetings. ("Britain" 15)

In the popular press, Wakefield received his strongest support from the Radical-leaning magazine, *The Spectator*, under the editorship of Robert Rintoul, while his most fervent opposition appeared in the pages of *The Times* (Temple 155). Following *Letter from Sydney*, Wakefield's next notable work on colonial themes was *England and America* (1833), a work of comparative political economy that sought to position systematic colonization as a solution to social and economic ills in both nations:



Admitting that the three elements of production are land, capital, and labour; supposing that the chief social evils of England are owing to a deficiency of land in proportion to capital and labour, and those of America to an excess of land in proportion to capital and labour . . . in that case, the Americans and the English have a common interest in understanding the art of colonization[.] (318)

This was followed by an edition of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1835-9), accompanied by Wakefield's own commentary, originally projected to extend to six volumes. After the publication of the fourth volume in 1839, however, the publishers were forced to issue a public statement to the edition's subscribers announcing that Wakefield appeared to have simply abandoned the project, even though "every mode of entreaty and remonstrance has been resorted to in vain, during the course of the last three years" (qtd. in Temple 168). One reason for Wakefield's inertia was that he had become immersed in public affairs in Canada following his appointment by Lord Durham, who had been made High Commissioner of British North America in early 1838, in the wake of the previous year's rebellions against British rule in Upper and Lower Canada. At the end of his tenure, Durham published his *Report on the Affairs of British North America* (1839), recommending the establishment of "responsible government" in Canada, including a lengthy appendix authored by Wakefield (though not attributed to him) on "Public Lands and Emigration." Wakefield's abandonment of the *Wealth of Nations* project also coincided with his attention turning to New Zealand, and he co-authored *The British Colonization of New Zealand* (1837), which was issued under the name of the newly-formed New Zealand Association. In addition to its enthusiastic reassertion of the principles of systematic colonization, this work notably framed the endeavor as an overtly civilizing mission, in response to increasing concerns in Britain about the treatment of indigenous populations:

But in selecting New Zealand as a field to which that system may be very beneficially extended, the Association have had an object which may be described as altogether new,—that of reclaiming and cultivating a moral wilderness,—that of civilizing a barbarous people by means of a deliberate plan and systematic efforts. . . . The success of such an experiment must in a great measure depend on the natural capacity of the inferior race for improvement. It will be seen that, in this respect, the native inhabitants of New Zealand are superior to most, if not all thoroughly savage people. (27-28)

The British Colonization of New Zealand constituted the leading edge of a sustained publicity campaign intended to spur systematic colonization in New Zealand; it was the "first of nearly 200 books and pamphlets on New Zealand that came out over the following fifteen years, largely sponsored by Wakefield-initiated colonising associations and companies," Temple observes, and "they cumulatively established a propaganda image of New Zealand as a green, pleasant and fertile land, sparsely populated with friendly natives and ideally suited for the foundation of an antipodean Britain" (195). Wakefield's last notable publication was *A View of the Art of Colonization* (1849), a fictionalized epistolary exchange between a "Colonist" and a "Statesman," in which he sought to establish his intellectual proprietorship of systematic colonization and to settle some political scores through highly personal attacks on Lord Grey and the Colonial Office (Temple 428-30).

Wakefield's active participation in the colonization of Australia began in 1831, when news reached Britain of the discovery of a possible location where the principles of systematic colonization might be enacted. The hastily-formed South Australian Land Company applied for a charter from the Colonial Office at the end of that year, only for James Stephen to dismiss the proposal as "wild and impracticable"; ultimately, the company collapsed a year later, and "[p]rospective settlers with a combined capital of £200,000 and 6000 poor people who had applied for assisted passages were left in the lurch" (Temple 151). In the wake of the public profile attained by *England and America*, Wakefield's supporters renewed their interest in colonizing schemes, and founded the South Australia Association in late 1833. The Association eventually succeeding in obtaining a charter in August the following year: the new colony was allocated over 300,000 square miles, and theoretically recognized pre-existing rights of Aboriginal land ownership.

