In Search of Ned: A Zulu man in Mid-Victorian Britain

This article takes a micro-history approach, focussing on the life of a man identified only in the British records as "Ned" in order to illuminate the complexity and slipperiness of categories of "race." Ned had lived in the Zulu Kingdom and, after fleeing a civil war there, became employed in Natal by an English colonist-settler, Thomas Handley. Ned travelled with the Handley family to England in 1859, and during this time, unexpectedly "disappeared" from the Handley's residence near Sheffield. A manhunt ensued and, as locals ruminated on Ned's possible status as a "slave," the case attracted the interest of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. He was eventually taken to London and housed in the Strangers' Home for Asiatics, Africans and South Sea Islanders before his tragic death a few months later. Ned's repeated escapes riveted the public and resulted in detailed press coverage. Numerous parties became interested in his case and complex and changing processes of racialisation were key to the shifting ways in which he was represented. In this article, we both search for Ned's agency and volition, and demonstrate how the case also speaks to major issues in British History including race, humanitarianism, and enslavement.

In September 1859, a man identified only as "Ned" in British records left his temporary home in the Sheffield/Rotherham area in the north of England. Ned was later identified as a Zulu man who had fled the Zulu Kingdom during its 1856 civil war, arriving in neighbouring British-colonised Natal. Here, Ned was employed by Thomas Handley, who was born near Rotherham, and emigrated to Natal in 1849-50. Handley married a Scottish-born woman and set up the firm Handley & Dixon in Pietermaritzburg before settling in Greytown.[1] The family returned temporarily to the Sheffield area in 1859, with Ned appearing to accompany them as a servant and caregiver to their children. After Ned's disappearance a few months into their stay, a manhunt ensued. Locals ruminated on Ned's possible status as a "slave." The case attracted the interest of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society and that of its secretary, Louis-Alexis Chamerovzow. Towards the end of October, Ned was captured and taken to London and housed in the "Strangers' Home for Asiatics, Africans and South Sea Islanders." Ned's repeated escapes and his trials for sheep-theft riveted the public and resulted in detailed press coverage. Eventually, and before Ned's untimely death in January

[1] *Natal Witness*, 15 November 1898.

1860, the various individuals and organisations that involved themselves with Ned appeared to have determined he should be returned to Natal.

Whilst Ned's case is more or less unknown, historians have long debated the British reception and treatment of people of colour, including those from Africa and the African diaspora, during the Victorian period and beyond.[2] Many scholars have cautioned against presuming racial intolerance was a fixed, innate, or timeless feature of British society.[3] Because historical subjects' "race" is often unmarked in sources, and sources such as newspapers tend to emphasise more remarkable (and perhaps less common) instances of hostility and discrimination, interpretations of race relations risk overstating conflict and polarisation.[4] As Paul Gilroy writes, people of colour were not "only unwanted alien intruders without substantive historical political or cultural connections to the collective life of their fellow subjects."[5] Careful fine-grained analysis of communities in specific periods seems to show degrees of integration, if recent initiatives to uncover local histories of people of colour underscore both diversity of experience and the difficulties in drawing conclusions from limited source material.[6]

At the same time, the nineteenth century in many ways saw a hardening of racist attitudes not least as related to the backlash to the emancipation of enslaved African and African-

[2] Of course there were many British-born African-descended people. See for example, David Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (London, 2017); Norma Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past: Blacks in Britain, 1780-1830* (London, 2004).
[3] Ben Szreter, "Social Cohesion and People of Colour Settling in Victorian Britain," *Immigrants and Minorities* 38, no.1-2 (2020): 54–76, at 55; Laura Tabili, "A Homogeneous Society? Britain's Internal 'Others,' 1800–present" in *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* ed. Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose (Cambridge, 2006), 53-76, at 56; Isaac Land, "Bread and Arsenic: Citizenship From the Bottom up in Georgian London," *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 1 (2005): 89–110, at 98; Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984).
[4] David Holland, *Imperial Heartland: Immigration, Working-Class Culture, and Everyday Tolerance, 1917-1947* (Cambridge, 2023); Szreter, "Social Cohesion," 59; Caroline Bressey, "Invisible Presence: The Whitening of the Black Community in the Historical Imagination of British Archives," *Archivaria*, 61 (2006): 47–61, at 48, 61; Tabili, "A Homogenous Society?," 56, 63.
[5] Paul Gilroy in Alan Rice, "Vagrant Presences: Lost Children, the Black Atlantic, and Northern Britain," *Zeitschrift Für Anglistik Und Amerikanistik* 65, no. 2 (2017): 173–86, at 179.
[6] See, for example, Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past*; Laura Tabili, *Global Migrants, Local Culture: Natives and Newcomers in Provincial England, 1841–1939* (Basingstoke, 2011); Holland, *Imperial Heartland*. For local initiatives, see Dig Where You Stand with Sheffield City Archives: https://www.dwys.co.uk/.

descended peoples in many parts of the world, imperial crises, and the rise of racial science.[7] Post-emancipation Britons may have taken pride in aiding those persecuted under what they labelled "thoroughly un-British forms of governance," but maintained strong ideas about racial hierarchies.[8] Ultimately, responses to people of colour arriving in Britain during the period depended on the particular configuration of their own identity (their nationality, class, heritage, among other characteristics), the place of their arrival/settling, and the particular historical moment. As the historical geographer Caroline Bressey ruminates, there may have been a "spatial geography at work" that considered people differently depending on their particular origins, for instance, distinguishing Black people in Britain from Black people in Africa and other parts of the empire.[9]

Ned's short time in Britain allows us to chart the journey and reception of an African man in the mid-nineteenth century in some detail. Ned's dis/appearance in the Sheffield area was constructed as a "sensation," and in this way, he provides an example of an individual whose "race" or presence was far from "unremarkable." Instead, discourses around Ned – extensive newspaper coverage and correspondence with the Anti-Slavery Society's Louis-Alexis Chamerovzow – provide insights into how an arrival to Britain was received. By taking a microhistory approach and zooming into the life of one person in one particular moment, we are able to trace the ways one individual's belonging or non-belonging was determined in conjunction with their racialisation. This method further draws our attention from race's "theorists" to its "practitioners," whilst illuminating some of the ways broader historical phenomena (from enslavement, to indenture, colonisation, and the exhibition of African people) shaped how Ned was treated, interpreted, and represented.[10] Equally, it enables us to "illuminate the meanings of these large, impersonal forces for individuals."[11] From the dense thicket of (mis)information that debated and sensationalised Ned's situation and his identity, we are able to ask questions about Ned's own experience. Ned was a non-elite continental African, and spent a significant part of his time in Britain outside London. His case thus

[7] Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge, 2002); Christine Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (London, 1971).
[8] Richard Huzzey, "The Moral Geography of British Anti-Slavery Responsibilities," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 22 (2012): 111–39, at 240; Richard Huzzey, "Minding Civilisation and Humanity in 1867: A Case Study in British Imperial Culture and Victorian Anti-Slavery," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40, no. 5 (2012): 807–25.
[9] Bressey, "Invisible Presence," 60.
[10] Land, "Bread and Arsenic," 93.
[11] Lisa A. Lindsay, John Wood Sweet, eds, *Biography and the Black Atlantic* (Philadelphia: 2014), 1.

contributes to the growing scholarship providing a lens into the presence and experiences of African and African-descended people in Britain beyond the "popular geographical imagination" that typically places them in port areas, cities, or aristocratic houses.[12]

