

CHAPTER ONE

NEW ZEALAND'S
LONDON

A whirl from Liverpool Street. 'We're in the City', declares a guide. 'This is Threadneedle Street. That's St Paul's.' Through Ludgate Circus and on up Fleet Street. What a ride! Ten minutes of marvels that the brain could not assimilate. Lunch at the 'Cheshire Cheese'. This really was London . . . From a railway station in New Zealand to the 'Cheshire Cheese' was the distance I had come to see this country so often dreamed about.¹

IN BREATHLESS PROSE, New Zealand journalist and sometime poet Ian Donnelly described the climax of his 'joyous pilgrimage' to England. At the Cheshire Cheese, in the heart of the imperial metropolis, he had found his Mecca, and in pilgrimage fashion, a journey of 12,000 miles was rewarded by the merest glimpses on a ten-minute ride through the heart of London. Eating lunch in the same room as Dr Samuel Johnson, surrounded by the iconic monuments of the metropolis, Donnelly had reached 'the focal point for numberless dreams and anticipations borne across the seas'.² His version of London, vividly imagined on the periphery, was mapped over the actual metropolis: he was now 'really' in London.

In the outwardly banal, worn and repetitive language of tourists like Donnelly lies a complex piece of cultural geography. His first impressions seem to trace a route through the actual geography of the metropolis – 'through Ludgate Circus and on up Fleet Street' – suggesting a journey through a literal landscape. In fact, through its selections and omissions, his account records an imagined, not actual place. It describes London as it existed in New Zealand. Donnelly expressed it as 'really' London, but it is better described as New Zealand's London. New Zealand's London is composed of specific geographic places – buildings, monuments, streets – and specifically located performances – parades, people, activities – that had coalesced in what might be termed the peripheral imagination as representative of 'London'. This imagined geography was loaded with symbolism, not for its own sake, but as important constituent elements of New Zealand's culture at this time. One of its functions was to minimise the idea of New Zealand as colonial periphery anyway. New Zealand's London may have been imagined on the edge of empire, but it functioned to pull New Zealand closer to its centre. More than that, its imaginative presence allowed New Zealanders to possess the metropolis too. This was not simply a sense that buildings belonged to them, but that the values these places came to embody were also shared by New Zealanders. In London, New Zealanders could become Londoners, members of the metropolis, and partners in empire as they incorporated London within their cultural landscape.

New Zealand's London was formed in two ways: first, by the imaginative construction of London in New Zealand, and second, by actual appropriation of London space. New Zealand's imagined London was created and sustained by constant repetition and reinvention through cultural channels, channels that became considerably more powerful from the last part of the nineteenth century, with the development of telegraph, sound recording, film and the expansion of the press. Together, they helped keep London familiar to New Zealanders, a familiarity that helped excise the 12,000 miles that lay between New Zealand and Home. In return, New Zealand extended its borders into London itself, and the 'familiar London' of the New Zealand imagination could be traced onto the city. This process took physical form: through maps and guides, on the wharves and in the markets, in New Zealand House on the Strand and through the iconic monuments of the city, New Zealand made itself at home in the heart of empire, colonising and appropriating metropolitan space.

We can follow this process through the experiences of some of those Britons on London Bridge. Their stories, whether published or unpublished, have fallen out of our cultural and literary histories, perhaps because travel in the first part of the twentieth century has been characterised as an elite activity, and therefore prone by its very nature to suspect Anglophilia.³ Its close cultural cousin was imperialism, another elite idea that Keith Sinclair has argued 'belonged to an official rhetoric, to newspaper editors, to school teachers, to politicians, to Governors and Governors-General'.⁴ By extension, then, it could be argued that stories of travel Home map cultural elitism rather than any more authentically rooted sense of identification. But as it happens, although there were a few travelling newspaper editors, the largest collection of visitors to London over this period was a considerably more diverse group. They were 'Bill Massey's tourists', thousands of ordinary New Zealanders who ended up in London as part of their service in World War I. New Zealand sent more than 100,000 men to war, some 9 per cent of its population. London became the main place of leave once the war effort moved to Europe, and although numbers are not officially recorded, it would be safe to assume that more than 60,000 passed through. These 'soldier-tourists', a cross-section of New Zealand's community, were also prolific producers of travel tales, mostly in the form of private correspondence. They too had an imagined London, although this might have been shaded and shaped a little differently from that of a touring newspaperman. Overturning assumptions of Home as retrograde cultural elitism, their diaries, letters and postcards also bear the imprint of London's place in New Zealand's cultural landscape.

The popularity of published pilgrimages also suggests that Home was not the narrow obsession of a few. Between 1927 and 1937 there were at least ten published – one a year, some by reputable companies like Longmans, Dent, Reed, and Whitcombe & Tombs, while serialised tales of travel in London were also common newspaper and magazine fare.⁵ The master of the genre was Alan Mulgan, a prolific writer. *Home: A New Zealander's Adventure* became his most popular book, first published in 1927 and reprinted twice after that, in 1929 and 1934. The two reprints, evidence of its success, were issued under a new title. It became a 'colonial's adventure', probably to increase its sales in Britain and the rest of the the empire, 'colonials' being more numerous than New Zealanders. Further proof of the popular market for pilgrimages, the trip was supported financially by Mulgan's employers.