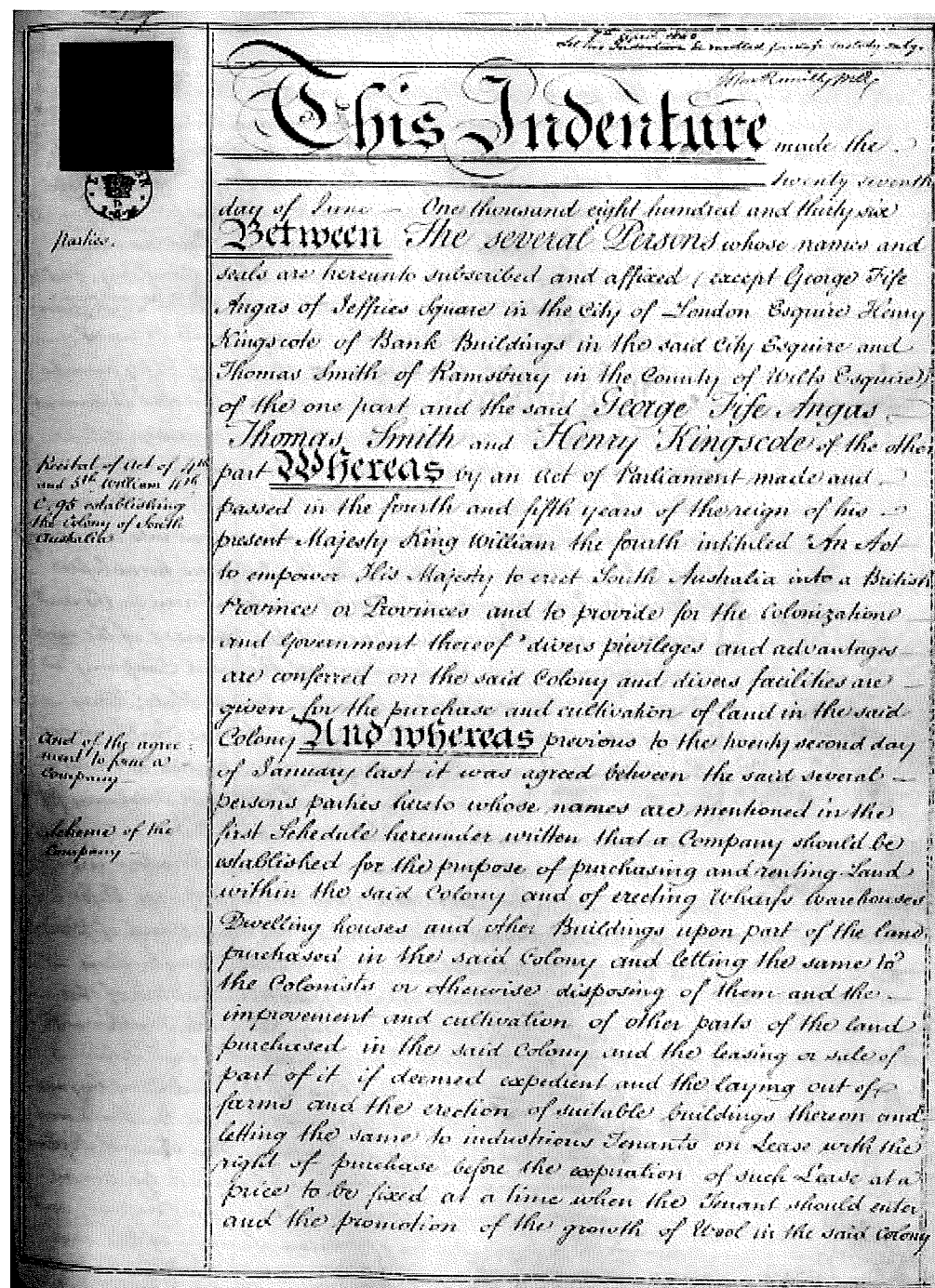


Figure 3: Deed of Settlement, South Australia Company. State Library of South Australia. BRG 42/11. Used with permission.

Wakefield withdrew at an early stage from formal involvement in the South Australian scheme, in part because he felt that it was deviating from the strict principles laid down by his theory. However, many of the basic mechanisms of systematic colonization—a fixed price on land, concentration of population, and emigration assisted by land sales—were in place when the first fleet of nine ships of what was now the South Australia Company landed more than 500 colonists in the colony during the second half of 1836. These first colonists had “set sail for the general region of Spencer Gulf’s eastern shores with no clear idea of where they would settle,” because the South Australia Company itself was unsure about the precise location of its colony (Carter 202). Yet although the



Company's survey was only conducted weeks ahead of the arrival of the colonists, much of the land had already been sold prior to their embarkation in order to fund the speculative enterprise:

The sole condition of purchase was to be a payment of 20/- per acre, which price was not to vary unless "any tendency to injurious dispersion" appeared among the colonists, in which event the Commissioners were to raise it to any amount not exceeding £2. In order to sell land to the value of £35,000 as required by the Act [i.e. South Australia Act (1834)], the Board offered 437 preliminary land-orders at £81, each entitling its purchaser to a country section of 80 acres and a town allotment of one acre. (Pike 120)

By March 1837, the urban settlement of Adelaide had been surveyed, enabling "the rational and equal division of the land into purchasable blocks that was the essential precondition of capitalist settlement—of the self-regulating 'democracy,' based on free trade, which Wakefield was promoting" (Carter 203). The surveyors proceeded over the next two years to map 150 square miles of the surrounding land originally envisaged for the colony's "country sections." As a result of settler dissatisfaction with the quality of that land, the survey was expanded to an additional area of 1,000 square miles further south; a further 500,000 acres were later surveyed during 1839-40 through so-called "Special Surveys," an innovation intended to spur investment in the capital-starved colony, whereby "any purchaser who paid in advance £4,000 [was able to] select at will an area of 15,000 acres outside the defined districts" (Pike 178). Ultimately, the historian Douglas Pike concludes of the systematic colonization in Australia that "six years sufficed to test all the major principles and find them wanting":

Prodded and protected by all the arts of the promoters, South Australia had at first an extraordinary flourish of artificial prosperity. In four years the population grew to 15,000, some 300,000 acres of land were sold, and a veritable prodigy of a town was brought into existence. . . . Instead of large profits arising from the cultivation of the soil by abundant cheap labour, most of the settlers found that they had exchanged the substance of steady incomes at home for the shadow of gambling in colonial land. (Pike 169)

Wakefield meanwhile, after having become deeply involved in questions of Canadian governance, and failing to secure a seat in Parliament, next turned his attention to New Zealand.

