

Letters from Home

Unlike today, when a letter from United Kingdom can take only a week to arrive in New Zealand, in the 1840s, letters from England to New Zealand took months to arrive. Even once the ship in which they were carried came in, arrived in the country, it could often be months before it arrived in the hands of the recipient. Often notices would be placed in a local newspaper advising of unclaimed letter. One such letter was advertised in 1846 as being unclaimed by William Douglas.

LIST OF UNCLAIMED LETTERS

POST-OFFICE, NELSON, August 14, 1846.

Armstrong, John	Kite, Thomas
Arnold, John	Lloyd, Henry (2)
Batt, John	Lusty, Benjamin
Bate, William	Marsh, William
Brunner, Thomas	O'Dwyer, Cornelius
Best, Charles	Price, Thomas
Coster, Charles	Perrin, Hannah
Carr, Henry	Phillips, A. F.
Coates, Isaac (2)	Pelichett, C. L. H.
Ching, Richard	Palmer, Salome
Carter, James	Stanton, William
Cullen, William	Sullivan, John
Crawford, Sarah	Staples, John
Douglas, William	Shepherd, John Fraser
Edwards, John	Salt, W. B.
Eyles, Daniell (2)	Stirling, J.
Flaherty, Thomas	Tross, Joseph
Hildreth, William	Tyriell, Harriet
Heaphy, Charles	Robinson, James
Harkness, Mr.	Vincent, Charles
Higgins, William	Wallis, Mr.
Jeffreys, Henry	Winter, James
Jury, John	Wagstaff, Thomas.

Left: A public notice advising that there was a letter for William Douglas to uplift. This notice probably refers to the letter dated xxx from xxx xxx a letter

In the following pages are copies of letters written to William and Mary Douglas by their relatives in England after their arrival in New Zealand. The letters have been signed by an Archibald Brown and a Thomas Dixon. At the time of writing it is uncertain as to exactly what relationship each writer was to Mary and William. While it is obvious that Thomas Dixon is related to Mary, I am not sure how Archibald Brown is related ie whose brother he is or even brother-in-law. These letters were written by both of their relatives in Bedlington, United Kingdom. More research is required to establish exactly what relationship these writers

had to William and Mary.

The originals of these letters, being over 160 years old, are held by the Alexander Turnbull Library and were given to the Alexander Turnbull Library by my mother Mabel Kelly. Mabel had been given these by her Aunt Mary Douglas and subsequently donated them to the Alexander Turnbull Library as she felt they would be safer there as they were kept under the correct conditions and would not deteriorate further. For ease of reading, I have transcribed each letter on [pages following the copies from pages xxx to xxxx](#)