Imagined London: a woodcut by Clare Leighton.
Alan Mulgan, *Home: A Colonial's Adventure*, London, 1929, p.25.

The *Auckland Star's* publishers paid him during some of his year's absence, and gave him £300 towards travel expenses.⁶ It made good copy. His adventures were excerpted in the *Auckland Star*, the *Press*, the *Evening Star* and the *Christian Science Monitor*.

The little surge of published pilgrimages Home from the end of the 1920s have been considered out of step with the contemporaneous development of literary nationalism in 1930s New Zealand, and this may be another reason why they have been neglected. Mulgan's work has been critically dispatched as the epitome of 'late-Victorian moral conservatism, Empire loyalty, and a sense of England as "Home"'.⁷ However accurate this assessment, books with titles such as *The Joyous Pilgrimage* and *Let's Go Home* are not anomalous with the development of literary nationalism. Like other better-known or better-written work, they are reflections of the culture that produced them. Combined with the experiences of the soldier-tourists, they provide an entry point into the imagined geography of New Zealand's London.

FAMILIAR LONDON

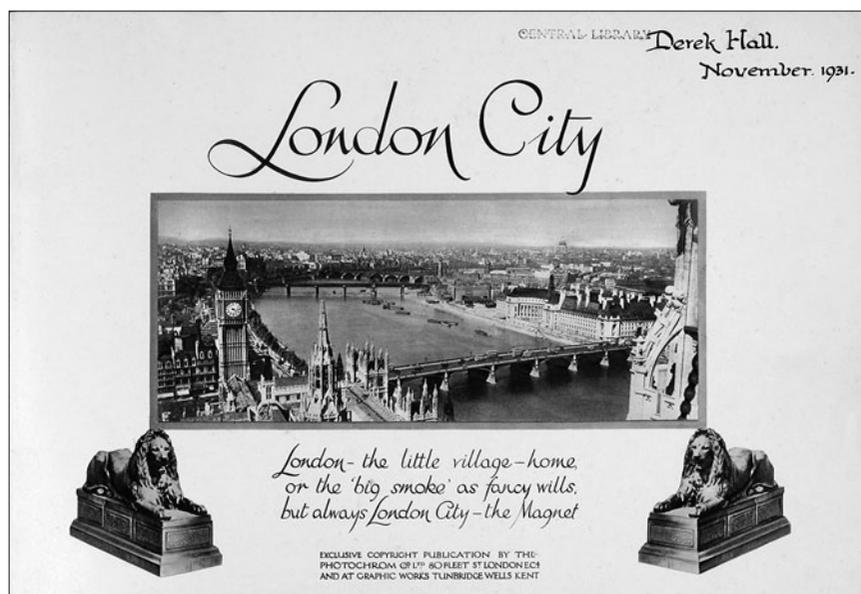
Like Donnelly's breathless whirl through the streets of London, travellers' tales trace out the shape of an imagined London, constructed in New Zealand and ready to be laid, like a template, over the metropolis itself. In part, this template was produced by personal and familial ties, often represented as nostalgia and sentiment. For travelling doctor Robert Noble Adams the source of imagined London was literally familiar, constructed from family stories.⁸ Newspaper proprietor T. C. List, exactly the type of imperialist Sinclair had in mind, travelled to London for the Imperial Press Conference of 1930. He also had imagined London through the tales of his family. When 'confronted with the stately pile of buildings on the water's edge at Westminster . . . [he] knows they are the House of Lords and the House of Commons because he has seen pictures of them from infancy and has heard so much of them from his parents'.⁹ For another traveller, H. K. Sumpter, London's churches acquired the 'added charm of recalling old nursery rhymes, photographs of fashionable weddings and other diverse and dormant memories with which we in the outposts of Empire have to be content'.¹⁰

But memories – the legacy of emigration – were not the only sources of an imagined London. Family stories and other private constructions of London were bolstered and transformed by public versions that reproduced a consistent version of the metropolis. The spread of modern technologies like film, radio and photography, along with rapid expansion of the press, subjects of a later chapter, ensured that London was constantly in front of the New Zealand public. These technologies would 'keep the empire more or less in place', although Edward Said did not have the white settler colonies in mind when he argued this.¹¹ In the modern world of shrinking space that such innovations created, a sense of propinquity – both cultural and spatial closeness – could be produced. When the self-titled touring pastoralist A. W. Rutherford arrived in London, he claimed, 'The illustrated papers had made me fairly familiar with London, so the buildings did not greatly astonish me'.¹² Alan Mulgan, whose family migrated to New Zealand from Northern Ireland, cited the *Boy's Own*, novels, and 'the big illustrateds – the *Graphic* and *Illustrated London News*, with their fascinating pictures of the Great World . . . All this fed our love of Home and especially of England'.¹³ Enthusiastic readers of *Home* agreed: one claimed