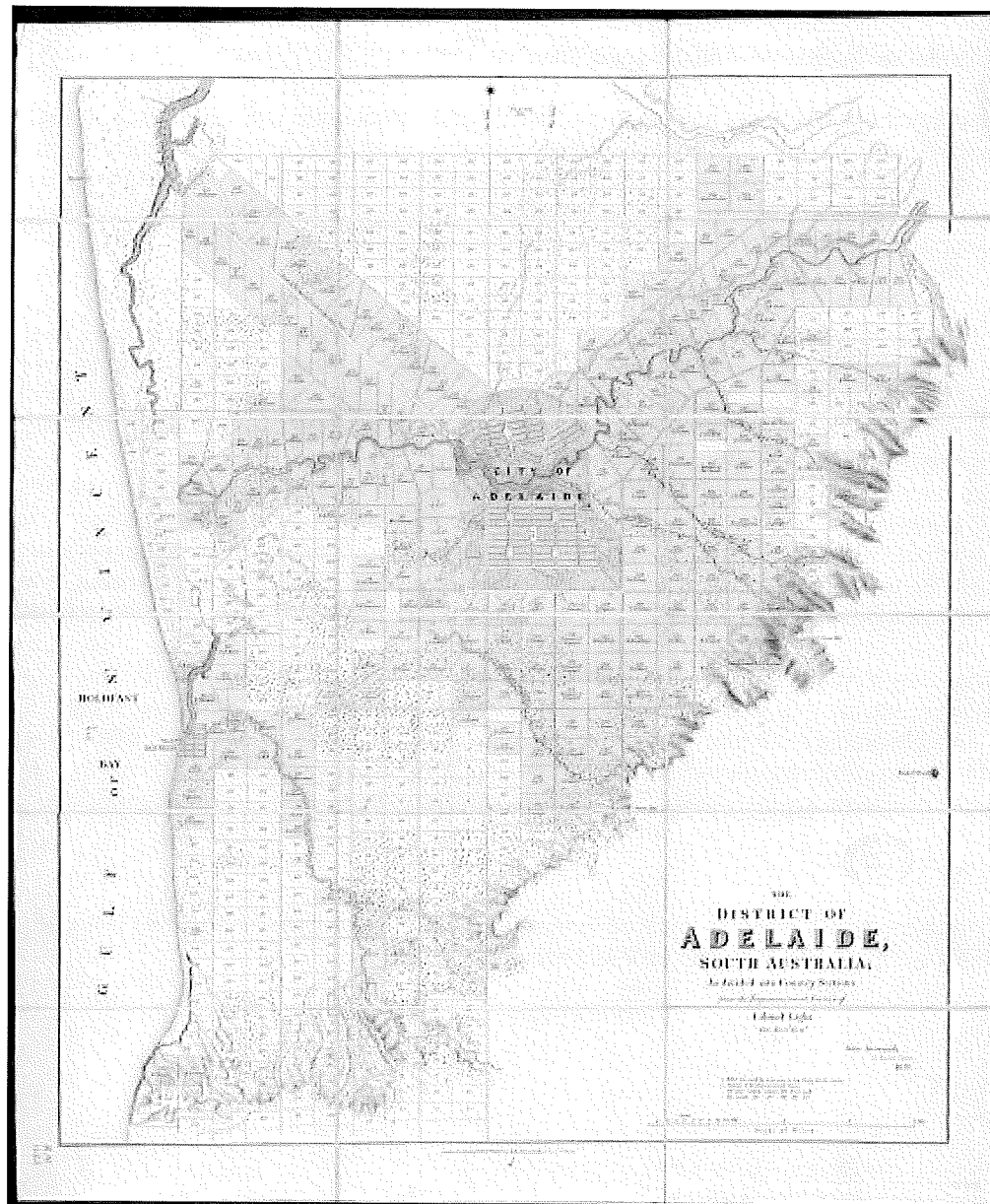


Figure 4: The District of Adelaide, South Australia: As divided into country sections. Used with permission. National Library of Australia. MAP RM 1122. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-231421265/view>

By May 1837, when Wakefield called the first meeting of the New Zealand Association to order—"the only time he chaired any meeting of the several colonising bodies of which he was the progenitor" (Temple 191)—the Church Missionary Society (CMS) had already been established in New Zealand for several decades, and Britain had had an official Resident based there since 1833, but the islands were still not subject to formal British sovereignty. The Association immediately began to lobby for an official charter, against the vehement opposition of the CMS and the Colonial Office, who were concerned about the impact of colonization on the indigenous Māori population. In service of his propaganda battle, Wakefield took into his house Nahiti, a Māori whaler who had been stranded at Le Havre; "displayed . . . to curious Londoners [as] a proof of the malleable, friendly Maori," and incorporated into Wakefield's writings at the time about New Zealand, Nahiti would eventually accompany the first New Zealand Company survey ship and serve as translator in its land purchases (Temple 196). The New Zealand Association was restructured into the New Zealand Company in 1838, and it purchased its first ship—the *Tory*—in November of that year. Continuing government skepticism toward the colonization scheme led Wakefield to propose that the



New Zealand Company proceed without official sanction. As one of the attendees of the Company's infamous meeting on 20 March 1839 recorded,

Mr W. then sd send off your expedition immediately—acquire all the land you can & then you will find that Govt will see the absolute necessity of doing something . . . possess yourselves of the Soil & you are secure—but, if from *delay* you allow others to do it before you—they will succeed & you will fail. (Burns 14)

The Company accordingly moved into high gear, in order to purchase as much land as possible before the pending establishment of British sovereignty brought such sales to a halt and therefore crippled its financial basis.

From the start, then, the New Zealand Company was in a tight financial position: it needed to sell land in the colony before a single colonist left Britain, in order to finance the enterprise; at the same time, it would be unable to purchase land directly from Māori once Britain annexed the colony, a process likely to be precipitated by the dispatch of the Company's survey ship. It therefore had to dispatch its first colonists not only before they sighted a map of the proposed settlements, but also before any land was even acquired. To generate sufficient early enthusiasm amongst investors in Britain, many of whom had no intention of ever leaving its shores, the Company sold "land orders" (or "shares") guaranteeing an acre of town land and one hundred acres of country land at the "ridiculously cheap" price of £1 per acre. It then entered the purchasers of these shares in a lottery that gave them the chance to maximize their investment:

The numbers allotted . . . to the owners of the shares were put into one box and drawn at random. As each number was drawn, the owner was identified and a second number was taken from another box. This second number represented the order in which the owner of the particular share (or his agent if he was an absentee) would choose his actual selection from the map prepared by the Company's surveyors in New Zealand. (Turnbull 15)

This "brilliant commercial device" hinged on the promise that all land purchases would appreciate rapidly in value as further colonists flooded in, but land in strategic positions—with access to water, or on main streets—would appreciate fastest of all, and the result was "a wild outburst of land speculation" (Turnbull 17). The entirely abstract nature of the metropolitan face of systematic colonization can be glimpsed in Samuel Cobham's *Proposed Plan of the City of Wellington* (c. 1840), drawn up in almost total absence of information about the location of the proposed settlement. Cobham presented to prospective purchasers the idealized spatial order of a rectilinear city, surrounded by 1100 farms of 100 acres each, and neatly bisected by a river that appears suspiciously similar to the Thames.