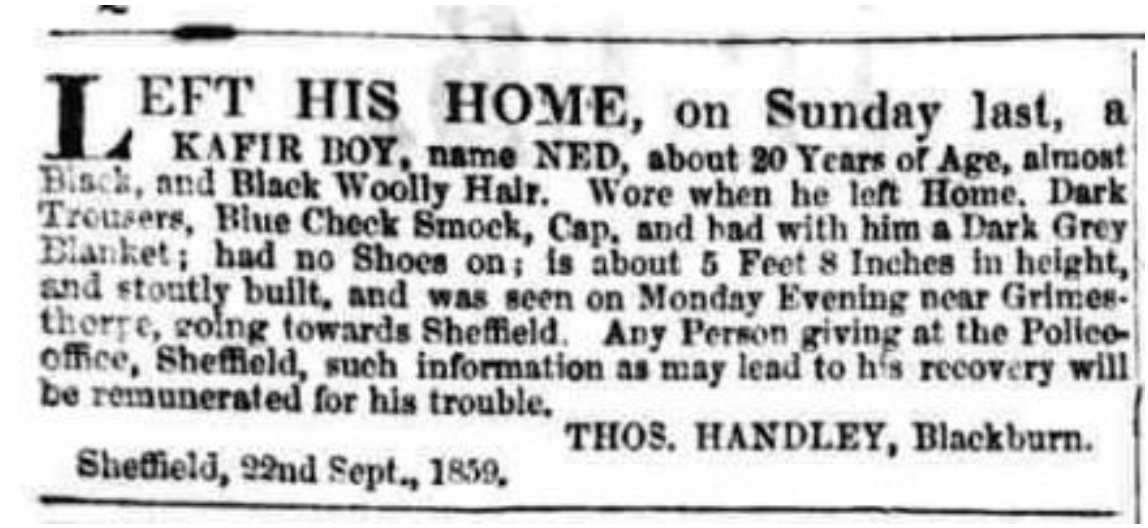
Close examination of Ned's case reveals an eagerness to "properly" identify someone whose identity was initially ambiguous and assign his "place." Identified as a possible "slave" and a "poor African," Ned's situation first generated a kind of British saviourism that cast him as a "victim."' This manner of representation waned as more was learnt about Ned's status and his employer and based on judgements around his behaviour and identity, all of which were used to assign his "correct" "place" outside Britain. Writing about the figure of "the stranger," the literary scholar Kristen Pond describes how "the permeable boundaries that define a stranger require constant negotiation, and this negotiation often focuses on elements of collective identity."[13] In Ned's case, we see how many people participated in this "constant negotiation," the flexible construction and reconstruction of Ned's position, and how commentary on everything from criminality to language usage was used to portray someone as fundamentally at odds with British life. Historian Caroline Shaw has argued that refugees – which Ned is identified as – "could be European or African, so long as the persecuted exemplified British ideals." The "deserving refugee" was innocent, a "model liberal individual willing to work hard," and their story both emphasised the "continuing tragedy facing those left behind" and "highlighted and welcomed British support."[14] While Ned's case confirms that support for some arrivals was certainly dependent on their adherence to a "refugee" narrative, it also demonstrates how readily ideas of "race" could be utilised to situate someone outside of the very capacity to embody "British ideals." In one sense, Ned's case demonstrates a "hardening" of attitudes to race on a personal scale, reflecting a shift from "saving" him to stressing his incompatibility with living in Britain.

[12] Bressey, "Invisible Presence," 50. See, for example, Rice, "Vagrant Presences"; Richard Maguire, "Presenting the History of Africans in Provincial Britain: Norfolk as a Case Study," *History* 99, no. 5 (2014): 819–38; Graham Moore, "Finding George Freedman: a 'Liberated African' in Berkshire in the Age of Abolition," *Slavery & Abolition* (2024), 1-23.
[13] Kirsten Pond, "'A Desire to Look Respectable in the Eyes of Strangers:' The Victorian Press and the Figure of the Stranger at the Great Exhibition of 1851," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 53, no. 1 (2020): 57–75, at 59.
[14] Caroline Emily Shaw, "The British, Persecuted Foreigners and the Emergence of the Refugee Category in Nineteenth-century Britain," *Immigrants & Minorities* 30, no. 2–3 (2012): 239–62, at 250.

In 2022, a short play based on Ned's life used creative storytelling to provoke audiences to consider how Ned might have experienced not only these tumultuous months in Britain, but his life before this.[15] This is one important strategy in decentering the colonial account of Ned's life, in which much is said about Ned, but his perspective is recorded in print only through a couple of comments purportedly made to individuals he met during his time in Britain. Here, whilst we are interested in representations of Ned, we also attempt to reflect on his lived experience in 1859 and trace some of his volition through his actions – not least his refusal to be returned to Africa – as an active participant in the attempts to decide his "place."

I. In Search Of: "The Runaway […] Slave" in England

On 22 September 1859 a notice appeared in the *Sheffield Daily News*:



LEFT HIS HOME, on Sunday last, a KAFIR BOY, name NED, about 20 Years of Age, almost Black, and Black Woolly Hair. Wore when he left Home, Dark Trousers, Blue Check Smock, Cap, and had with him a Dark Grey Blanket; had no Shoes on; is about 5 Feet 8 Inches in height, and stoutly built, and was seen on Monday Evening near Grimesthorpe, going towards Sheffield. Any Person giving at the Police-office, Sheffield, such information as may lead to his recovery will be remunerated for his trouble.

THOS. HANDLEY, Blackburn.

Sheffield, 22nd Sept., 1859.

> LEFT HIS HOME, on Sunday last, a KAFIR BOY, named NED, about 20 Years of Age, almost Black, and Black Woolly Hair. Wore when he left Home, Dark Trousers, Blue Check Smock, Cap, and had with him a Dark Grey Blanket; had no Shoes on; is about 5 Feet 8 Inches in height, and stoutly built, and was seen on Monday Evening near Grimesthorpe, going towards Sheffield. Any Person giving at the Police-office, Sheffield, such information as may lead to his recovery will be remunerated for his trouble.[16]

[15] Citation deleted to maintain integrity of the review process.
[16] *Sheffield Daily News*, 22 September 1859.

The notice gave a striking image: a young Black man, barefoot, leaving "his home," most likely through the wooded areas north of Sheffield. Handley's notice drew attention for its resemblance to what commentators asserted was "one of those advertisements common in slaveholding America, but very unusual in free England."[17] The similarities are clear: it provided a detailed physical description of the "runaway," details around his movements, offered a reward for his "recovery," as well as labelling him by the single name "Ned" (itself likely an Anglicization). Simon Newman has shown how such advertisements were first created and used in Restoration London, demonstrating the long history of racial slavery and freedom-seeking on English soil.[18] But by 1859, the Black freedom-seeker clearly connoted U.S. slavery. This association likely reflected popular interest in the "slave narrative" and the activities of visiting self-emancipated African Americans.[19] Moreover, particularly since the highly contested abolition of slavery in the British empire in the 1830s, anti-slavery was co-opted into ideas about Britishness. Shortly after Ned's disappearance, the *Sheffield Independent* reported that "the runaway African is a slave" and dubbed the man-hunt "a piece of 'slave-hunting' in the very heart of that country in which 'slaves cannot breathe.'" On re-visiting England, he had, it was claimed that Handley had, brought "one of his slaves with him, under the guise of a servant."[20]

The paper noted that "Mr. Handley has for a number of years been residing in some part of Africa not under English dominion, and, like other Europeans there, has had his slaves."[21] The colonial frontier, in nineteenth-century southern Africa, encompassed violent and shifting border regions. That Handley is rumoured to have "had his slaves," and that so too had "other Europeans," was further used to vilify him for, despite the recent history of British slavery, enslavement in southern Africa was primarily understood as a practice linked with the "Boer" population. In the claim that Handley had "evidently resided much abroad," it is hinted that he has been "tainted" by his long residence in this particular space of empire. Slavery is constructed as a foreign practice – American, African, and European – and Handley is seen to have transgressed not only the spatial expectation that *England* was a

[17] *Sheffield Independent*, 24 September 1859.
[18] Simon Newman, *Freedom Seekers: Escaping from Slavery in Restoration London* (London, 2022).
[19] Richard Blackett, *Building an Anti-slavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement* (Baton Rouge, 1983); Audrey Fisch, *American Slaves in Victorian England* (Cambridge, 2000); Hannah-Rose Murray, *Advocates for Freedom: African-American Transatlantic Abolitionism in the British Isles* (Cambridge, 2020).
[20] *Sheffield Independent*, 24 September 1859.
[21] *Ibid*.

place of freedom but of nationality, as "it seems improbable that a slave-holder, especially an *Englishman*, would have the audacity to bring a slave to this country (italics ours)." Ned's case had troubled Victorians' "spatial containment" of slavery and appeared to speak to Britons' sense of their responsibilities over instances of enslavement "inflicted by the British state, under its laws or by its subjects."[22]

However, as early as 1 October, the *Sheffield Independent* declared Ned's rumoured enslavement "injurious supposition." It instead identified him as a "Zooloo" refugee who had escaped a civil war and entered "the service of a settler" in Pietermaritzburg, Natal, before being employed by Handley.[23] This account was also later promoted by Natal legislative council member Jonas Bergtheil, who was temporarily staying in London and visited Ned during his time in Clerkenwell prison towards the end of November. These sources appear to refer to the succession struggle in the Zulu kingdom between the king Mpande's sons, Cetshwayo and Mbuyazi. In December 1856, Cetshwayo's forces attacked Mbuyazi's, who found themselves trapped in the river Thukela basin. Thousands were massacred, or drowned attempting to escape, with a small number reaching neighbouring Natal.[24] Zulu refugees in Natal were apprenticed to European colonist-settlers. But Bergtheil later came to identify Ned as the beneficiary of British benevolence: describing how orphaned Zulus, or those "too young to take care of themselves," benefitted from "certain protective and restrictive laws" that bound Zulus to "such Europeans as it is expected will take care of them."[25] The traumatic and coercive conditions of Ned's recent years were, unsurprisingly, glossed over.