'your longings and experiences almost exactly duplicate mine – I grew up with a steady desire to go "Home" and that longing was fed on the English "illustrateds" and magazines like the *Captain* or the *Strand* with its blue cover with a drawing of the Strand'.¹⁴ This desire was the product of media, not memories. Once finally in London, Margaret Johnson, who published a memoir of her trip, found it 'impossible to believe that I am really here, and seeing with my own eyes the things I've read about and seen so often in photographs'.¹⁵ In his diary, journalist Ian Donnelly described his first sight of England: 'How often I have dreamed of seeing this storied and well-beloved country'.¹⁶ It is no surprise, then, that he imaged the first days of his visit as the 'vast tome of London . . . opening'.¹⁷

This shared blueprint made travellers feel familiar with London before they even arrived; it shaped their expectations, itineraries, emotions and reactions. The familiar effect began with the first glimpses of England. These were loaded moments, as travellers imbued England's landmarks with cultural resonances: 'Britannia was all there – invisible, yet invincible – we could feel her strength along the coast, and feel, in a sort of subconsciousness, the sense of security that came as a moral atmosphere from her historic shores'.¹⁸ The predetermined first glimpse was to be the white cliffs, as it was for Johnson: 'And then, late in the morning, came my first sight of England itself – Beachy Head, its grey white cliffs rising noble and beautiful out of the soft mist. Now Julius Caesar and I have something in common besides our noses – we have both seen the white cliffs of England'.¹⁹ Beachy Head was a reasonable alternative for the real white cliffs of England, at Dover. Yet appropriate substitutions were not always possible, as Ian Donnelly noted when his first glimpse of England turned out to be Eddystone lighthouse: 'The pilgrim coming to England should see first the chalk cliffs of Dover. They should be his landfall, but it is not always practical to arrange things so'.²⁰ Nor was it always quite as expected: Gladys Luxford, a Voluntary Aid Division nurse, described getting to England 'at last'. Like other travellers, part of the trip was as expected – she saw Land's End. But part was unexpected: 'oh, oh, the cold wind going up the Channel'.²¹

Fond expectations of 'homecoming' were frequently tempered by reality. Mulgan had 'pictured' his arrival, yet his first glimpses were lost to fog. 'Were we to be denied the entry we had pictured to ourselves as perfection – coasting up the Channel on a clear day'.²² His experiences deviated from



'The Magnet': albums of scenic photographs like this were widely available, reinforcing familiar London iconography in the colonial imagination. 582-Album-96, Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries.

the perfect pilgrimage script, one that, given his Irish Protestant heritage and avid reading of *Boy's Own*, was formed from public, not private, ties. This pilgrim experienced a miracle: appropriately, the weather changed, and 'we had our desire fulfilled, and in a manner so completely marvellous, so miraculously charged with wonder and beauty, that no man could fully deserve it'.²³ Even the momentous act of stepping on to English soil did not always meet the expectations of the visitors. A. W. Rutherford, arriving from what he had found to be a very foreign France, was 'predisposed to be sentimental about first setting foot in England, the home of the Briton, but Dover isn't attractive'.²⁴ The homecoming template did not extend to cover customs checks and queues, unromantic impositions on people who felt they were essentially Britons too. 'The thrill of stepping on to English soil was short-lived for we were soon lined up in a long queue filing past passport officials and customs men.' However, for Sumpter, the budget traveller, the gap between rhetoric and reality was soon neatly closed as he stepped 'into our first English train and away through fair Kentish hops towards the heart of the world!'²⁵

These moments of disappointment and dreams fulfilled point to the strong grip of an imagined Home. Travellers simply expected a great deal from the 'heart of the world'. Indeed, contrary to assumptions of a naturally increasing sense of national identity, it seems that this grip strengthened over time. Voyagers writing between 1880 and World War I, although affected by their arrival Home, are relatively restrained in their descriptions of it. Russell Carr, a young woman travelling in 1886, wrote what feels like an almost cursory description: 'The first sight of England was beyond expression delightful and very impressive.'²⁶ Forrestina Ross's arrival, in 1912, is lyrical, but not overwrought: 'England – our first peep – grew out of the mist . . . those of us to whom England is an unvisited land have already felt its glamour, when Devon's rose red cliffs and tree crested capes grew out of the horizon.'²⁷ The unsentimental pastoralist, Rutherford, journeying in the same period, adopted an unimpressed posture. Later writing from the interwar period changes tone: for travellers like Mulgan, arriving Home, more than 'delightful', was nothing short of a miracle. Disappointed Australian tourists also start in this era to be outnumbered by enthusiasts, whose first sightings of England are marked by exclamations over 'land! dear English land!' and 'my beloved English soil'.²⁸ Later New Zealand writing likewise changes form. Typically, travel books move from the grand tour model of earlier writers, with England just the most significant of several countries visited, to tales dedicated to pilgrimages Home. In these later tales, even shipboard life and exotic stopovers almost disappear as 12,000 miles are telescoped into a few pages or less. List and Johnson dispense with any mention of travel at all, Donnelly spares one and a half pages, whilst Mulgan spins the journey out over two and a half. As actual distance disappeared from their narratives, the imagined closeness of New Zealand and London was emphasised.