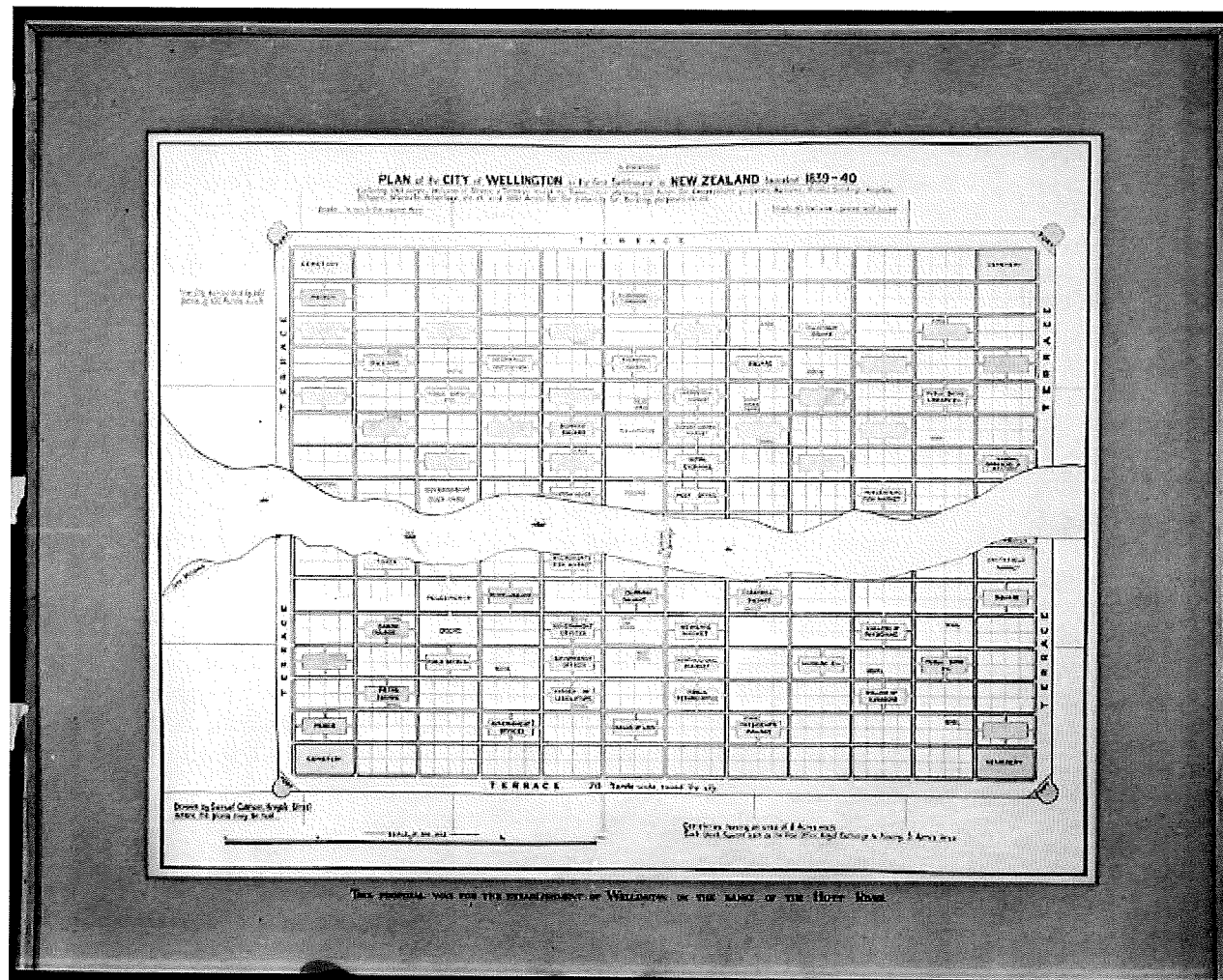


Figure 5: Proposed plan of the city of Wellington, drawn by Samuel Cobham. Used with permission. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. Ref: 1/2-051659-F. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23125982>

With land sales far advanced in Britain, the *Tory* was dispatched in May 1839 with the task of identifying sites for settlements and purchasing land (the manifest recording, “cost of barter goods, £5,040 2s 10d”) only a few months before the first ships of invading colonists commenced the 16,000-mile voyage (Temple 237). With two of Wakefield’s relatives at the head of the mission—his brother, William, and his nephew, Edward Jerningham—the *Tory* expedition headed first to Te Whanganui a Tara (Wellington), the site of the Company’s proposed main settlement, which was already the site of seven significant Māori p (settlements). The Company would ultimately claim that it had acquired some 20,000,000 acres in this region, for a purchase price that included guns, gunpowder, and ammunition, “1 dozen umbrellas,” “60 red night-caps,” and “1 gross jews’ harps” (Jellicoe 18). Edward Jerningham Wakefield described the encounter with one tribal leader, Warepori (Te Wharepuri), in his propagandistic account of the New Zealand Company’s early activities, *Adventure in New Zealand, from 1839 to 1844: With Some Account of the Beginning of the British Colonization of the Islands* (1845). In it, he sought to convince his British audience that Māori had ascribed little or no value to the land in question until the arrival of the New Zealand Company, due to its seemingly uncultivated status, and as a result its purchases were not in any way exploitative. Nevertheless, the account also reflected something of the fundamental misunderstandings that framed the entire exchange:

It was extremely difficult—nay almost impossible—to buy a large and distinct tract of land, with fixed boundaries, from any native or body of natives of this part of New Zealand, perfectly unused as they were to any dealing in land according to our notions. . . . [A] claim to waste land beyond this natural one of



seizure and occupancy was unknown among them at this time. It may be safely asserted that *Warepori* considered himself to be making over to Colonel Wakefield this vague right deduced from proximity, together with that over the more actual possessions of the tribe near the sea, when he pointed with his finger along a line of hills forming the horizon of sight all around, on which he had probably never been, and concerning which he could have no certain knowledge whether they were inhabited or not by other owners. And he had acquired the idea of ownership to this wild and desert district by the wish which we had expressed, of paying a larger sum than he had yet seen for a larger tract of land than any for which he had yet heard treated, in order to receive a population beyond his imagination of numbers, and to be made available with a rapidity beyond what he could conceive. (1.85-87)

Even before the first settler ships arrived in the harbor, and the first tree was felled to clear a town or country section, the New Zealand Company began transforming the landscape by translating it into Victorian terms. "The Heretaunga River became the Hutt; Matiu Island became Somes. Now there were Lambton Harbour, Thorndon Flat, Baring Head, Sinclair Head, Barrett's Reef, Pencarrow, even Point Jerningham. . . . Boards bearing the words 'New Zealand Land Company' were put up in prominent places around the harbour" (Temple 251-52).