In reality, the apprenticeship system devised in Natal looked very different. By the 1850s, British settlers in Natal faced a "manpower crisis" as they failed to transform the growing local African population into the compliant labour force they desired.[26] Refugees offered part of a solution the British devised to this "problem," and highlights Ned's belonging to one of the many post-slavery coercive labour systems in the British empire, alongside the 1834-38 apprenticeship system in the Caribbean, and the use of labourers from South Asia in the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa. Under the 1854 Refugee Regulations, male Zulu refugees were

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[22] Lindsay Chappell, "Placing Victorian Abolitionism," *Victorian Literature & Culture* 50, no. 2 (2022): 225–59; Huzzey, "Moral Geography."
[23] *Sheffield Independent*, 1 October 1859.
[24] Benedict Carton, *Blood from Your Children: The Colonial Origins of Generational Conflict in South* Africa (Charlottesville and London, 2000), 27-8.
[25] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 1859.
[26] Keletso E. Atkins, *The Moon is Dead! Give Us Our Money!: The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843-1900* (New Hampshire and London, 1993), 1-3.

required to enter "apprenticeships" to European colonists. Border agents conveyed Zulu refugees to the local magistracy, and they were then "inspected by prospective employers with whom they were obliged to enter into three-year indentures at wage rates well below the market level."[27]

Against this background, colonizers' "campaign of public vilification" characterised local Africans as the cause of the labour problem, and the trope of the "lazy Kafir" gained widespread popularity.[28] The term linked in this period with southern Africans and with ideas about inferiority.[29] If Handley's advertisement primarily connoted slavery to its local readership, now something viewed as thoroughly un-British, his use of this epithet and the later identification of Ned as an apprenticed refugee betrayed different forms of racialisation and coercive labour relations that could not be distanced from Britain. In fact, according to Keletso Atkins, "British Natal's earliest system of African servitude bore striking resemblance to the institution of bondage for which they had so severely criticized the Transvaal Boers."[30] But initially there was seemingly little interest in Ned as a refugee or colonial subject, something that may have raised deeper and wider questions of the treatment of such individuals and their rights in the metropole. The *Independent* was quick to reassure its readers that Ned was not enslaved, and identify Handley "an inhabitant of the British colony of Natal, where, of course, slavery is as unlawful as in England itself" (we don't know whether this statement was due to Handley's convincing "explanation" to the newspaper's proprietor or his apparent litigiousness.)[31] But either way questions around and interest in Ned's possible enslavement persisted. Besides the advertisement, these appear to have originated with Rotherham surveyor Thomas Brady. After a "casual conversation" with Ned, Brady "believe[d] him to be a slave," and reported that Ned had run away when he learned he was due to return to Natal. Brady communicated his suspicions to the Sheffield police, something he considered "following a dictate of humanity," and encouraged an investigation

[27] Patrick Harries, "Plantations, Passes and Proletarians: Labour and the Colonial State in Nineteenth Century Natal," *Southern African Studies* 13, no. 3 (1987): 372–99, at 376.
[28] Ibid, pp.1-3. This is an immensely offensive term, and the authors only use it where necessary to illustrate Ned's racialization in the source material.
[29] See J.S. Arndt, What's in a Word? Historicising the Term "Caffre" in European Discourses about Southern Africa between 1500 and 1800," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 44, no. 1, (2018), 59–75.
[30] Atkins, *The Moon is Dead!*, 24. On apprenticeship's characteristics, see 17-20.
[31] *Sheffield Independent*, 1 October 1859. See Robert Leader to Chamerovzow, Oct. 17 1859, MSS. Brit. Emp. s.22, G10/A, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford; T.C. Brady to Chamerovzow, Sep. 6 1859, MSS Brit. Emp. s.18, C28, fol. 68, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.

into Ned's relationship with Handley. He also contacted the London-based British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. Appealing to the Society to "interfere," Brady hoped they would "look after the missing man" and shield Brady from the legal action Handley had threatened against him for slander.[32]

Ned's case quickly gathered attention beyond the local area. On 15 October the *East Suffolk Mercury* was among several papers reporting that Louis-Alexis Chamerovzow, the Society's secretary, "calls the attention of the public to a case of what he deems 'slave-hunting in England,'" and dubbed Handley an "alleged slave-hunter."[33] The Society felt that "if not slave-hunting in this country" Ned's case was "so suspicious as to warrant the Society's immediate interference."[34] Chamerovzow quickly developed a network of informants to assist in ascertaining Ned's "condition." The abolitionist Edward Smith advised Chamerovzow there was "no time to be lost interfering" but also stressed the difficulty in determining whether Ned was a "hired servant" or an "actual bondsman."[35] The Anti-Slavery Society nevertheless moved to ensure that Ned was not taken to Natal against his will, having Metropolitan Police officers observe the Handleys' embarkation without Ned and threatening proceedings against the ship's captain should Ned accompany them..[36] All the while, Ned remained missing in the Sheffield area, having "secreted himself in the woods" and "baffled every attempt to capture him."[37]

How did Ned interpret his situation? Initially, "the general impression" was that Ned ran away "because he considered himself his master's slave," and "had no desire to return to Africa with Mr Handley."[38] As the *Independent* attempted to redress the slavery theory, they set out the near opposite – Ned had wandered off in a "low and melancholy" state because he feared "he should not see Africa again."[39] Others pointed to conflict in the Handley household. In the periphrastic manner consistent across discussions of Ned, a local clergyman

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[32] Brady to Chamerovzow, Sep. 6 1859, MSS Brit. Emp. s.18, C28, fol. 68, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.
[33] *East Suffolk Mercury*, 15 October 1859.
[34] "Monthly Summary," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, vol. 7, issue 11 (November, 1859).
[35] Edward Smith to Chamerovzow, 10 October 1859. MSS. Brit. Emp., s.18, C36, fol. 62, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.
[36] *Sheffield Independent*, 26 November 1859; Assistant Commissioner to Chamerovzow, October 11 1859 and October 17 1859, MSS Brit. Emp. s.18, C33, fols. 64-65a, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.
[37] "Monthly Summary," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, vol. 7, issue 11 (November, 1859).
[38] *Derbyshire Times and Chesterfield Herald*, 29 October 1859
[39] *Sheffield Independent*, 1 October 1859.

who had obtained information about Ned from an associate of Handley claimed a fellow servant had unjustly accused Ned of stealing, and he "feared his master would have him punished."[40] Some weeks later, a woman who claimed to have stayed in the same inn as Ned and the Handleys stated his disappearance owed to a dispute over pay: "he had some high words with his mistress" and through tears told her that Mr Handley had a "bad heart, bad heart."" She claimed that Ned had said that "Mr. Handley was to give him 10s. to come to England to nurse Tom and Harry [Handley], but he had not given him anything."[41] It is notable that this is one of few sources where the author claimed to give Ned's account (and directly quote him). The second was Bergtheil's letter to the editor of London's *Daily Telegraph*, which professed to give Ned's perspective of his situation predominantly based on their November 1859 conversation. Bergtheil claimed that Ned had experienced sea-sickness so severely "that he declared he would for no consideration ever again venture on board a ship," and learning that the Handleys were due to return to Natal, had fled.[42]

For the Anti-Slavery Society, Bergtheil's allegedly authoritative account, and that Ned claimed wages of Handley, would later "set at rest" the question of his enslavement.[43] But enslavement as a legal status could not and cannot necessarily encapsulate Ned's condition nor his perspective of his condition. If Ned *was* articulating that he was working without payment for the Handleys, or discussed other aspects of his situation as a refugee/apprentice/servant, he may well have believed himself enslaved and/or given this impression to others. It is ultimately unclear whether Ned was (still) apprenticed, and whether he travelled to the country under some degree of coercion – Bergtheil claimed Ned "was apprenticed to Mr Handley [...] and finally agreed to accompany him and his family to England."[44] His reasons for departing the household are also unclear. But it is possible that whatever Ned had related after his departure, it was quick to be read through the lens of enslavement, which most likely related to British preconceptions of the "runaway" Black man.