While trips to England were being presented as pilgrimages Home, London was the main attraction. The city colonised images of England, and not only in the imagination of New Zealand travellers. At the turn of the century, London's Lady Guide Association made London "chief representative" of England and the "pride" of its "countrymen", whilst a later Ward Lock guidebook explained that the visitor to London would notice 'that the special aspects of many of the other great towns are reflected here', implicating Manchester, Liverpool, Oxford and Cambridge in forming London as epitome of the nation.²⁹ It is, then, less surprising that London could act

as synecdoche for England for travelling New Zealanders. A young soldier, George Knight, subconsciously made London stand for England when he wrote from Boulogne: 'Oh England, I've always longed to go there. I hope I can see something of it. I'm longing to see Nelson's Monument, The Abbey, The Zoo and The Gardens. These are the chief things that have fixed themselves in my mind for London.'³⁰ A later tourist made London's symbolic role explicit, identifying Home with London and telescoping the attributes of England and empire into one place: 'To me it seems it must be because London is not only the heart of England, but is, to the British person, no matter where in the world his interests lie, the very heart of Empire. We learn this at our mother's knee, and to every loyal son, some day or other, the urge speaks with insistent voice and we come "Home".'³¹ London's predominance could be expressed without pretension. One newly arrived soldier wrote: 'The impressions [of England] were all thrilling to us, to be in the Old Country. In due course we were given leave to go where we liked, and backpay too. So we all made for London.'³²

'A DREAM COME TRUE': LONDON IMAGINED

'Making for London' meant glossing over its outskirts, which again were not part of the imagined template. They were, at best, 'the drop-curtain before the mise en scène in the great drama of London town'; at worst, 'a sorry introduction to the excitements and picturesqueness of the city'.³³ The proper arrival was supposed to be something like this:

Evening was closing in as we neared London, and we saw it first through that blue misty light that is its own. After this day of quickened emotions, Chelsea and the oft-dreamed-of Thames were blurs. Fortune, however, was not yet satisfied. After supper I was driven to the city – Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament, Whitehall, the Strand, Fleet Street – we even stopped at the Cheshire Cheese for a moment – St Paul's, the Bank; in a half dream I heard my host indicating these jewels of London. The evening ended with a visit to Waterloo to retrieve my luggage, and there I had my first experience of a moving staircase. And so to bed, and do you wonder that, tired as I was, I could not easily sleep?³⁴



'Really in London': a New Zealand tourist's photograph of St Paul's from Bankside. O.031861, Harry Moulton Album, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

This, not the outskirts, was the London fashioned – 'dreamed of' – in New Zealand.

First glimpses reveal its 'familiar' outlines. 'Our drive from Victoria to Piccadilly Circus, where the Regent Palace Hotel is situated, was one of the most thrilling of our lives, for we were continuously recognising such famous buildings as Buckingham Palace and St James's Palace. The way one recognises so readily historic buildings and monuments and buildings is one of the charming surprises of London.'³⁵ These buildings were, as Donnelly put it, 'really London'.³⁶ Where imagined London was given substance, it was a 'dream come true'.³⁷ St Paul's was a sacred site for London pilgrims, a visual icon of arrival: 'when we crossed London Bridge, and looking back, I caught my first glimpse of St Paul's dome, a deeper grey through grey

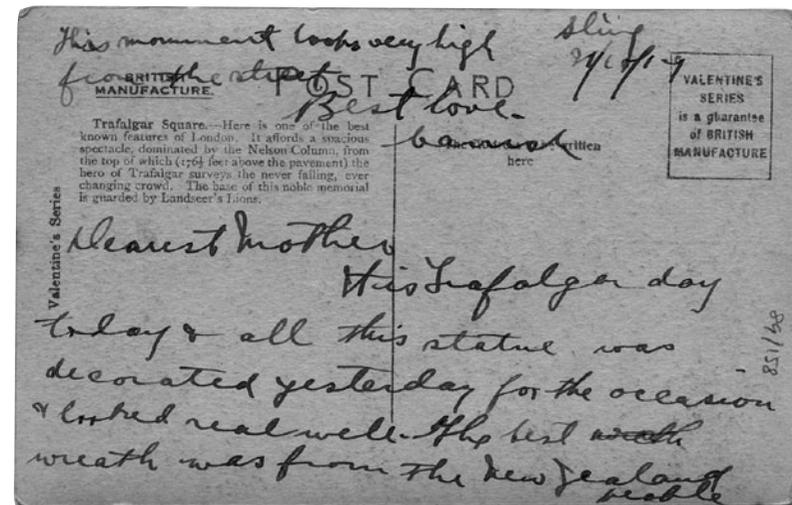
mist – then I knew I was really in London'.³⁸ It was a crucial part of the familiar London template: 'The sight of St Paul's from Fleet Street is the view of London strangers know well.' Donnelly 'knew it long before [he] saw it in reality'.³⁹ Its iconic status was almost too well-rehearsed. Soldier Hugh Grierson, on leave in 1918, 'went over St Paul's Cathedral it is very fine, but just what I expected, I had seen so many illustrations of it that it was like looking up an old friend'.⁴⁰