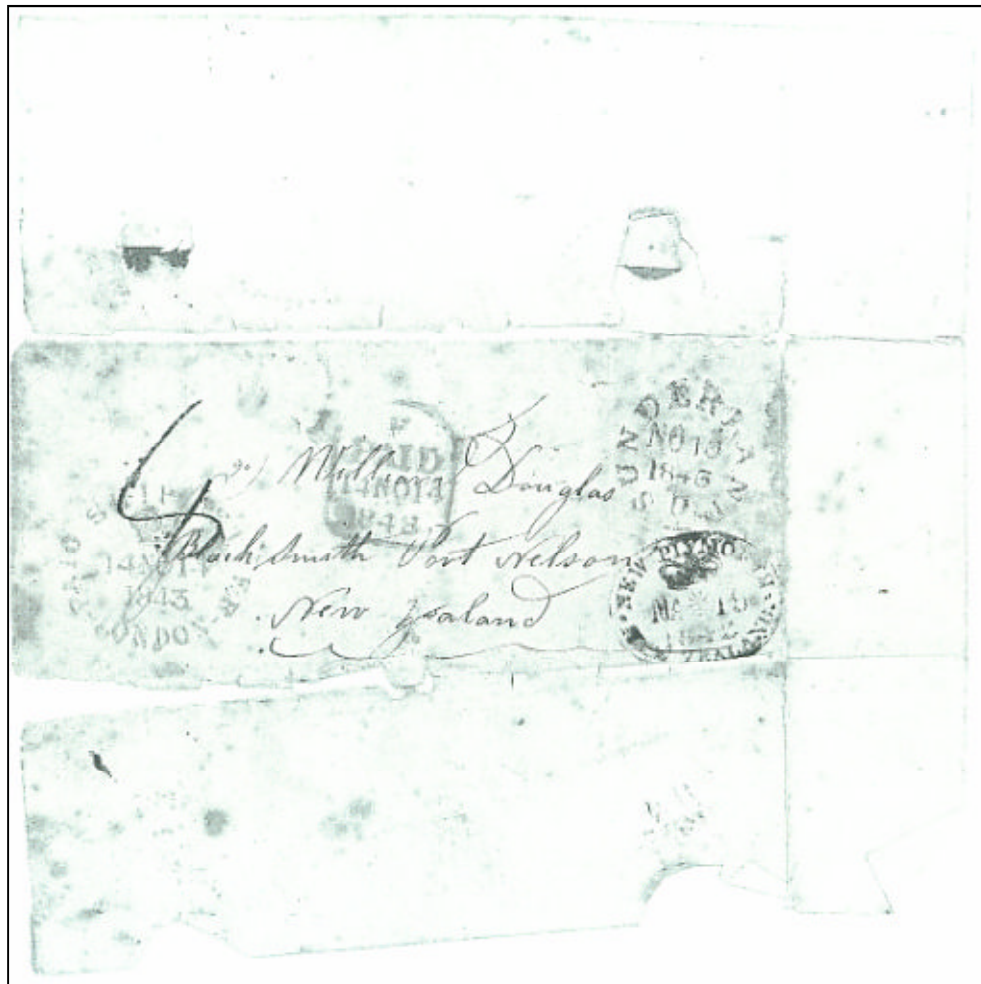
From an historical perspective, the letters identify personal details regarding William and Mary Douglas such as the blessing upon the birth of their first child, and the conditions that they were living under, such as the uprising of the Maori as reported in the United Kingdom.

It is interesting to note that the first letter from John Dixon, indicated that he was so concerned for William and Mary's safety in New Zealand and said; *"We were sorry that you did not find New Zealand as good as reported. If you do not find things better to your expectations at present make your way to England and remain with us until you find work."* Clearly that did not happen!

The first letter in the collection of four letters sent to William and Mary Douglas was written by John Dixon. John Dixon would appear to be Mary Dixon's brother. Judging by the opening comments in the letter, this was the first letter sent to William and Mary on receipt of their first letter to them after their arrival in New Zealand. Having arrived in Nelson, February 1843 the letter "home" took at least 9 months, assuming John Dixon wrote back promptly. John Dixon's letter ("envelope" below) was post marked **SUNDERLAND NO 1843**. The next post mark was **LONDON 14 NO 1843**. The first New Zealand post mark was **NEW PLYMOUTH MA 1844**.

NO, being November.

In 1843, envelopes as we know them today had not been invented. Each letter encased in a folded sheet of paper with the address on and sealed with wax.



Above: A copy of the *envelope* or the paper that had the name and address of the recipient. These letters were sealed with wax. While not easy to decipher, the letter left Bedlington 1843 and was date stamped New Zealand, July 16, 1846. It would have been this letter that was at the "Unclaimed Letter Office" William and Mary may not have realized it had arrived or was it because that had to pay to claim it?