The Natal context offers other perspectives. Keletso Atkins' work makes clear that labour relations between Africans and colonists in Natal were extremely fraught, and disputes over

[40] Richard F. Hartley, undated letter, MSS. Brit. Emp. s.22, G10/A, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.
[41] *Sheffield Daily News and Morning Advertiser*, 5 December 1859.
[42] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 1859.
[43] ""Monthly Summary," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, vol. 7, issue 12 (December, 1859)
[44] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 1859.

wages and terms of employment were endemic.[45] This offers another way of reading Ned's situation. If Ned did willingly travel to England under the promise of payment, departed the household and later (according to Bergtheil) looked to find another kind of employment in England, the events of 1859 may reflect (in part at least) Ned's attempt to determine the kinds of work he did, where, and for whom or what. He may also have had other motives in travelling to Britain. Bergtheil claimed that Ned was "highly pleased with the prospect of seeing Europe."[46] A number of Zulu people had travelled to Europe and returned to Natal in the 1850s, and accounts of their experiences may have been widely known. One published account of a Zulu traveller who had visited Europe for around a year as part of an "exhibition" appeared in the *Natal Journal* in 1858, the year before Ned left for England.[47] As the historian Sadiah Qureshi highlights, this could "taken to be the words of the Zulu or the missionary who transcribed his words and subsequently arranged for their publication."[48] But the account stressed the interest in exploring features of the colonizers' country, if its characterisation of the journey, place, and people would have also likely created a lot of trepidation. It also suggested that the Zulu travellers had used the trip to investigate certain claims the English were making in Natal; and that the experience had given the returning travellers some status. In other words, such a trip could offer opportunities for personal and community gain.

Whilst different accounts of Ned's situation and his motives emerged, their limitations in explaining Ned's disappearance are self-evident. None can speak for Ned, who made one thing certain – his determination not to be captured. The question of his enslavement remained open during his time "missing" in the Sheffield area, and identifying his whereabouts attracted great public interest.

II. In Search Of: "The Lost African" in Sheffield and Beyond

Having run away mid-September, Ned was still "missing" by late October. The papers related that Ned was "supposed to be hiding in some of the woods in the neighbourhood of Grimesthorpe."[49] He was sighted or encountered in various locations, and for "several

[45] Atkins, *The Moon is Dead!*
[46] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 1859.
[47] Bernth Lindfors, "A Zulu View of Victorian London," *Munger Africana Library Notes*, 48 (1979): 3-19.
[48] Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 221.
[49] *Sheffield Independent*, 24 September 1859.

weeks," Ned had "taken up his quarters in the woods at Norton, from whence he ventured to emerge occasionally in the day-time, in quest of food."[50] Ned was in the village of Thorpe Salvin, more than ten miles from Grimesthorpe, when he was eventually taken into police custody, after over a month "missing."[51] This period raises questions both of Ned's experience, and local responses, during this time. The tone of the local newspapers reports on Ned was, if heavily patronising, fairly sympathetic. Newspapers reported "severe frosts." Ned had left with no shoes and minimal clothing. There was "great reason to fear that [Ned] may perish from the weather and lack of food."[52] In an article entitled "The Lost African," Sheffield's *Independent* stressed:

> The African is perfectly harmless and inoffensive, so that no person need feel any fear of him, and it will be a real act of humanity to the poor creature to allay his alarm, and give him food and shelter till he can be properly provided for. We hope this explanation will [...] induce persons to interest themselves in saving the poor man from perishing by cold and hunger.[53]

As the newspaper encouraged, Ned received considerable support from locals, and allegedly he was supplied with food and "charity."[54] It was also noted that Ned was "subsisting on blackberries and such other wild fruits." The paper elaborated that this was "a mode of living which of itself indicates no small amount of determination not to return," but the image of Ned subsisting on wild fruit would also have resonated with this familiar trope in constructions of "savagery" in general and of southern African hunter-gatherers in particular.[55] Sheffield's *Independent* wrote: "The wild but harmless demeanour of the man excited strong feelings of compassion whenever he occasionally presented himself."[56] Again, ideas about "wildness" would have evoked a sense of "savagery" to the nineteenth-century reader, not least in regards to constructions of Africa. But at the same time, these articles clearly emphasised commentators' sense of Ned's vulnerability and that he required assistance.

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[50] *Sheffield Independent*, 22 October 1859.
[51] *Sheffield Independent*, 5 November 1859.
[52] *Sheffield Independent*, 1 October 1859.
[53] *Ibid.*
[54] *Sheffield Independent,* 22 October 1859, 5 November 1859.
[55] *Sheffield Independent,* 24 September 1859.
[56] *Sheffield Independent,* 5 November 1859.

Ned was not universally perceived in this way. The sources also point to more negative experiences. The *Independent* reported that Ned had been "abused and beaten by some persons, and had dogs set upon him by others," and was "so much alarmed as to hide himself as closely as possible."[57] Brady claimed to have cautioned "police and peasantry" to "beware of hunting Ned or using violence (though Brady himself was also participating in this pursuit)."[58] It is unsurprising, then, that according to one commentator, "[Ned] has a real fear of being taken."[59]

In defying capture, Ned defended himself in numerous encounters. Soon after he left the Handleys, when "seized by two men in a wood near Grimesthorpe," Ned "offered so energetic a resistance that they were quite unable to detain him."[60] When disturbed on another occasion, sleeping under a "wrapper or rug," Ned communicated "his displeasure" and "the men, therefore, left him."[61] And when two agricultural workers attempted to capture him, "he resisted, and adroitly seizing hold of one, threw him over the adjoining hedge."[62] Ned also resisted persuasion. In mid-October, Ned was supplied with food and spent some time with the male servants at Thomas Jones' farmhouse. Ned "appeared quite harmless, made himself intelligible in broken English, and seemed to perfectly understand what was said to him."[63] But when the men attempted to "induce" Ned to return to "his master," Ned quickly "showed symptoms of fear[...] and all further efforts to prevail on him to go to Sheffield were fruitless."[64] The pattern of interactions with Ned attest to his terror of recapture and his vulnerability, but at the same time, show his resilience, resourcefulness, and determination.

Ned also had to sustain himself over this period – and reportedly appeared "haggard," "emaciated," and "worn out."[65] An outcome of this hunger, Ned was allegedly seen by Hackenthorpe farmer George Hellewell with a slaughtered lamb. He explained that he identified Ned from the newspaper coverage, and when he called him "by his name," Ned

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[57] *Sheffield Independent*, 1 October 1859.
[58] Brady to Chamervozow, undated, MSS. Brit. Emp. s. 22, G10/A, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.
[59] Robert Leader to Chamerovzow, 17 October 1859. MSS. Brit. Emp. s. 22, G10/A, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.
[60] *Sheffield Independent*, 24 September 1859.
[61] *Sheffield Independent*, 22 October 1859.
[62] *Ibid.*
[63] *Ibid.*
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] Brady to Chamervozow, undated, MSS. Brit. Emp. s. 22, G10/A, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.

approached Hellewell, laid his hand on his shoulder, and "motioned him to pass on." Hellewell gave up persuading Ned to go with him, given he carried the knife used to kill the sheep.[66] The *Independent* speculated that "he may even be guilty of some more dangerous crime," and characterised him as a "wild looking" "character armed with a knife."[67] Though still describing him as a "poor fellow," the threatening characterisation was a notable shift from initial portrayals of Ned as – if not the fugitive slave – the lost, harmless African.

At daybreak, Hanging Lea Wood was "thoroughly searched" "surrounded and scoured" by "officers and some hundreds of people from the village."[68] Long searches by "hundreds of workmen and other people in the village…proved in vain," and locals were left to ruminate on Ned's direction of travel from footsteps in the dew.[69] Ned was captured shortly after the sheep-stealing incident, eventually "induced" to a household in Thorpe Salvin. These high levels of public involvement in the search for Ned perhaps reflected the appeal of the rewards allegedly offered for Ned's capture, or eagerness to participate in anti-slavery activity, but ultimately speak to the excitement and "spectacle" of an African man in the local area.