London was treated like an old friend in other ways. Travellers expected to be able to navigate its streets, as if they would be as familiar to them in reality as they seemed to be in their imagination. This was not always the case: soldier Stan Chester was 'lost most of the time' one day in March, whilst an officer, Captain F. S. Varnham, was 'bewildered at first, huge crowds and dazzling lights and noises'.⁴¹ But even being lost is transformed into a 'familiar' experience. Varnham later wrote, 'Easily lost in London – turn around twice and I am lost. Then simply ask a policeman or take a taxi'.⁴² One policeman claimed he 'too oft found himself astray in less-known parts', suggesting being lost was a typical experience for all 'Londoners', including those from the colonies.⁴³ However, others wrote proudly of mastering the city. World War I nurse Ella Cooke spent 'a few days piloting Nurse Eddy around. She thought I found my way around splendidly'.⁴⁴ Soldiers were masters of casual familiarity with the capital, as they 'roam[ed] about', 'knock[ed] about', 'potter[ed] about' and, in one case, 'had a good old loaf around' the heart of empire.⁴⁵ In part this reflects soldierspeak of the time; patrols were 'picnics', attacks were 'stunts'. Slang has a number of functions, including group identification, but it also works to minimise the events themselves, to keep them human-sized and under some sort of control. A casual reference to 'roaming about the big smoke' is a way of bringing the capital down to size, a cultural bridging strategy with swagger for colonials who felt they had a stake in the imperial capital too.

Although soldiers have usually been conscripted into narratives of New Zealand's developing nationalism, it is possible that the thousands who went to London may also have helped maintain familiar London. It is difficult to demonstrate this conclusively, but on leave amongst London's iconic geography, they too were tourists, taking photographs, writing letters and sending postcards to families. These images, which recycled a shared imaginary, sustained London's imaginative presence in New Zealand.⁴⁶ Photographs were cheaply and readily available, especially as postcards,



'This monument looks very high from the street': New Zealander Leslie Carrick Hewson's postcard home. Leslie Carrick Hewson Correspondence, 21 October 1917, Leslie Carrick Hewson Papers, MS 89/158, Auckland Museum Library.



and one traveller 'bought views of London and England gardens and posted them to Alice', while another 'sent home some book views of London'.⁴⁷ A number of the archived postcards are not postmarked or addressed, so they were either kept as souvenirs or enclosed with letters in envelopes. Leslie Hewson sent postcards of France, Sling, British hospitals, London Bridge

and Nelson's Column. On the back of this last he wrote, 'Dearest Mother, It is Trafalgar day today and all this statue was decorated yesterday for the occasion and looked real well. The best wreath was from the New Zealand people. This monument looks very high from the street.'⁴⁸

Soldiers' letters about London are overwhelmingly positive, no doubt in part because the soldiers at last had something to write about that their audience would understand. Imagined London, unlike the unimaginable warfront, could be shared. Their intense experiences, often lasting only a few days, tended to focus on the historic centre of the city, reflecting and reinforcing the familiar template. On his first leave, Captain Herbert King had only two days in London: 'It is a large place as you know and one cannot see everything in two days but I did my best and had a look at the Houses of Parliament, St Paul's, Westminster Abbey, Tower of London, Hyde Park, the Row, Serpentine etc. It is all very interesting and wants to be seen to be appreciated.'⁴⁹ Nurse Ella Cooke, writing to a young relative, described London's iconic monuments carefully:

Well now I must tell you a wee bit about London although it is hard to describe. Perhaps the first thing that strikes me is these smoke begrimed large buildings towering up into the skies. The streets are mostly narrow, often only just admitting two carts at a time (one each way). Some of the old architecture especially (Wren's) works most wonderful. Wren's work is perhaps best known in the building of St Paul's Cathedral, Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey and St Alban's cathedral and Abbey. The outside of these places one could look at for hours but I think some of the domes inside are most wonderful. I can't describe the work, it is quite beyond me. Just to think they have stood for some hundreds of years, it is marvellous.⁵⁰

Cooke's letter not only demonstrated the careful cataloguing of London sights integral to maintaining the imagined metropolis on the periphery, but also brought to life another important set of images. The narrow streets and smoky buildings evoked the 'Londons of Dr Johnson, Charles Lamb, and Charles Dickens', and these, as much as famous monuments, came to be considered the "'soul of the city'".⁵¹ They too formed part of London's history and heritage. Indeed, through the grime of its haphazard streets, London was unequalled as a place where the past might be observed.

