

## **Borrow Collection**

### **Microcassette 003M, Box 1**

#### **Mrs Priscilla Mitchell as to Edward Gibbon Wakefield**

**10/10/1986. Track 1. 16 mins.**

**Mrs Mitchell** – I am a Wakefield and because of that I feel that I belong very much to this colony. Now my great-great uncle was Edward Gibbon Wakefield. My great-grandfather was Daniel Wakefield, who grew up [inaudible word(s)] and I was delighted on seeing this, to turn it over and to find the actual words of my great-grandfather, this is his work. I knew he had done quite a lot but I'd never actually read it. Well now, I'm going to read to you a very short letter written by Edward Gibbon Wakefield to his sister and it was written on December 11, 1835.

“Tell Charles that the colony of South Australia is on the point of departing. The Commission has sold all the land as required by the Act and has raised without difficulty the funds for government expenses. They have got a man-of-war for the Governor and Chief Officers and a company with a large capital for colonising the province. The ‘Buffalo’ the ship given by the Admiralty, will depart with the Governor and Officers on 14 January and the two other ships bought by the company. I've half a mind to go myself for a year to tell the tale of the beginning.

You will hear more of this in ‘The Spectator’.” Well ‘The Spectator’ supported the Wakefield schemes, the ‘Times’ was bitterly opposed to him and he wrote for the ‘Spectator’ a very great deal later in life, the ‘Times’ never. (31)

Well, who was this Edward Gibbon Wakefield? He came of very good Quaker stock. His grandmother was Priscilla Wakefield, who had been Priscilla Bell, and his first cousin was Elizabeth Fry, the great prison reformer. Well now Priscilla Wakefield had written a great many books, I think 20 for young people and she'd also started

with the savings banks. Well going back further than that he was of royal descent, I mean descended from Edward III, some of the early James' of Scotland, Robert the Bruce, some of the Earls of Athol and rather excitingly a crusading knight, Count Robert of Sicily. So that he had this very romantic background and I think that probably influenced him a good bit. He had rather a stormy boyhood, he went into the diplomatic service in the early 20's, he was under William Hill who was afterwards, Lord (Harridge, Herrick?) and he became a King's Messenger and he was appointed to the Court of Turin and he moved between Turin, Genoa and Paris. Well, his first elopement was when he was about 20 and that was the beautiful Eliza Pattle. The Pattles were rich Indian merchants and some of his early letters are hilariously funny about the family. I mean, I have 46 unpublished letters written by him in these very early days. Now other material, I've got I think all the material on which the first three books about Edward Gibbon Wakefield were based. All the early things and I realised how valuable it was when, I think, is it 24 years ago Keith, that you came to stay in England and he said, "well you know these are unique and you must take great care of them". And so I have treasured them and as people have got older they have said, "would you like to have these papers?" and I say "yes please". And so they are all in England, the ones that are connected with South Australia will be sent to South Australia, (**KT Borrow** – "Hear, hear.") and the great bulk will go to New Zealand to the Turnbull Library and there they will be available for scholars for all time.

I can't read my own notes, oh yes, just to show you what the sort of letters are like that he wrote, he wrote to his father. They were coming back from Genoa and he said, "In the first place, have Mrs Pattle's picture put in the dining room, have the best

bedroom prepared for Mrs Pattle and have a tub put in her bedroom, she's very particular about this." (*Laughter*) (80)

This is not quite history but it is really rather delicious, I think.

Now this gay diplomatic life came to a tragic end. Eliza, his beautiful little wife died and his grief, his grief was absolutely overwhelming. I have the letters and they are tragically sad. He wrote them to Catherine, his great confidante, and she had most of his letters. He couldn't speak about it for years almost and the family deplores this abduction, the abduction of Ellen Turner. There is very little to be said in favour of it. It was set up, to use the modern phrase, by his stepfather, by the niece of the Bishop of Norwich and by members of the diplomatic core. And it went wrong and he abducted her and carried her off to France. He was pursued by angry relations. I think four Wakefield brothers had all eloped and all had been forgiven, but in this case he wasn't forgiven and he went to prison in Newgate for three years. Now, his sentence wasn't imprisonment, it was a very heavy fine and he refused to pay it because he didn't want to jeopardise his children's future. Anyhow, he had a very fine brain and he occupied it, first of all by thinking about his fellow prisoners. He wrote a very penetrating book on "The punishment of Death in the Metropolis". I mean, I have one letter in which he writes about a boy, I think about 19, being sentenced to death for the theft of just over five pounds. The death penalty was ... anything over five pounds there was a death penalty, and he went to the early morning service before the hanging, and it made a very deep impression upon him and he felt something must be done. And then so he wrote this "Letter from Sydney" and also this book on criminology, or what is now called criminology. (116)

When he came out, within two years he was thinking of the founding of South Australia. It seemed quite incredible, can you imagine it0 happening today?