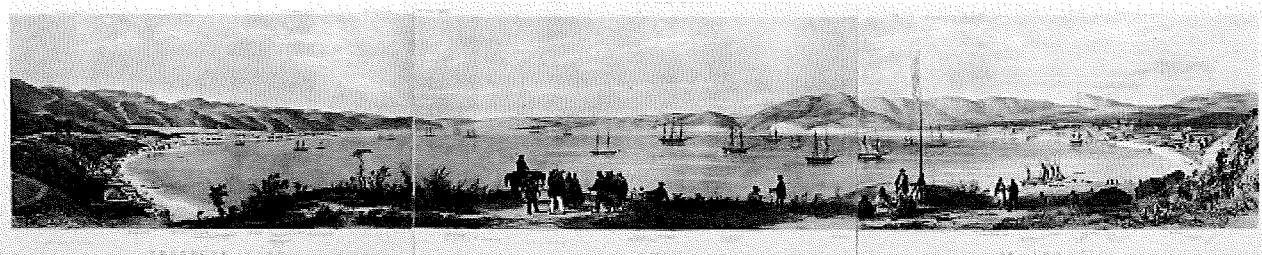


Figure 6: The Harbour of Port Nicholson and the Town of Wellington, 1842, New Zealand, by Captain William Mein Smith. No known copyright restrictions. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. 1992-0035-1905. <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/240314>

Putting systematic colonization into practice, however, proved challenging. The Company's surveyor-general, William Mein-Smith, was tasked with "design[ing] a city of 1,100 one-acre sections, each a parallelogram in shape, with boulevards and other facilities," and this scale forced him to choose the flat land at the mouth of the Heretaunga river, a "dense mass of forest, scrub, flax and swamp"—and also, as the settlers would soon discover, prone to catastrophic flooding (Burns 131). Within a year, the sodden colonial population would relocate to the other side of the harbor, now directly imposing themselves upon the Māori already present. "The surveyors . . . measured the various pa and kainga as if these did not exist, as if the land was vacant. The Maori were astonished and bewildered to find Pakeha tramping over their homes, gardens and cemeteries, and in places sticking pegs in the ground" (Burns 151-2). As Edward Jerningham Wakefield explained, the Company intended for the indigenous population to be dispersed across the settlement, to reside in allocated reserves, and thereby become assimilated into the settler community:

A very important part of our projected plan was to reserve a tenth portion of the land bought by us for the benefit and use of the natives. . . . We had looked forward to the time when the value bestowed on these native reserves, by the improvement and cultivation of the other lands with which they should be intermingled, and by the presence of a large and thriving civilized community, might afford the means of furnishing the natives with abundant revenue to support the dignity of their chiefs with improved clothes and food, with houses like those of Europeans, with cattle and agricultural implements, with education and the means of religious worship; in short, with all that might make them respectable in the eyes of the future colony. (1.39)

The Company did not succeed entirely, however, in imposing its will either on the Māori population or on the colonial landscape. As is evident in the contrast between the perfect parallelograms of Cobham's *Proposed Plan of the City of Wellington* and the awkwardly juxtaposed plots of Mein-Smith's *Plan of the Town of*



Wellington (1840), the difficult terrain itself partly frustrated the attempt to order the landscape in accordance with Wakefieldian principles. The increasing numbers of settlers, and their impositions upon Māori land, also generated increasing tensions and “outrages.” This culminated in an attempted survey at Wairau, a short sea voyage from Wellington, which was actively disrupted by local Māori, and led to a disastrous attempt by the settler authorities to arrest the tribal leaders, Te Rauparaha and Te Rangihaeata. Wakefield powerfully recounts his experience of first hearing “strange reports” of the ensuing conflict, and its catastrophic toll on the New Zealand Company employees:

A shout came clear and distinct over the water, and I felt faint at each word. “There had been a fight,” the harbinger of ill news cried; “and *Rauperaha* [sic] had killed Wide-awake [Arthur Wakefield] and 40 White people—no natives had been killed; that was all he knew!”

I tried to laugh it off. . . . But from each little settlement or hut the same story still rang, with varying additional circumstances; all agreeing, however, that Wide-awake was dead. (2.361-362)

The panic-stricken settlers in Wellington rapidly formed a militia, and Wakefield recounts ongoing incidents that provided “perfect evidence that they had not the least idea of considering themselves in any way subject to our laws” (2.408). Nevertheless, settlers continued to pour into New Zealand, and as the ecologist Geoff Park observes, “Little more than a century and a half after the arrival of the orthogonal grid plan—the key *spatial, organisational* element in Wakefield’s settlement idea—we are so thoroughly at home in it that it is hard to conceive of any other way of organising space” (36, original emphasis).