Whilst Ned was referred to using many variable racializing terms, he was identified as southern African (through the "K—" epithet) and a Zulu man specifically. The Zulu people were relatively "novel" to the British public, with public interest increased by British colonisation in Africa. New exhibitions highlighted "tales of violence, border conflict, and British military activity," and were "among some of the most popular forms of metropolitan entertainment."[70] With Charles Caldecott's 1853 "exhibition" claiming to be the first of its kind, these continued to be popular, with Zulu men (described as the "wild men of Africa") exhibited by the Royal Windsor Castle Menagerie during Ned's time in England.[71] Zulu people were presented as "novel amusements" and "specimens" for the examination of alleged human differences.[72]

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[66] *Sheffield Independent*, 15 October 1859.
[67] *Ibid.*
[68] *Ibid.*
[69] *Sheffield Independent*, 22 October 1859.
[70] Sadiah Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 2011), 170.
[71] Bernth Lindfors, *Early African Entertainments Abroad: from the Hottentot Venus to Africa's first Olympians* (Wisconsin, 2014), 89.
[72] Qureshi, Peoples on Parade, 170, 182, 279.

Besides the more general interest in Ned, and the question of his enslavement, his identification as a Zulu , perhaps explains some of interest in Ned's dis/appearance in the area. Newspapers reported that "a 'wild man' had been caught," and after Ned's capture, "crowds of rustics and others thronged the premises […] in order to get a sight of the stranger." Ned was "an object of extraordinary curiosity" and amongst his "hundreds" of "visitors" came those bearing "ordinary victuals, confectionery and sweetmeats."[73] The *Derbyshire Times and Chesterfield Herald* set out that "several people have so far sympathised with him that they will take him into their employ if allowed to do so."[74] But, after Ned's capture, local magistrate Thomas Need wrote to Chamerovzow that:

> As to an engagement in our neighbourhood I am very much opposed to any thing of the sort, because I am convinced that those who wish to engage him are influenced by very unworthy motives & *would keep "Ned" as an object likely to attract customers*. There are many other objections, & I quite agree with you that the best way to dispose of him is to send him back to his own country (italics ours).[75]

In Need's perspective, at least a degree of this public interest thus reflected an objectifying interest in Ned.

Despite this, the question of his condition remained important. When Ned was taken into custody by the county constabulary, "the strongest determination was shown by the crowd to resist his removal, they being under the impression that the poor fellow had no right to be deprived of his liberty."[76] Ned was nevertheless briefly incarcerated in Eckington, something framed as a "safe keeping" measure until the Anti-Slavery Society could "send down somebody to take charge of him." Evidence was taken "simply to justify their detention of the man."[77] Again, there seemed to be a degree of local support for Ned and "a sum of money was subscribed on his behalf."[78] But there was little concern voiced about Ned's own wishes – it was taken for granted that the Anti-Slavery Society was the appropriate body to "care" for him. The extensive newspaper coverage of Ned's case both allowed and was enabled by public participation in his case, and it's clear that many people physically involved

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[73] *Sheffield Independent*, 5 November 1859.
[74] *Derbyshire Times and Chesterfield Herald*, 29 October 1859.
[75] Thomas Need to Chamerovzow, 15 November1859, MSS. Brit. Emp. s. 22, G10/A, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.
[76] *Sheffield Independent,* 5 November 1859.
[77] *Ibid*.
[78] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 1859.

themselves by searching for Ned and attempting to see him. There appears to have been a real local commitment to ensuring Ned's freedom – from Brady's initial concerns about Ned's enslavement to the crowd's insistence on Ned's "liberty," which could reflect popular enthusiasm to engage in anti-slavery activity. But public interest certainly reflected a wide and deep fascination with Ned as an African, and specifically Zulu or southern African, man. Whatever the locals' motives, Ned was chased, hounded, bribed, captured, gawked at, and then imprisoned, and removed.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when the Anti-Slavery Society became satisfied that Ned was not legally enslaved. It seems they still had work to do in investigating "the whole circumstances of the poor fellow's case" when papers reported that Ned would "be taken care of by the society, or permitted to go into the service of some trustworthy person."[79] The Society's *Reporter* stated in November that "we are expecting him to be placed in our hands, and trust we may find a home for him.[80] But Need's comment that he agreed with Chamerovzow "that the best way to dispose of him is to send him back to his own country" also suggests Chamerovzow was contemplating Ned's return to Natal. By this point, Handley had departed England and "forgoes all claims whatever upon [Ned]."[81]

III. In Search of a Specific Kind of African Man:Humanitarians and The Question of Race

On 1 November London's *Daily News* reported that Ned "left for the metropolis on Friday," and alleged he was "very much improved in spirits and appearance."[82] The Anti-Slavery Society arranged for Ned to be escorted from the Derbyshire village of Eckington to London's "Strangers' Home for Asiatics, Africans and South Sea Islanders" on West India Dock Road. During his time here we see repeated attempts to identify a specific kind of Black man, one that fitted with contemporary racial ideas and humanitarian ideals, a stereotype in which African people, particularly those who came under the influence of missionaries and humanitarians, were expected to act in a "grateful" (read "subordinate" or even "submissive") way towards the Europeans positioned as their paternalistic beneficiaries.

[79] *Derbyshire Times and Chesterfield Herald,* 29 October 1859.
[80] "Monthly Summary," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, vol. 7, issue 11 (November, 1859).
[81] *Derbyshire Times and Chesterfield Herald*, 29 October 1859.
[82] *Daily News,* 1 November 1859.

Whilst under their contact, Ned defied these hopes and aspirations, he did not conform to the passive stereotype they searched for and, as such, was found not to belong.

In mid-nineteenth-century Britain attitudes towards race were in flux, with attitudes towards race generally moving away from humanitarian ideas of colonised people as "redeemable." After the abolition of slavery in the British empire, many came to believe the "Great Experiment" had "failed." Events overseas from Xhosa resistance to colonisation in southern Africa, to the Indian Rebellion of 1857-58 were used by some as "evidence" the humanitarian "project" of "civilisation" was impossible. Racial science made hardening claims about the immutability of racial difference.[83] Nonetheless, many humanitarian-minded actors both in Britain and elsewhere continued to operate through missionary work, organisations such as the Aborigines' Protection Society and organisations such as the Strangers' Home.[84] And as the historian Darren Reid has recently demonstrated, "humanitarian decline" was far from straight forward, with some humanitarian-minded people, including members of the Aboriginie Protection Society becoming more "entrenched" in their humanitarian beliefs, at the same points that others became disillusioned.[85] It was into this charged atmosphere that Ned's case was heard.

The Strangers' Home had opened in 1857, just a few years before Ned arrived in Britain. A centre for Christian missionary work, missionaries played a central role in its founding and operation.[86] The home provided information, advice, accommodation and food for sailors, while they found their next job on a ship or their passage home, looking to alleviate the destitution, vagrancy, and vice believed to plague transient sea-faring populations in London.[87] The home hosted people of many different origins and the press reported that "natives of India, Arabia, Africa, the Straits of Malacca, the Mozambique, and the Islands of the Pacific, have been sheltered at the Home for periods varying from one week to three

[83] Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960* (Hampshire, 1982); Edward Beasley, *The Victorian Reinvention of Race: New Racisms and the Problem of Grouping in the Human Sciences* (New York, 2010)
[84] Zoe Laidlaw, *Protecting the Empire's Humanity: Thomas Hodgkin and British Colonial Activism 1830-1870* (Cambridge, 2021).
[85] Darren Reid,"'British Humanitarianism, Indigenous Rights, and Imperial Crises: Assessing the Membership Base of the Aborigines' Protection Society, 1840–73,"*Journal of British Studies* (2024),1–18.
[86] Humayun Ansari, *"The Infidel Within": Muslims in Britain Since 1800* (Oxford, 2018), 66-67.
[87] Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: The Story of Indians in Britain, 1700-1947* (London, 1986), 49, 51.

months."[88] As much as this setting potentially provided opportunities to meet people with somewhat similar experiences, Ned was hardly a seaman, and it's more likely it was terrifying given his evident determination not to return to Natal. Colonel Hughes, the Home's honorary secretary, assured Chamerovzow that every effort would be made to make Ned "happy & comfortable." But by Hughes' own admission, this had not been the case. Ned had related that he "felt he was in jail and not allowed to go where he wished." Visited by two men who conversed with Ned "in his own language," Hughes claimed Ned's "mind was set at rest & he now appears in a much happier state than previously."[89] But he was mistaken, and Ned soon departed the Home. As Ned later allegedly explained to Jonas Bergtheil, the cause of this was "because all the people who came to see him talked about his being put on board ship, and sent back [...] to Natal."[90] Ned continued to be steadfast in his determination to remain in England.