Private P. G. Williams' letter gives an account of the 'principal sights' a soldier might see:

By the way about a week before we left Sling we went on our four days' draft leave. I went to London for mine and had a look around. Went through the Tower of London, St Paul's, Westminster Abbey, the King's Stables saw the horses he rides at reviews etc. Went through one of the museums and in it among other interesting things is the skeleton of Napoleon's horse. Saw Madame Tussaud's waxworks. The figures are that lifelike that I was very nearly asking a policeman to a certain part of the building. There are several tableaux including King John signing the Magna Charta . . . the murder of the Princes in the Tower (I saw the room where this happened when I was through the tower the day before also the place where their bodies were hidden in the wall for nearly 100 years.) The Babes in the Wood with the birds covering them over with leaves. The execution of Mary, Queen of Scots and Jack the Giant Killer settling a giant with a pick. I was stopping at a YMCA in Holborn Street. It cost me 1/6 for 3 nights (6d per night) and meals average 1/- each. You could live in London (in uniform) and have a bit of a look around for 5/- a day. But to have a decent look around you would want from 15/- to £1 per day. Well this is all the news of importance right just now.⁵²

Private Williams' sights took him into the past. Like the Londons imagined by readers of Dickens or Lamb, they shift almost imperceptibly between fact and fantasy. The fairytale presentation of Jack the Giant Killer merges with the real story and setting of the princes in the Tower, or Mary Queen of Scots. This was part and product of London's existence in the imagination as well as in reality, where multiple cultural threads were merged.

While in some ways London was treated as a gigantic version of Madame Tussaud's, with various monuments and buildings plucked out to exemplify 'British' history and heritage to tourists, it was not all waxworks. New Zealand's London was also located in the activities of the city: like the tourists themselves, familiar London had a performative aspect.⁵³ Mulgan knew he was 'really' in London at Whitehall with the changing of the guard: 'This was truly London!'⁵⁴ Another visitor had 'to drive through the City proper to London Bridge Station, and it was almost necessary to hold me down in my excitement at seeing the funny little streets in grey old London,

and men walking unconcernedly about in silk hats when they aren't going to a wedding or a garden party, and London buses and a hundred other things'.⁵⁵

London was, though, more than a history lesson come to life. 'Historic' London's spaces were partnered with 'modern' London. Visitors expected to experience modern life there; they expected to be overwhelmed by its size and pace. Experiencing London's traffic, policemen, underground trains, even the process of arriving in London by steamship, positioned these travellers as participants in the modern world. The pastoralist on tour, Rutherford, was neither astonished by the buildings, nor daunted by traffic, as 'it is common knowledge that the control of street traffic by the police leaves nothing to be desired'.⁵⁶ Johnson took a tour as 'the lights were coming out, and the city was crowded', and she 'didn't feel a bit overwhelmed by the traffic of London', and 'as for the crowds – I quite felt I was amongst "my ain folk"'.⁵⁷

Modern London could, however, fail to live up to its thrilling reputation. High expectations of the capital were not restricted to a cultural elite, but were broadly shared amongst ordinary New Zealanders. World War I soldier Private Herbert Gill, writing to his wife Sophia, asks her to –

Just picture me sitting in the heart of a small village called London. Dropping you a few lines to let you know I've been out in the country . . . here I am in the city of the big smoke.⁵⁸

Soph, disappointed with London, I thought it would take an hour to cross the streets here but I have seen as much traffic in Wellington if not more. Was in the busy streets last night, the Strand and so forth and I did not see any difference from Wellington, some very fine buildings, am going around to Westminster Abbey in the morning, have passed pretty close to it, been across the Thames a few times some great sights to see quite easy to find your way about, pretty dark at that, very few lights. The people about here amuse me, ask where a certain place is they don't know, never heard of it and it would only be a couple of miles off, they want waking up, thousands and thousands of big able-bodied men knocking about in civic clothes.⁵⁹

'A London policeman': another icon photographed by a travelling New Zealander. O.032075, Harry Moulton Album, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.





New Zealand soldier-tourists in Piccadilly Circus, probably on Peace Day, 28 June 1919. O.032003, Herbert Green Album, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Gill expected more from New Zealand's modern metropolis: overwhelming scale, the bustle of a fast-paced city, the bright lights of peacetime, not the dark afternoons of a wartime winter, and certainly not somewhere like Wellington. He also expected more from its citizens. Australian soldiers made similar comments. Some of these have been attributed to colonial brashness, but others to 'disillusioned Anglophile colonials who had expected to be more impressed'.⁶⁰ Gill's letter, though, is neither brash nor Anglophile. Instead, it speaks to the strength of that 'familiar' London template, and its broad reach among ordinary New Zealanders. Gill's London is a 'small village', easily conquered by a travelling New Zealander. Yet it would be wrong to minimise his experience. Reaching the heart of London, mastering its busy streets and passing 'pretty close' to Westminster Abbey remain significant achievements, even if his personal style is to play them down. In a way, this makes London seem even more accessible, both to the

traveller and to his reader. His time in London remained a memorable experience for him, and a treasured one for his reader. The letter made it home, although Gill himself, like so many other soldier-tourists, never would.