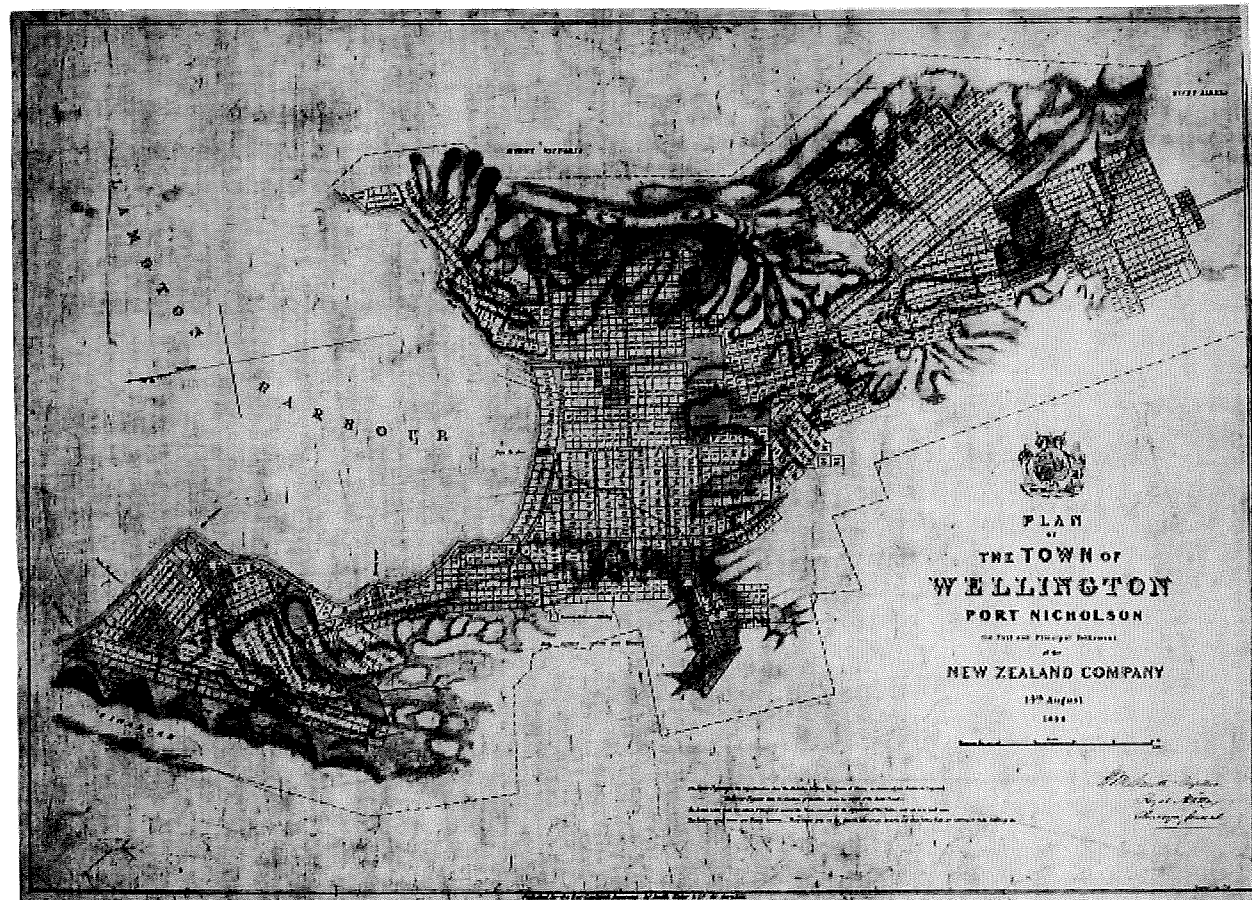


Figure 7: Plan of the town of Wellington, Port Nicholson. Out of copyright. Archives New Zealand Te Rua Mahara o te Kōwhiri. AATE W4920 Box 79. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/archivesnz/15975386086>



Systematic Colonization in Colonial and Metropolitan Culture

Tony Ballantyne points out that Wakefield's economic theories "took root and formed a foundational element of the political lexicon" in Australia and New Zealand, but they "did not move metropolitan opinion easily" (45-46). Viewed from the perspective of Victorian representations of Empire, however, systematic colonization can be seen to have a much broader and more sustained impact, both in Britain and in the colonies themselves, on the emergence of a new imperial imaginary. Looking at the Victorian novel, only a few texts directly portray Wakefieldian ideas (and often do so critically) but a much larger number attest to, and participate in, the "stabilization" of Australia and—though less prominently—New Zealand as pastoral locations capable not only of restoring damaged British subjects but also constituting a global community of British citizens whose affective ties are undiminished by distance. In the first novel published in the colony of Victoria, Thomas McCombie's *Arabin; or, The Adventures of a Colonist in New South Wales* (1845), the tale of its migratory protagonist has barely commenced when the narrative is suspended in order to launch a diatribe against "the Colonial policy of our Government" (15). Railing against a "race of English economists" who have gained political influence yet "know nothing about either the Colonies, or the development of their resources," the entire second chapter is devoted to an attack on systematic colonization:

Edward Gibbon Wakefield ranks at the head of these fireside economists. In an evil hour the Home Government adopted the new-fangled principles; and since that time everything has gone wrong with our Colonies in the East. . . . It is clearly impossible that Governors or Parliaments should affix a certain value to waste lands, and compel men to purchase; whatever the exchangeable value of land may be, it is evident that its intrinsic value is exactly in a ratio with the profits it can be made to yield. Speculation may advance it beyond this price, but legitimate demand never. (17)

Despite rejecting such "Utopian systems" (55), the novel is nevertheless set in the midst of a seemingly limitless expanse of colonial "waste" land, and its plotting of settlement follows directly the stadialist logic outlined in *Letter from Sydney*.

The novel's Australian scenes open with McCombie's protagonist, Godfrey Arabin, traversing "vast" and "monotonous" plains, a "dreary . . . waste" whose "awful sublimity" is profoundly anti-social in nature: the "utter desolation of the boundless plains of Australia" is "too awful for a creature formed for social intercourse to bear" (29, 30, 34, 35). This Wakefieldian state of nature is appropriate for Arabin, who has proved unable to settle in the colony, and maintains a romance-inflected desire to remain mobile and outside the colonial economy:

[I]f I make up my mind to live and die in one portion of the globe, it would be in such a spot as this. . . .

Rather than follow flocks of sheep, I would wander the country with an erratic tribe of black men, and see one spot to-day, another to-morrow, and be untrammelled by the artificial rules of society. . . .

Sheep-herding might have been a delightful occupation to the ancients in the days of Virgil; but I neither like it, nor, in candour, his Pastorals. (74)

The novel's character system positions Arabin between the Wakefieldian alternatives of settlement and wandering through the contrasting figures of the successful pastoralist, Butler, and the "melancholic," unstable Willis. Willis's instability is equally temperamental, racial, and spatial in nature. On the one hand, his personality mixes "many great, noble, and poetic feelings, with debauched habits and licentious sentiments," such that he "could not live without excitement" (199); on the other, his "unsettled" reason results in him for "many weeks . . . wander[ing] among the natives, and subsist[ing] upon their scanty hospitality" (206). Arabin's stabilization as a character thus hinges on his acclimation to the pastoral economy, which provides the means for him to settle—both spatially and temperamentally. He purchases a flock of his own, becomes engaged to Butler's sister-in-law, and "was very much surprised at the turn which his feelings had taken, and at the interest which he began to feel in the affairs of the station when he found it would pay" (177). This transformation feeds into the novel's broader interest in stabilizing the colonial population by fixing it in place so that a familiar capitalist economy can take



shape. The chapter announcing the death of the “erratic” Willis concludes,

The Australian Colonies present an almost unlimited field for labourers, or young men of education, with some capital, who are willing to work at first. At times there may be a superabundance of labour, but the resources of these new Colonies soon absorb it. Government, therefore, should lose no time in making arrangements to colonise upon a general *system*. . . .