Others at the Home had different explanations for Ned's departures. Its superintendent informed Chamerovzow that he felt "pretty well assured that [Ned] wishes to get amongst bad company in the public houses, and he has often begged for money, though none has been given him, but he has been supplied with tobacco." The Home was "quite at a loss to imagine what has become of him."[91] Evidently there was a growing sense of frustration amongst those who had concerned themselves with Ned's case. Chamerovzow wrote critically that, since Ned's removal to London, his "conduct" had been

> …far from what was desired, and notwithstanding every attempt that has been made to induce him to settle down to a civilised life, he has got worse and worse, and several times made his escape from the institution.

Ned's failure to adapt to either a "settled" or a "civilised" life may be situated in wider humanitarian narratives about the limits to which reforming those from backgrounds such as mobile pastoralists was possible. Chamerovzow went on to express hope that, though "the man is again at large," he might again be "captured" and returned "to his native country."[92]

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[88] *Glasgow Daily Herald*, 23 December 1859.
[89] R.M. Hughes to Chamerovzow, 2 November 1859, MSS. Brit. Emp. s. 22, G10/A, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.
[90] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 1859.
[91] J. Freeman to Chamerovzow, 15 November 1859, 19 November 1859, MSS. Brit. Emp. s. 22, G10/A, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.
[92] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 24 November 1859.

Four days later, Chamerovzow appeared even more exercised by Ned, emphasising that "notwithstanding all the precautions that were taken consistently with not placing him under bodily restraint to keep him at the 'home,' he has, after two disappearances, again made off." Demonstrating a shift in Ned's representation, he continued that "He is quite wild, and the best thing that could be done with him would be to get him conveyed to Natal, and placed under the care of Mr. Shepstone, the protector of the aborigines."[93] Chamerovzow portrayed Ned as unwilling, or unable, to respond to the many attempts to "induce him to settle down to a civilised life." This was something echoed in press coverage at the time that concluded that all the efforts made, "and the kindness which has [bee]n used, have, as it appears, failed to reconcile the poor [fello]w to the condition in which he was placed."[94] As Ned refused his containment in the Strangers' Home, which could not be altered by either interventionists' "kindness" or "precautions," his "behaviour" was rendered proof of his insurmountably "wild" and "uncivilised" characteristics.

These representations of Ned's incivility culminated during his final escape from the home, when Ned was eventually discovered in Highgate Wood, having again (allegedly) stolen and killed a sheep. By daybreak the "inhabitants of Highgate had got the information" about Ned's whereabouts and "a large number of people" joined the hunt for Ned in the woods. Ned was eventually "secured" by two constables "after a hard struggle."[95] Newspapers drew attention to what one dubbed the capture of "A real live Kaffir… near Highgate" emphasising through this degrading language the perceived extraordinary nature of Ned as a spectacle.[96] Ned was described in animalistic terms: "more like a wild monkey than a man" and almost in "a wild state of nature."[97] Emphasis on his agility was used to animalise him, but also to stress his evasiveness as a criminal, now re-characterised by one commentator as "the terror of the neighbourhood" during his time in the Sheffield area.[98]

After Ned was captured, he was taken to Clerkenwell House of Detention. During Ned's time here, he was visited by Jonas Bergtheil, the aforementioned member of Natal's legislative council temporarily in London. As someone associated with Natal who could (reportedly)

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[93] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 1859.
[94] *Sheffield Daily News*, 26 November 1859.
[95] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph,* 25 November 1859.
[96] *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 3 December 1859.
[97] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph,* 25 November 1859; *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 4 December 1859.
[98] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 30 November 1859.

"converse with [Ned]," Bergtheil was contacted by the magisterial authorities and visited Ned at Clerkenwell "with a view of ascertaining any particulars with which I might be acquainted relative to him."[99] Bergtheil provides the most detailed account of Ned's time in England, and as previously discussed, authors one of the only sources professing to give us Ned's own perspective on some of the events that unfolded in 1859.[100]

Bergtheil's account confirmed aspects of Ned's story already covered in the press – in particular, reiterating that Ned was not enslaved but a Zulu refugee from the 1856 "sanguinary massacre" who had been apprenticed to Mr Handley, and "finally agreed to accompany him and his family to England." Bergtheil also made the novel claim that he had already met Ned in Durban, before his embarkation, where Ned appeared to be pleased with "the prospect of seeing Europe." Bergtheil also reported the changed mental state Ned appeared to have undergone since then, recording that:

> When I first entered his cell this morning, although he appeared to recognise me, he seemed terrified, and pretended not to understand the questions I addressed to him; but after recalling to his mind where I had originally seen him, telling him that I knew his master, explaining to him who I was, also that I knew Mr. [Shepstone], secretary to native affairs in Natal, and that if he required assistance I would properly represent his case, a broad grin stole over his countenance, and he freely answered all my enquiries I subsequently put to him.

It is notable here that Bergtheil describes that Ned "seemed terrified" in his cell. It furthers the questions we already have about what Ned was experiencing. That Ned was allegedly "pretend[ing] not to understand" while he assessed the situation also suggests this is a tactic in navigating these situations that might have been used in other interactions such as in court and with locals. Bergtheil goes on to explain that Ned had been "horrified at finding himself chased by a number of 'umlungas' [white men] in uniform, who he supposed to be soldiers." Bergtheil believed that Ned had "entirely [...] lost" his "confidence in Europeans," who had pursued him and taken the money he was given.[101] In Bergtheil's characterisation, Ned did not distinguish between the police, Anti-Slavery Society officials, or soldiers. If correct, we can imagine how Ned felt navigating the different people and organisations he encountered, a

[99] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 1859.
[100] *Ibid.*
[101] *Ibid.*

host of "Umlungas, or white people" claiming variably to help or apprehend him and all acting as obstacles to his objectives.

Although Bergtheil acknowledged these aspects of Ned's experience, and that the Handleys owed Ned wages, he alleged that Ned felt he had not been treated badly by his former master, nor at the Strangers' Home, and he felt his crimes had been treated most leniently. According to Bergtheil, Ned's frustrations instead sat in one very particular place. His determination to avoid return to Natal owed to his terrible seasickness. When he learned he was due to return, "his fear of the voyage was so great that he abandoned his service without a single penny in his possession, without declaring his intention of leaving, or affording any trace of his whereabouts." At the Strangers' Home, Ned was horrified that "all the people who came to see him talked about his being put on board ship, and sent back across the sea to Natal." According to Bergtheil, Ned felt that "everybody" was "in a conspiracy to send him – again across the sea."[102] Of course, Ned was correct about this. Believing he would "be forcibly placed on board," Ned again ran away. His overriding objective was, according to Bergtheil, to stay and work in England.

Ned's case was tried at Highgate Petty sessions in a courtroom "crowded to excess."[103] Bergtheil attended the court as Ned's interpreter and explained he was "taking up" Ned's case as a "man without means, without a friend [...] and – worst of all – unaccustomed to our habits."[104] Bergtheil recommended Ned be "summarily convicted" to avoid association with criminals that might harm his chances at employment.[105] Bergtheil, as well as the missionary Charles Frederick Mackenzie who was also temporarily resident in London, claimed to seek employment for Ned, themselves unable to "take care of him."[106] He stressed Ned's suitability for domestic service explicitly, and drew on his "long experience of the Zulu character", "stating that he will make an admirable and faithful servant," drawing attention to his "trustworthy," "honest," and "wholly inoffensive" character.[107] Other commentators used their personal experiences with Ned to testify his character. "M.E.B," the woman who claimed to have stayed in the same inn as Ned and the Handleys, emphasised to a London newspaper both Ned's unfamiliarity with English culture ("he drank from a large basin of

[102] *Ibid.*
[103] *Ibid.*
[104] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 3 December 1859.
[105] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 30 November 1859.
[106] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 3 December 1859.
[107] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 1859.

tea… like a horse"), and his diligence as a servant, in particular detailing his "tenderness and care of a mother" towards the Handley children.[108] Such accounts pointed to the possibility of Ned's employment in England. But they were also used by newspaper editors to evidence "the simple, harmless qualities of this untutored child of nature," and to argue that Ned's return to "his own country" was "a step which, in his destitute and unenlightened condition, is absolutely necessary as regards both himself and others."[109]

