Lead: In May 1827 London’s Newgate Prison had a new prisoner. Who could have imagined that this new inmate would become one of England’s most influential social critics and help change the destiny of a worldwide empire?

Intro.: A *Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Edward Gibbon Wakefield was the spoiled son of prominent, politically well-connected London Quaker family. He piddled
his way through school, but was possessed of a certain charm and the skills of the intellectually glib. He landed a job as a diplomatic courier for the Foreign Service on the Continent and persuaded a rich heiress, 16-year old Eliza Anne Frances Pattle, to elope with him. The resulting settlement from her estate provided for him generously and they started a family. Eliza died at the birth of their second child Edward in 1820.

Following pattern and ambitious for a political career, in 1826 he cast his designs on Ellen Turner, the 15-year old daughter of a wealthy Macclesfield County manufacturer. He hoped to secure her father’s
support for his run for office. He and his brother kidnapped her and under false pretenses convinced her to marry him. This time it didn’t work. Daddy came calling. The police apprehended the fugitive in Calais and he and his brother William were tried and sentenced to three years in prison.

Like so many before and after him, public disgrace and prison changed Wakefield’s life. There he met men whom he would never have met otherwise, prisoners sentenced to death for sheep-stealing or forgery, men convicted of petty crimes destined to be transported to Australia. The now disciplined and chastened mind of Edward Gibbon
Wakefield was turned to the betterment of society. Next time: the renewal of the Second British Empire. Research assistance by Eleanor Gretes, at the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.
Resources


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