Dear Brother & Sister we Received your welcome

Letter in the 27 Oct and were glad to hear
of your safe arrival at Port Nelson we are
all well at present as we hope it will meet
you the same thank God for it Catherine is
married to Joseph Mack and has got done
things and there best respects to you I was at school
and they were glad to hear from you they send all
their kind love to you we were sorry that you
did not find New Zealand as good as Reported if you
do not find things better to your expectations
at present make your way to England and remain
with us till you fall in the Work Mary your new
has had twins they are 11 months old one is dead
we have got another son his name is Thomas after
your father George is doing very well when he
saw the Letter he was drinking your healths all
Joy Mrs. Buchanan is got married since you left.
The wife is expected to be born every day

and fetched home for death but he is the ^{young} of Recovery he
is just no more no more we write to Wellington to your
brother as soon as we receive your Letter Mr. Arthur
has got a ship out at New Zealand but we do not know
what Port we suppose you know the Capt. he sailed
at Mr. Arthur when you were there they have lost one
of their ships the Burning Point the Old woman
is quite distressed about it there has been a great loss
at sea the last month the country is in a bad
state at present it is expected every day to be broken
in Ireland Daniel O'Connell and his son and John Bishop
is under Bond your Uncle Robert is quite well and
sends his kind love to you write by the first Post
and let us know all Particulars as you will be able
to judge by that time the way of the Island I conclude
Remain your Affectionate Brother John Daver

Bedlington March 26 1844

Bedlington March 26 1844
Dear Brother & Sister I got your letter dated the 25 July 1843 on the 20th inst. I was
glad to see you were both well and I hope so you have got a piece
of land you will obtain the necessaries of life in a better way I was
very glad to hear of the awful success of your Gleaners and others but I
hope you will soon have laws to protect the honest against the dishonest
I would rejoice to hear that Chuzzle and is completely converted and
others & Evangelized I don't not but that you and others will be the
means in the hand of God of bringing about that happy change I hope
by this time you will have the glad tidings of a ~~change~~ ^{change}
~~on and the~~ ^{on and the} ~~circumstances of~~ ^{circumstances of} ~~tenure~~ ^{tenure} ~~appointment~~ ^{appointment} ~~displaced~~ ^{displaced} I am very
glad you can give me so little encouragement to come to you more
for your sake than my own the time looks worse with me than for
merely I have been much off work since I parted with you and so
little prospect as yet but I think trade in general is better than it
has been in this country several railways is expected to be formed
one between Edinburgh & Berwick & between there & Newcastle and is
expected will come just here as it may be hope that some will
be relieved as there are thousands depending on it the country some
have left here for London and are working at the rail way sta-
tions they have better wages from 50 to 2. for week ^{they} ^{will}
have been working there about 6 months and likes it well ^{it} ^{will}
a letter to Sunderland to let them know about you & get a notice
back they were very glad to hear from you they are in good health
there work is about the same I write there how love to you & are
anxious to know whether you got a better they want you I hope you
have got it before this but you had not time to get it before you
sent the last to me the first you sent me was about 6 months
in coming I am sure I have got both your hand writing with the
I have had a letter from Edgworth they are all well & stop
still and all other friends as far as he knows are well they
all love their kind love to you John Hattie James Brother is
living well in Russia he is carrying on coach making and
employs 140 men and victuals them all in his own house for
the small sum of 6. per month I think they must be very poorly
fed I suppose they are mostly all slaves I sent the particulars
of your letter to Mr. Hattie & to Oscar in Russia & requested
him to let Mr. Hattie know about you and that she might
expect a letter he sent me another but I got nothing particu-
lar to let you ^{know} but only sends his best respects to you he wishes
to have a letter from you but I think he might be satisfied to
hear from you