Those who involved themselves with Ned's case also concurred that some kind of punishment was necessary for his crime. Chamerovzow argued "a short imprisonment, for the sake of keeping him safe until means can be found to send him to Natal, would satisfy justice and be in accordance with humanity."[110] Bergtheil thought punishment could serve other purposes too, and that "some nominal punishment… such as gentle exercise on the treadmill," would make Ned understand that "he must not break the law with impunity."[111] The magistrates declined to acquit Ned of the crime, and he was committed for trial at the Central Criminal Court. Ned was taken to Newgate prison, and then stood trial again before being acquitted and discharged from custody.[112]

The promotion of more forceful methods to control Ned's behaviour and strengthening emphasis on his "necessary" removal reflects a sharper emphasis on his unsuitability to life in England. This is particularly clear in Chamerovzow's comments, who had become convinced that "he will never do any good in this country, owing to his wild habits and utter impatience of personal restraint." Chamerovzow again stressed the insurmountable nature of Ned's "racial" characteristics:

> He is quite uncivilised, and though he says he wants to stay in this country and work, it is clear to me that he would never live under the restraints of civilised life, but would take the first opportunity of again making for the woods and resuming in England the life of Kaffir.[113]

With Bergtheil's "narrative" seemingly disproving "the slavery theory," Chamerovzow identified Handley as a "respectable trader," reaffirmed Ned's refugee status, and explained

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[108] *Sheffield Daily News*, 5 December 1859.
[109] *Ibid.*
[110] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 30 November 1859.
[111] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 1859.
[112] *Weekly Mail* [London] 4 December 1859; *Sheffield Daily News*, 5 December 1859.
[113] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 30 November 1859.

that his claim of wages "is sufficient evidence of his having been a servant."[114] Chamerovzow concluded from the Society's "inquiries" that "we are strongly inclined to believe that he never was so regarded."[115] Ned was certainly not the only Black visitor from Britain's colonies who British anti-slavery activists looked to "return" when they did not behave in the desired way.[116] But strongly resonant here are the assumptions concerning "savages" and the inability of southern African peoples to "settle" discussed above, and calls forth in particular European characterisations of Natal's local African population as "fickle," "fitful," and reserving "the right to start off the *kraals* whenever the humor changed."[117] Asserting Ned's identity in this way, Chamerovzow again promoted the appropriate body for Ned's "care" as Natal's "protector of the aborigines."

Ned's status as a refugee thus seemed to carry little weight in determining his possible future – he was a colonial subject (and a "troublesome" one), rather than a fugitive slave, and this had seen a distinct shift in attitude. Isaac Land identifies that in the nineteenth century, Britain's "well-publicized openness to [European] political refugees" balanced against a "quiet but vastly more interventionist approach toward seamen from Britain's own colonies."[118] For Raminder K. Saini, certain colonial arrivals like destitute Indians "occupied an unclear space of belonging within Britain," and revealed "contentious understandings of what rights were owed and by whom."[119] Ned's case demonstrates an eagerness to – figuratively and literally – resolve such questions of belonging by assigning colonial subjects to their "proper" places and establishing them as both problematic and incompatible with life in Britain. That designation of Ned's place relied, in a large part, on his racialization. It has been argued that the nineteenth century saw a battle over the representation of slavery and enslaved people.[120] Although by this point, Ned was no longer considered to be enslaved, we can see a battle between different racializing ideologies unfolding in how he too was represented. At different moments, Ned was referred to in various racializing terms including

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[114] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 1859.
[115] "Monthly Summary," *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, vol. 7, issue 12 (December, 1859).
[116] See, for example, Diana Paton (ed.), *A Narrative of Events, Since the First of August, 1834, by James Williams, an Apprenticed Labourer in Jamaica* (Durham, 2001).
[117] Atkins, *The Moon is Dead!*, 2.
[118] Land, "Bread and Arsenic," 103.
[119] Raminder K. Saini, "England Failed to Do Her Duty Towards Them: The India Office and Pauper Indians in the Metropole, 1857–1914," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, no. 46 (2018): 226–256, at 228, 249.
[120] Hall, *Civilising Subjects*; David Lambert, "Sierra Leone and Other Sites in the War of Representation Over Slavery," *History Workshop Journal*, 64 (2007): 103–32.

"Kaffir," "Black," "Zooloo," "darkie," "Negro," "African," "black man," "man of colour,'" and a "native of the tribe of the Zulu Kaffirs." That all these different epithets are used fairly synonymously in the documents indicates the slippages and fluidity of 'racial' difference in this period, as well as showing how easily Ned was cast and re-cast as "runaway Negro," "poor African," "wild Kafir," and more. But in other ways, these terms, though sometimes interchangeable, resonated differently and carried with them different connotations. As such they contributed to a complex, slippery and multi-layered process of racialization and discourses that could be recast inferences of difference as was strategically important to the speaker.

As elsewhere in this period, "race" was frequently read from bodily markers. The *Sheffield Independent* probably gives the fullest description here that Ned had "woolly hair and thick lips characteristic of the African race."[121] Animalistic imagery has obvious and well-known racializing functions, and the description of Ned's movements "so nimble" that "he was more like a wild monkey than a [man]" speak to this.[122] Such thinking draws on a lineage of linking African people explicitly to orang-outangs, current since the eighteenth century.[123] "The peculiar gestures and great excitability" which he apparently exhibited when accosted are also massive racial tropes.[124] Tropes of "civilisation" and "civility," highly important in the first half of the nineteenth century in demarcating "difference," were also highly important in how Ned was racialised. The report made about his behaviour at the Strangers' Home described how "notwithstanding every attempt that has been made to induce him to settle down to a civilised life, he has got worse and worse."[125] Again, there were parallels here between the growing unease with the way in which Ned acted and wider patterns of the contemporaneous "disillusionment" of missionaries and humanitarians in Southern Africa at this period.[126] In court Ned was described as behaving "in a very wild manner," which may well reflect that he was experiencing and showing signs of distress or frustration, but certainly shows the racialised way that his behaviour was interpreted and represented. By November 1859, some newspapers were referring to Ned using the term "Wild Kafir"

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[121] *Sheffield Independent*, 5 November 1859.
[122] *Sheffield Daily News,* 26 November 1859.
[123] Catherine Hall, *Lucky Valley: Edward Long and the History of Racial Capitalism* (Cambridge, 2024): 372-415; Wulf D. Hund et al, ed., *Simianization: Apes, Gender, Class, and Race* (Zurich, 2015).
[124] *Sheffield Independent*, 22 October 1859.
[125] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 24 November 1859.
[126] Richard Price, *Making Empire: Colonial Encounters and the Creation of Imperial Rule in Nineteenth-century Africa* (Cambridge, 2008).

showing the linking between "civilisation" and (wrongly perceived) ethnicity in these constructions. These associations were made by other commentators too and reflect the "hardening" attitudes to Ned. Recall, for instance, Chamerovzow's comments that Ned was "quite uncivilised," and despite Ned's ambitions to "stay […] and work," he was incapable of living "under the restraints of civilised life" and would simply "resum[e] in England the life of a Kaffir." This important statement speaks to debates in Victorian Britain about the capacity or not of indigenous people from various sites of empire to "become civilised."