LONDON APPROPRIATED

New Zealanders not only recognised the metropolis, they also appropriated parts of it. Indeed, they even had some encouragement in their imaginative possession of the metropolis. A. Staines Manders' *Colonials' Guide to London*, written for visiting soldiers in 1916, claimed 'the Tower, the Abbey, Westminster Hall and St Paul's appeal to the imagination of the peoples of the Dominions as no novelty however brilliant can appeal. For these are theirs and ours, and in the shadow of the Abbey or the White Tower, we are Londoners all.'⁶¹ Some twenty-one years later, another guide written for the 'white colonials' of Australia, South Africa, Canada and New Zealand was still remaking London as a joint possession. In *The Empire Comes Home*, author, actor and 'white colonial' himself W. S. Percy wrote, 'No nation possesses a capital which has such a hold in the hearts and imagination of the people as London. It has over the English a fascination almost as strong as Mecca has for the Moslem. In London the Colonial feels he can enter into his heritage as freely as those born within the sound of Bow Bells.'⁶²

New Zealanders were quick to appropriate iconic London as part of their heritage. In doing so, they once again inverted the usual direction of imperial power, turning the imperial gaze, with its ability to 'passively look out and possess' back on the centre itself.⁶³ Johnson was moved to tears on viewing the Houses of Parliament: 'It was the realisation of all I'd read and heard. And I felt so completely at home, as if I belonged there, and it was all a part of me.'⁶⁴ These same buildings were appropriated for all 'colonials' by List:

Here is the seat of the supreme Government of the British Empire, the Mother of Parliaments, the shrine of the world's liberties, the last word in political tolerance and democracy . . . He is filled with pride, tintured with gratitude – pride that he, an inhabitant of the most distant post of Empire, can share in this possession of this wonderful institution that has

it roots so firmly fixed in the past, and in the habits and instincts of the nation; and gratitude in that he has attained his childhood ambition of viewing this part of his wonderful heritage.⁶⁵

Traversing time and space, List travelled from ‘the most distant post of Empire’ ‘down the ages’ to view ‘this part of his wonderful heritage’. Historic and imperial London are collapsed in the Mother of Parliaments, which is regarded as a colonial possession: ‘they, the descendants of Britons who years before had emigrated overseas to found new nations and extend Britain’s dominion, all sharing in the possession of this historic building and the other historic architectural treasures at the seat of Empire’.⁶⁶ List called his book *The Briton at Home*, and it is difficult to know whether the title describes the people he was visiting or himself.

Westminster Abbey was another appropriated treasure, not as church, but as shrine of a literary kind. Cultural reconnection occurred for H. K. Sumpter by ‘Poet’s Corner, where only plain marble slabs mark the resting places of our greatest writers and poets. It was not until I stood in this hallowed spot that I felt that deep emotion which is closely akin to tears.’⁶⁷ These are not simply great writers: they are ‘our’ writers, whilst being explicitly British. ‘I had dreamed of the day when I would be able to stand in Poet’s Corner, paying my tribute to the sleeping dust of men whose labours have coloured so gloriously the English heritage. They toiled more magnificently than they knew. Songs tossed off for the pleasure of the “Mermaid” lived on to bring joy to British hearts in remote realms unknown to rare Ben Jonson and the rest.’⁶⁸ In fact, the Abbey may literally be a colonial site. At the Unknown Warrior’s tomb, Mulgan wondered whether the soldier beneath saw ‘the summer sea sparkle under the dark green and red of the pohutukawa on a Christmas morning, or breathe[d] the sharp dry air of tussock lands? Each Dominion will ask a similar question.’⁶⁹

Like the Abbey, the magnetism of St Paul’s, the empire’s church, was not, as Mulgan also acknowledged, really religious. He was more entranced by the Gothic architecture, ‘so intimate a part of our English heritage’, and the abbey’s role as ‘a national and Imperial burial place [that] . . . is second in interest to Westminster Abbey only’.⁷⁰ Which nation, or rather, who belongs to it, is again not quite clear. Certainly Sumpter, when he visited the ‘tombs of Nelson and Wellington . . . felt such a flood of emotion as to stir [him] to the depths’. So stirred was he, in fact, that he wished to have seen it at ten