I would like to know how you cultivate the ground with
the spade or the plough with horses or even I would like to hear
of you having a complete farmers stock but I doubt it will
be ill to get in New Zealand. We have had a very moderate win-
ter here the there has been a deal of snow and still bys
white on the hills but harvest here there was a very abun-
dant crop of grain but a complete failure of potatoes they
are now ~~about~~ about a bad many of the farmers have the
seed to buy Potatoes the latter here is a bankrupt he is
back many thousands and has been all sold off but it is
thought he will go on as brisk as ever. The land owners here are
making great efforts to improve the soil by draining with tin
and artificial manure these drains are made very narrow
4ft deep when a man is in one of them he cannot get one
foot past the other they have only 4p for each for cutting them
it is hard work to make 2^d for day when it is wet it is wet
whether they cannot work there is a number of gentlemen
trying to get a free trade in corn it is generally thought it
would do much good to manufactures but it also meets
with much opposition from the principle land proprietors
there is much feud and faction for the most part every one
is for their own benefit very few advocates for the poor
of the poor. We have just heard of a most horrible murder
committed by an old pensioner by almost severing his
wifes head from his body it is said they had an
illicit distill for whiskey and the wife had threatened
inform on him but otherwise she was a good woman
his murdered wife in state of insensible drunkenness
I believe this country abounds with as great wickedness as
any other drunkenness is the prevailing evil with its
most awful consequences a dreadful instance I may truly
say a visible judgement on two fittonen the other week
they had been drinking all the Saturday night and the subit
also playing at cards but their wickedness did not end with
that but in a mocking manner took the Lords supper one
of them striped himself naked and personated our saviour
on the cross a ranting preacher happened to pass they forced

him in and then called for a bottle of hell's flames but were
told they sold none of that than bring him one of damnation
but the most wicked of the two became powerless of one of
his arms and next became speechless and went out of one of
into another in terrible agony till his very eyes hung over his
cheeks he was told to pray but he was without hope & despair
James Emerson is another sufferer he lost his work by being
in about 6 months since and poor man he has also been in
jail for preaching after losing his work he went to New York
and some of his friends went a preaching to him and told
him that Jesus was the only one known he was told to the birth
should suffer the penalty of the law I do not know if
he has worked any since this family must have suffered
a great deal. There has been a great overturn in the church
of Scotland about 60 ministers have left parish kirks the cause
of patronage the people are building chapels for that many
which you by the name of the free church many of these
kirks is almost lost disolate our little flock advances
very slowly we want to build a chapel this summer but
it will be difficult to gain as much money as the chapel
I am built without salaries they are all then
to this time there is no work at the iron works
airing their engines machines and boilers I have
been working nearly 5 weeks and there is about another
5 weeks work for us there is only 3 of us working at the
boilers. My Robert is turned a very ingenious little
fellow he has been about 3 months at school he knows
the letters pretty well and can say some little words
John sends his best respects to you both I will be very
glad to have a letter from you and write very close every
thing I will be glad to know of you in any way con-
cerns you I have a very anxious care of you ten
thousands times more than ever I had about you
when here and many a prayer I offer up for your
welfare and I share your hand to the
plough and will not back hock this leaves us in
good health hoping and wishing it may find you the
same and may the Almighty protect and bless you my
most kindest love to you both so I remain your
most affectionate Brother & Sister Brother



Above: Every picture tells a story, the above is the address and “envelope” for the letter written to William and Mary Douglas by Archibald Brown. Addressed to Mr William Douglas, Motuaka New Zealand, with a comment in the corner “try Nelson”! The letter was date July 31 1845 from Bedlington England. There is a stamp indicating *Bedlington Penny Postage*. However we know from the contents of the letter that it cost 1 shilling and 3 pence to post. Postage was paid in **Aug 1845** and date stamped **MORPETH Aug 9**. On **Jan 20 1846** the letter had a New Zealand post-stamp. Again in **May New Zealand** another post-stamp. From the date of writing to the date of arrival in New Zealand, this letter took at least 10 months to reach its destination! On the following three pages the originals have been copied, followed by a transcription of the letter on page **xx-xx**.

Dear Brother & Sister

Burlington July 31. 1845.