A Colonist must land with a determination to pursue an even, steady course; he must resolve that no temptation shall ever wean him from habits of industry. . . . The new districts often present a better field; he may settle there, and grow up to wealth in a ratio with the advance of the country. Then in time the district becomes thickly populated, and, like his neighbours, he will become wealthy and independent. (224-25, original emphasis)

Despite its vehement critique of Wakefield’s theories, the ultimate horizon of McCombie’s vision of colonial society—demarcated by a systematic approach to immigration and the achievement of population density—remains in close accordance with the principles of systematic colonization.

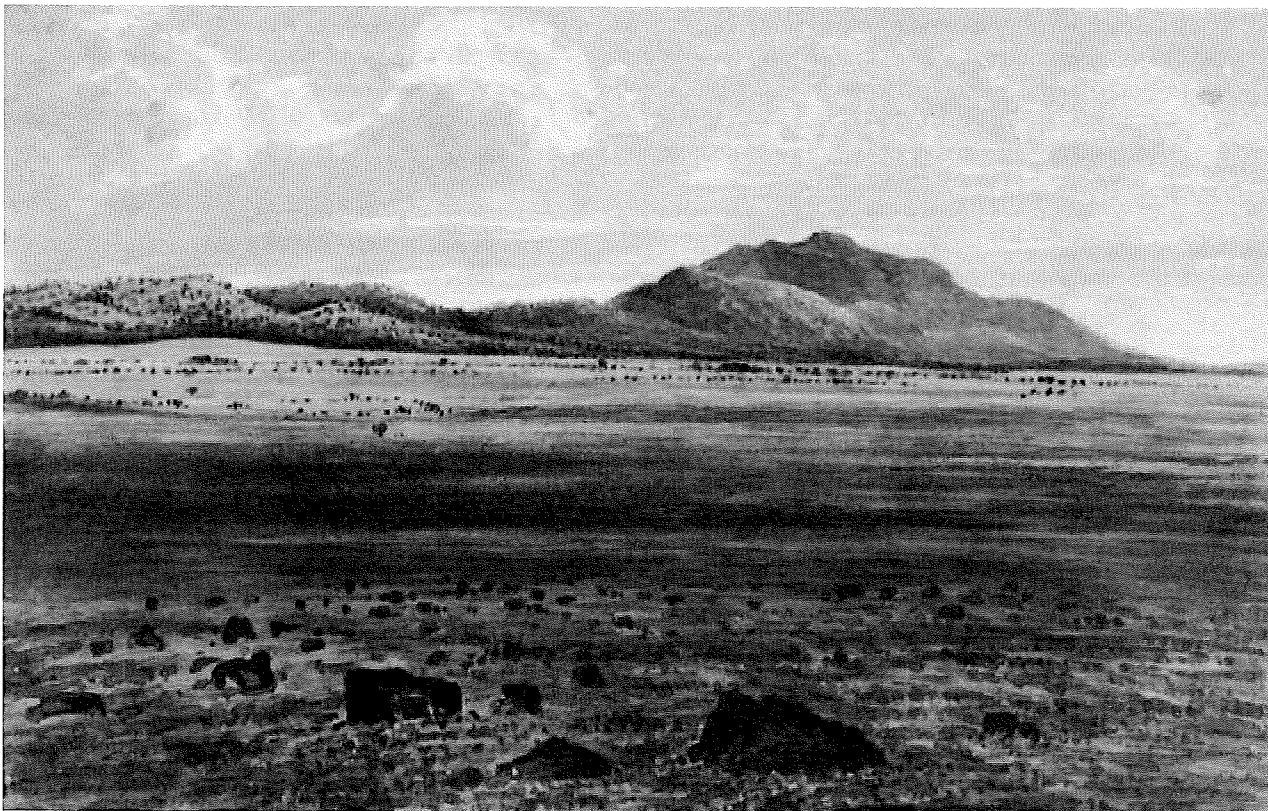


Figure 8: View from Waterloo Plains looking towards Challicum, Victoria, ca. 1850. Used with permission. National Library of Australia. PIC Volume 176 #R322. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-138463619/view>

In the metropolitan novel, the most direct portrayal of Wakefield-infused colonial thinking is found in Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *The Caxtons: A Family Picture* (1849), which “contained a powerful recommendation of colonisation and colonies as contributors to the national interests of Great Britain and to the advancement of civilisation” (Knox 2). In this Shandyesque narrative, the youthful protagonist, Pisistratus Caxton, and his immediate family fall upon difficult financial circumstances and are forced to relocate to his uncle’s unproductive farm. Emigration to Australia thus enters the narrative as a solution to a two-fold metropolitan problem: a lack of capital that is preventing the family estate from being “redeemed” from a “dreary bleak waste,” and a lack of



opportunities for British subjects “not adapted for success in any of our conventional professions—‘mute, inglorious Raleighs’” (2.105, 34, 36). The colonial plot is given moral and intellectual legitimacy by a noble-minded politician, Trevanion, whose estate stands as a model of capital-infused productivity that produces broader social benefits. While Pisistratus has never before “seen a landscape more beautiful in its peculiar English character,” it is nevertheless devoid of traditional “feudal characteristics” and is instead a space of agricultural innovation, with “pastures . . . parcelled out in divisions by new wire-fences” and other scenes providing “evidence of improvement—energy—capital” (1.174). It is Trevanion who advises Pisistratus to emigrate, and to take with him a number of other less-than-successful young men, and also provides him with an initial sum of capital to do so. Thus the emigration plot hinges on what at first seems a bizarre financial logic, whereby the Caxtons’ surfeit of “waste” land and lack of capital in Britain requires the export of £3,000 of metropolitan capital to the “waste” land of Australia, where it can grow before being reimported back to Britain so that the metropolitan waste can ultimately be “manured by money” (2.134). This complexity arises in part because of Bulwer-Lytton’s departure from Wakefield’s own colonizing narrative, notably in his amalgamation of the separate “plots” of the metropolitan investor seeking a colonial return (the ostensible author of *Letter from Sydney*) and the impoverished emigrant seeking opportunities unavailable at home (the laborers that Wakefield’s colonist hopes to employ).