On the strength of what he had written he became a power. He had to be in the background very much for a long time. Anyhow his system of colonisation everybody knows, that was, that land should be paid for. In the beginning, people were given vast tracts of land which meant that they were widely separated from each other and they hadn't the resources to develop it. He thought that if a labourer came out from England, in two years he would be able to purchase enough land to settle and continue with his own farm and here I believe the price of land was 15 shillings. In New Zealand it was a pound and that was the sort of great foundation and it's, well it's been the foundation of all the white colonies, or I say the early colonies. Sorry, I find it's difficult to read my own writing. It's all right I think.

In the early 1840's, he wrote. "At some future time our colonies, powerful as the present state or more so, must either, thanks to mismanagement, become independent states more likely to be its enemies than its hearty friends, or else through a wise foresight have been closely bound to it, confederacy in some shape by degrees taking the place of the old bond of union, the British Nation continuing still united so far as perpetual peace, material good understanding, freedom of commerce and the identity of foreign policy can make it. The ties between us we must never let go if we are wise, nor loosen."

And I think I will conclude with that because it is very important that we remember these ties. I am preaching to the converted with the Pioneers' Society but I think we should all try to tighten the ties and remember the great work done by our pioneers.

Thank you. (*Applause*) (154)

**KT Borrow** – Thank you very much Mrs Mitchell, I should have pointed out that Mrs Priscilla Mitchell addressed you. I now have pleasure in asking Sir James to move a vote of thanks. Sir James.

**Sir James** – Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen. Well what a treat that was and I think it was much too good simply to be answered by a formal vote of thanks. I hate votes of thanks, they sound just something you have got to do. We haven't got to do this, but I'm going to say thank you to Mrs Mitchell on your behalf and I hope that in the end you will endorse my thanks for a fascinating talk she's given us. She has told us a lot about Edward Gibbon Wakefield which reminds us of our debt to him. I was brought up under Archie Price and as you know he was a great historian but as far as what I learned from Archie about Edward Gibbon Wakefield was that he ran away with an heiress and I thought that was a marvellous ambition but I achieved it more or less. I didn't have to run away. But that was a fascinating talk and I was reminded when the president talked about Penshurst Place at the beginning with which these people were related reminds me of one of my favourite stories.

A friend of mine and of most of you, was walking through the grounds of Penshurst Place one day and he thought this is marvellous, to think that along these streets Sir Phillip Sidney walked years ago and he was really getting quite romantic about this and a little boy up a tree jumped in front of him in the path and my friend said "hello little boy, what's your name?" and he said "Phillip Sidney" which is a marvellous idea of the continuity of course, because Sidney's grandfather was the Governor-General of Australia.

Well that was a fluent, articulate and lucid talk, and a fascinating story and we are very grateful to Mrs Mitchell for coming here tonight and talking to us and giving us such a pleasant experience, and therefore on your behalf, I say to Mrs Mitchell thank you very much indeed for what you have done for us. (*Applause*) (189)

**KT Borrow** – Thank you, Sir James. I am sure that we all share those sentiments. I think we should feel most grateful to Mrs Mitchell for speaking to us, for coming out

as her time is limited and she's got many responsibilities in England. She comes from Totnes which is an important part of the west country, one knows, and she has many responsibilities there and other places and I think we are very privileged to have her here, and also to have Mr Robert (Corker?) here representing New Zealand. So I hope you will all come to the Annual Meeting which is in November and the Proclamation Day Lunch which is at the St Leonards Inn on 28 December and I recall that we have an elaborate programme for the ensuing year and the membership is increasing so I feel that things are looking quite rosy for the Pioneers' Association and with Mrs Mitchell's encouragement I think we will make even greater strides. So I will thank you all for coming and wish bon voyage to Mrs Mitchell. Thank you.

*(Applause)* (200)