I received your letter about the beginning of June and I'm glad that you are in good health & doing well you have soon got a large stock I make out so I hope you will have to enlarge your barns & biers if you can but get it kept & enjoy it I think I may prefer to wish you long lasting enjoyment of being Father & Mother if it be the Lord's will that you have a family in time they will be a great help as you have got so many smiths tools as will enable you to do work in that way you will perhaps have a machine for separating the chaff from the corn you might easily use them instead of bellows for blowing the fire very small farmers makes a very strong blast a wood box with an iron pipe into the furnace we have a rod drawn with the iron blows about 20 times at some of them anchors are made which weigh stones they have hire the Government contracts for anchors and ships their very busy we have been very busy in winter but we are now rather slack we have the lot for the Locomotives that we know of nearly finished we think that they have or expect an order because they are not willing to part with any of the men there is a good demand for labour at present in this country owing to the making of so many railways. The want of civilisation I believe is great hindrance to improvement we have very unfavourable accounts given us in the Newspapers about New Zealand saying that the natives look on the settlers as intruders I am afraid you do not let me know the worst what would this country be if there were no laws to protect the helpless against the oppressor without doubt the rich will find friends in almost every country while the poor is too often despised even of his neighbours when I read or hear of the unhappy state of New Zealand it brings to mind times long gone by in Britain also such as Chaucer's time & the like Oh that these things which are behind may not be brought

to mind by such like deeds but may we be led to look
forward with hope to that happy period when all
these warlike instruments shall be turned into in-
struments of husbandry and surely it shall be when
righteousness shall cover this world as the waters the
channel of the great deep at this time in this country
there is a mighty movement towards that grand
object sending Missionaries to every quarter of the globe
with glad tidings of great joy to them that believe
but it is lamentable to know that those who
bear the precious seed have so oft to go forth even
reaping as they sow our earnest prayer ought to be
that they may have a reaping time of joy the
Free Church of Scotland is working wonders it is shak-
ing its roots deep and spreading its branches far
& wide we have got our chapel nearly finished it will
be opened in about 2 months time we have given
a minister a call it is likely he will be ordained at
the same time I would be glad to hear of you having a place
of public worship God loves the gates of Zion more than the dwell-
ings of Jacob. As soon as I got your letter I sent it inclosed to Sunderland
they sent me a few lines to let you know they are all well except
being distressed owing to the death of their son Richard. Catherine
has 2 children Mr Bluchum married Esther Roby's daughter that
is all that I have got from Marys Brother I have also got a few
lines from Scotland Samuel Hastie says Margaret & him are
going very fast down the Hill I believe they will nearly number
100 years between them Sarah is at service near Egerston the
rest of the family is at home they have a cow this year they
all send their kind love to you Janet has left Annerum and
gone to the Rowton Robert is still at Libbist-cup Uncle
Tom is now ^{quite} stupid he is laden with years his
daughter Filds Husband has got his leg broken by a
fall from his horse it is but little information
I can give you about your friends acquaintance being at
a distance from all of them the last account I had from
Adam McKinnis he was working at Hawthorn Newcastle

You were misled in thinking that the letter was opened
for not being paid when posted I paid 4.3. the post Master
did so that every care would be taken for its safe to I care
little about the letters being opened provided you
get them and whoever you are that breaks open this
letter if you have the feelings of man you will
do your best to pass it onward to its rightful owner
I intend for the future to write you every 3 months
and at the same ^{time} to send you a newspaper I am
very glad to know that you will get them with little
trouble or expence I hope you will also be puz-
zled in writing every 3 months the last winter
has been moderately mild this summer we have
had a great deal of cold and wet weather with very
little heat in consequence of which the corn is high
in price the flour has risen 6. per bush within this few
weeks it is now 2.4 per bush the potatoes seems to be a
fair average crop owing to the wet there is
plentyful crops of hay We have all enjoyed tolerable
good health this long time Ann still keeps my horse Robert
is improving very well in body & mind he has been a year & 1/2
at school and reads parts of the Testament most beautiful he
has also a very retaining memory he promises very well for
his years I do what I can to bring him up in the fear & virtue
and adoration of the Lord Paul an ex filant and tyolas water
but God only gives the increase of Grandmother is something
here and is wonderful well for her years if you have any
desire to return to this country I will do what I can to help
you tho you give me not the least reason to believe
that you are dissatisfied still I cannot think you are
in a place of safety I think you have nothing to depend
on but the good providance of God may you and I ever
look chiefly to that tho his arm be strong to smite
it also strong to save Ann Robert and myself send
our kind love to you and I remain your affectionate
Brother Joseph Brown