As the novel makes clear, however, despite these and other variances from Wakefield’s script—notably, Bulwer-Lytton’s avoidance of formal colonizing organizations, in favour of an Athenian model of colonization by “cleruchiaie”—groups of colonists who retain their citizenship of the parent city” (Knox 7)—Pisistratus’s colonial solution to his metropolitan difficulties could only be imagined in the wake of systematic colonization. Trevanion’s letter to Pistratus, urging him to emigrate, is punctuated by a footnote:

These pages were sent to press before the author had seen Mr. Wakefield’s recent work on Colonisation, wherein the views here expressed are enforced with great earnestness and conspicuous sagacity. The author is not the less pleased at this coincidence of opinion, because he has the misfortune to dissent from certain other parts of Mr. Wakefield’s elaborate theory. (2.138)

After ten years in the colony, where he has successfully invested in sheep, cattle, and land, Pisistratus “attained a much larger fortune than I had calculated to make” and feels able to return to Britain (2.376). Coral Lansbury notes that *The Caxtons* was met with “delight” by its Australian readers “largely due to the relief that the colony was being regarded in literature as something more than a penal settlement” (89). Indeed, the settler colony is figured as a vital supplement to the continued health of metropolitan society. Upon his return, Pisistratus employs his colonial earnings to spur a revival of English pastoralism, such that “smiling cornfields replace the bleak dreary moors” on his uncle’s estate, as its “domains . . . are reclaimed, year by year, from the waste” (2.429). The novel’s comic ending, which hinges on reconciling capitalism with feudalism, and nationalism with imperialism, signals the extent to which Wakefieldian ideas had brought settler colonialism into imaginative alignment with fundamental principles of Victorian society and British identity.

Beyond the particularities of emigration schemes and financial mechanisms, the new relationship that Wakefield envisaged in *Letter from Sydney* between Britain and its new settler colonies was that the colonies “would no longer be new societies, strictly speaking. They would be so many *extensions* of an old society” (165, original emphasis). The attainment of this perceptual shift is evident, even more so than in *The Caxtons*, in the fleeting treatment of Australia in Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield* (1850). With Bulwer-Lytton’s novel “probably a model for its emigration passages” (Brantlinger 121), Dickens’s second-to-last chapter famously recounts the news from Australia of the colonial redemption of the debt-ridden Wilkins Micawber and the fallen Emily. Emily’s uncle, Peggotty, regales David and Dora at their London fireside with the tale of his own success:

Our fortunes, Mas’r Davy . . . is soon told. We haven’t fared nohows, but fared to thrive. We’ve allus thrived. We’ve worked as we ought to ‘t, and maybe we lived a leetle hard at first or so, but we have allus thrived. What with sheep-farming, and what with stock-farming, and what with one thing and what with t’other, we are as well to do, as well could be. Theer’s been kiender a blessing fell upon us . . . and we’ve done nowt but prosper. That is, in the long run. If not yesterday, why then to-day. If not to-day, why then to-morrow. (Dickens 797)



The role of colonies in such moments is typically read as little more than “a device to facilitate narrative closure,” offering a means of removing undisciplined characters from the body politic (Moore 7). Lansbury argues that such Arcadian logic provided a “palliative, a means of solving social problems without disturbing existing society” (106). Yet beyond the obvious convenience of this plot device, the colonial addendum to the conclusion to *David Copperfield* attests to a new ability to imagine British identity at the furthest reaches of the Empire, where the emigrant is no longer lost to the body politic or forced to exist in a diminished affective, cultural, and patriotic relationship to it.



The Emigrants.

Figure 9: The Emigrants. Image scan by Philip V. Allingham. The Victorian Web.

This affective realignment evident in the metropolitan novel accompanied and influenced the increasing importance of the settler empire as a site of imperial investment. The economic historians Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson point out that in the second half of the century, London investors displayed a bias toward investing in the settler colonies as compared to other parts of the world, even if at the cost of a lower return. They attribute this predisposition in part to the role played by the connotations of “Britishness,” especially in the absence of more specific knowledge about local conditions:

The underlying message seems to be that the dominions were regarded as “safe” precisely because the British investor knew what type of behaviour to expect from both the borrowers and the state apparatus that ultimately guaranteed their capital’s security. For the British, therefore, “Britishness” connoted not their parliamentary or legal systems per se, but all the virtues they saw in themselves and that breathed life into their institutions: fairness, justice, reliability, technical competence, accountability, individual freedom and respect for private property. . . . [I]t was this perception of themselves, and by extension



those in their colonies, that influenced, at both the conscious and sub-conscious levels, the attitudes of investors. (212-13)

Despite this mutually reinforcing relationship between culture and capital, one of the many ironies of systematic colonization was that its own business model was so preposterous; the New Zealand Company collapsed in 1850 due to the unsustainability of its financial model, and Wakefield himself died in relative obscurity in Wellington in 1862. Nevertheless, some of its earliest transactions continue to have impacts to this day. In New Zealand in 2003, the Waitangi Tribunal—established by legislation to review injustices perpetrated against Māori since formal colonization—released its report on the Port Nicholson Block, the area of the first purchase made by the New Zealand Company. The final section of the Tribunal's report begins:

The 1839 Port Nicholson deed of purchase was invalid and conferred no rights under either English or Maori law on the New Zealand Company or those to whom the company subsequently purported to on-sell part of such land. (479)

After cataloguing the litany of subsequent injustices since 1839, the Tribunal concluded:

These and other Treaty breaches set out in this report combine to entitle the various claimants to substantial compensation. The Tribunal considers that a significant element of such compensation should be the return of Crown land in Wellington city and its environs. (493)



Figure 10: New Zealand Company Coat of Arms. Out of copyright. Archives New Zealand Te Rua Mahara o te Kōwhiri. NZC34 Box 12/17. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/archivesnz/16051045881>

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ENDNOTES

[1] For a detailed account of the publication history of *A Letter from Sydney*, including Wakefield's likely publication in the *Morning Chronicle* of spurious letters to the editor as a strategy for "keeping his scheme and its ideas before the public," prior to its eventual anonymous publication under the "editorship" of Robert Gouger, see Ballantyne 33-35.

[2] For a more detailed discussion of the "two principal intellectual languages" that shaped proposals for the systematic colonization of New Zealand, stadialism and *ius gentium* (law of nations), see Hickford 61-82.

[3] For the origins and implications of stadialist thought, see Meek 99-130, Moloney, and Pocock.

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