‘Our heritage’: a visiting New Zealander takes photographic possession of the Houses of Parliament. O.032045, Harry Moulton Album, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

years of age, and so ‘render for England a service so great that I would be forever remembered in this sacred place’.⁷¹ Nelson in particular was connected to New Zealand as what Mulgan called ‘the greatest seaman the world has known’: ‘We New Zealanders may say without impropriety that, like the English, we are what the sea and winds have made us and here lies the greatest of these who bent the strength of the sea and the winds to the tremendous purpose of our race.’⁷² Tenuously, then, Mulgan connects landscape, heritage and race to repossess an imperial hero. He finds that ‘the Englishman is still by far the most important “national” in the Empire. He supplies Britain with most of her wealth, enterprise and character. What is more, he is still the world’s chief champion and expositor of freedom and tolerance, good humour, justice and fair play . . . He is the playing field boy of the Western youth.’⁷³

Other travellers also found 'British' values embodied in the tombs, churches, monuments and buildings of their metropolitan centre. Not all of the buildings were conventional monuments: Donnelly found 'familiar' London in the literary associations of an old eating house, the Cheshire Cheese: 'London stood for Johnson, for Lamb, for Wells, a hundred others, and in the first hour the "Cheshire Cheese" stood for them all.'⁷⁴ And in the shadow of these monuments, New Zealanders did indeed become 'Londoners all', as they read their own history and values in the landscape of the imperial metropolis. They also embodied these values themselves. Noble Adams came to the end of his journey Home 'very proud to know that I am a Britisher, living under a flag that stands for Truth and Righteousness'.⁷⁵ In this way, the values of empire and nation encapsulated in the London landscape were also located in the travelling 'Britons'. Like the landscape, they figured themselves as ideal expressions of a cohesive empire, cultural exemplars, not cultural dependants. New Zealand was 'British', so its heritage and history were therefore quite logically located off shore, where it was available for enthusiastic acquisition by colonial co-owners.

'SUPER-BRITISHERS'

If New Zealanders could use London to redefine their status as metropolitan, they could also use it to confirm their place within empire. A regular feature of the journey to London included leaving the boundaries of historic London for an 'exotic tour' through parts of the centre's own periphery, visiting different ethnic neighbourhoods or the equally foreign-seeming slums of the East End.⁷⁶ In this part of the empire's heart, New Zealanders could assume the more conventional imperial gaze, fascinated by the transgressive elements of race, sex and class. Donnelly, whilst generally disapproving of London as a 'liberaliser' (he viewed barmaids, banned in New Zealand, with some suspicion, seeing 'rather more than tap-room conviviality in their good fellowship'), took 'an excursion to the Limehouse' within two days of arriving in London:⁷⁷ 'Children quick to pick strangers, and as remorseless in quest of pennies as the coloured gamins of Colombo

The Westminster Abbey Tower from the Dean's Yard.
O.032072, Harry Moulton Album, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.



and Port Said . . . Not an almond-eyed beauty anywhere, not a sinister yellow man. One Lascar lounging under a street lamp.⁷⁸ Under the guise of emigration research, Rutherford 'engaged a taxi for an afternoon's exploration of the slums of London', evincing particular interest in the condition of Jewish women.⁷⁹ Women did the same: Ross went south of the Thames – 'in the heart of the poor part of London – beyond Blackfriars Bridge' on the invitation of the Women's University Settlement to observe work done to raise 'boys and girls from the slough of despond they are apt to sink into'.⁸⁰ Johnson took an exotic tour to the Jewish community in Berwick Street, and 'soon we found ourselves in a smallish shop full of jabbering Jewesses with their make-up very plenteously and sketchily applied'.⁸¹ Travellers may also have practised this imperial gaze on the trip over when their ships docked at places like Port Said. As Angela Woollacott has observed, 'Australian women viewed their own status in the British Empire at least partially through the knowledge they gleaned of the empire's constituent parts on their passages "home"'.⁸² Although exotic tours taken on the voyages Home did not feature in New Zealanders' published travel tales, this does not mean New Zealand travellers were immune to their effects in reinforcing the imperial hierarchy and their place in it.

London was a place where metropolitanism could be created and experienced, where New Zealanders could participate as members of the first-world 'white empire', not the dependent empire.⁸³ But while there was some ambiguity in the status of white colonials, New Zealanders frequently experienced a form of metropolitan superiority. World War I nurse Ella Cooke wrote heatedly, 'As regards my opinion of English people it's quite altered now that I have lived amongst them. They seem to think the people in the colonies are not up to much and really don't know anything never the less at a time like this they ought to send all the men they can to defend England. That's all very fine but why can't more be sent from here? . . . You never in your life saw more "rotters" or "slackers" than I have come across.' She added, 'Believe me Florrie, Eaddy and I were happier in France with foreigners than being here with our own flesh and blood.'⁸⁴ Another writer disowned the Londoners entirely, preferring the 'sensible shoes and colours' of Glasgow to London. (He was not reborn as a New Zealander,

New Zealand soldiers explore Petticoat Lane, part of the 'exotic' East End, during World War I. Album 413, p.39, Auckland Museum Library.