Language is also used to mark "race", and it is therefore interesting that descriptions of Ned's use of English were so inconsistent. Of course, there may be many reasons for inconsistency, comprehension (not least in a second language) can indeed fluctuate depending on circumstance, mental state, accent etcetera, and it may be that the initial encounters Ned makes are marked by incomprehension which expressed itself in linguistic dissonance. But it is also possible to use the varying accounts of Ned's language to track signs of how he performed his identity and representations of this. When hiding near Sheffield he is said to have "made himself intelligible in broken English, and seemed to perfectly understand what was said to him both by Mr Jones and his men."[127] This pattern seems to be fairly consistent in writings about Ned circa October 1859 where a different journalist notes "he seems in no wise to be afraid of those who address him, and though he cannot understand all that is said to him, yet he has a sufficient knowledge of the language to make himself understood."[128] Similarly, as described in November 1859, Ned and Mr Hellewell "talked for about ten minutes, trying to understand one another" – the emphasis here reflects the two-way nature of comprehension and communication.[129] Yet, at his trial, Ned "addressed the magistrates in his native tongue." Communication difficulties frustrated the trial "till somebody acquainted with his language could attend," and may have been quite intentional on Ned's part.[130] Brady commented after Ned was "secured" that "None here to understand him" and he needed "to be examined per interpreter" in London.[131] Another informant to Chamerovzow, Rev. Richard Hartley, reported that Ned "had been much with other tribes, & that he spoke a 'mongrel language.'" Hartley believed "This may account for the difficulty he & the man I

[127] *Sheffield Independent*, 22 October 1859.
[128] *Derbyshire Times and Chesterfield Herald,* 29 October 1859.
[129] *Sheffield Independent*, 5 November 1859.
[130] *Ibid*.
[131] Brady to Chamerovzow, undated, MSS Brit. Emp. s. 18, G10/A, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.

brought for Sheffield had to understand each other, though there were several words common to both."[132]

Particularly after the relocation to London, emphasis seems to be placed on his complete *lack* of comprehension, with Ned being described as " in a very wild state, and who could not speak one word of English."[133] It seems notable that he was explained as though uncomprehending in the court setting, which must have been an overwhelming situation. As discussed, Bergtheil's account may suggest Ned was manipulating his comprehension, "pretend[ing] not to understand" Bergtheil's questions until recalling their previous meeting, when he then "freely answered all [Bergtheil's] questions."[134] For others, emphasising Ned's allegedly limited English language skills simply provided further evidence of his unsuitability for life in England as "an additional obstacle to his obtaining employment" and reflects the desire to represent Ned as increasingly "uncivilised." [135] In December, London's *Daily Telegraph* described Ned as "only be[ing] made to understand by signs," and wrote that he "kept grinning and dancing with the gaoler."[136] Further afield, *The Bury and Norwich Post* also described Ned dancing and laughing at the bar, stating he was "obliged to be kept quiet by force."[137] References to "dancing" in Ned's representation significantly echo the racialisation of those Zulu participants in the aforementioned 1853 London exhibition. Dancing was a central part of this display and helped draw in crowds. Charles Dickens's well-known reflections on "The Noble Savage" in *Household Words*, prompted by the display, made not dissimilar representations of the Zulu people "howling, whistling, clucking, stamping, jumping" and "tearing."[138] Dickens's argument, in this piece, that "savages" should be "civilised off the face of the earth," points to the frightening ramifications of these depictions and arguments and the power of racialising exhibitions to excite extreme responses.

V. Conclusions

[132] Richard F. Hartley, undated, Oxford, MSS. Brit. Emp. s. 22, G10/A, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.
[133] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 1859..
[134] *Ibid.*
[135] "Monthly Summary," *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, vol. 7, issue 12 (December, 1859).
[136] *The Daily Telegraph* [London], 3 December 1859.
[137] *Bury and Norwich Post*, 6 December 1859.
[138] Charles Dickens, "The Noble Savage", *Household Words*, 7 (168), 337-39.

What did Ned want? For all those records that exist where Ned is the object of a search, there are scarcely any that illuminate what Ned was looking for in his travel to Britain, or his escapes from Handley and the Strangers' Home. What is clearer is – once in Britain – Ned was determined not to return to Natal. While there is nothing to suggest Ned identified with any notion of "Britishness" or staked any such claim, his experience of labour in Natal and in Britain formed a basis for an attempt to remain. The only statement that Ned (allegedly) made about what he was looking for was work and this seems to be unequivocal: "If only the white people will take me and give me work, I do not care what wages I get!" Bergtheil claimed Ned was frustrated "that no white man will take him into his house, although he has, time after time, said that he will do any kind of work at nominal wages."[139] At the same time, Ned would have been shrewdly aware that voicing his preparedness to work for "the white people" was necessary to assert his conformity to class and gendered expectations.

If Ned had indeed hoped to settle and work in England, it seemed for a moment that he may have been successful. After his acquittal for sheep-stealing in late November, it seems that Ned went to work in Bergtheil's London household. Ned "conducted himself in every way to the satisfaction of his new master."[140] However, on 1 January 1860, a newspaper reported that Ned had again gone missing.[141] Given Bergtheil was "resident in London, but intends soon to return to the colony," and Ned's well-established determination not to return, it's likely that the same motive drove Ned's final departure as his previous ones.[142] Bergtheil once stated that Ned was "utterly at a loss to understand" his position, but it seems that Ned understood quite clearly that his forcible return to Natal was likely.[143] A few days after he left, Ned's life had a tragic end. He was struck and killed by a train.

The *Anti-Slavery Reporter* described that the train "pounded [Ned] to atoms."[144] And other reports were similarly visceral.[145] Highly insensitive descriptions of Ned's tragic killing were yet another way he was made a spectacle, and news of his death was widely printed. His death was portrayed as an inevitability, arising from "his aversion to confinement and restraint" that "prompted him to resume his wild and wandering habits of life," and an

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[139] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 1859.
[140] *Weekly Dispatch* [London], 1 Jan. 1860. See also A.S.S. Minute Book (III), Jan. 1860, MSS Brit. Emp., s. 20, E2, 8, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.
[141] *Reynolds's Newspaper* [London], 1 January 1860.
[142] "Monthly Summary," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, vol. 8, issue 2 (February, 1860).
[143] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 1859.
[144] "Monthly Summary," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter,* vol. 8, issue 2 (February, 1860).
[145] *Bell's Weekly Messenger* [London], 7 January 1860.

unfortunate outcome of "his ignorance of the perils to which he was exposed in the vicinity of a railroad."[146] Ned's death was used to suggest his non-belonging – that being from Africa, Ned was destined not to fit into rapidly industrialising Britain.

The record of "Ned's" life leaves unanswerable questions. It is impossible to say how he experienced his departure from the Zulu Kingdom, his life in Natal, and how much choice he had in making the trip to England. Nor is it conclusive how he viewed his relationship with the Handleys, or why he left the household, and the other homes and households he was placed in. We are left to speculate on how Ned experienced his time in the woods of the Sheffield and London regions. His response to crowds that gathered to view him and pursue him. His encounters with the fellow inhabitants of the Strangers' Home and his wanderings around West India Dock Road. His feelings when incarcerated in Eckington, Clerkenwell, Newgate. Who missed him and who he missed as he travelled far from "home." Different readings of the record of his time in Britain could arguably frame Ned as an eager traveller to Britain who seized his opportunities to attempt to make a life for himself elsewhere, or a traumatised man experiencing coerced employment and forced movement compelled to run by fear or desperation. Such is the colonial archive. But Ned's life and the story that's left behind is important, and the process of speculation underscores the depth and complexity of experience that is lost in the coverage of his case and others like it.

Ned's case speaks to questions about the lives and relationships of people of colour in British provincial areas. As we have discussed in regard to Ned's interactions with locals in the Sheffield area, these relationships were inconsistent suggesting interest and some support, but also caution, hostility and unfamiliarity. Admittedly, Ned had only been in Britain a short time. However, it is striking how much he is seen as belonging to Africa, rather than to Britain. He is described using racialised African epithets and the solution to the quandary he posed and the discomfort he provoked in humanitarians and others seemed to be to "return" him, expressly against his will, to African shores.

Examining Ned's life helps us understand more about British attitudes towards Black arrivals to Britain in this crucial mid-nineteenth century period, not least the shifts we have tracked from paternalism, fascination, to frustration, rejection, removal. His case provides evidence as to how processes of racialisation were worked out on the ground. The twists and turns of

[146] "Monthly Summary," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, vol. 8, issue 2 (February, 1860); *The Daily Telegraph* [London], 29 December 1859.

Ned's story suggests this was a multi-directional process of negotiation, occurring with multiple actors and different forms and practices of representation. Related to this are ideas about "street citizenship" – how belonging was negotiated by individuals outside the formal processes of state bureaucracy. Isaac Land has shown how in Georgian London, "the Black Poor" resisted overseas "resettlement" projects, and adopted numerous strategies to assert their belonging (and Britishness). Ned participated in the debate over his future, making abundantly clear his determination not to return to Natal and (allegedly) his desire to live and work in England. But in this case, Ned's attempts to assert his belonging by working in the metropole, were resoundingly rebuffed, stressing how difficult it was for individuals to "contest and reshape society's assumptions about who people are and who belongs where."[147]

All this raises questions both about how white British people saw people of colour and how attitudes towards people of colour helped white Britons see themselves. Ideas about refugees, even when that term is not explicitly used, operate as pivots where these forms of identity are negotiated. As we noted above, Shaw has argued that race was not a key determinant of an ability to fit or deviate from the category of the "good refugee" arguing that "the refugee could be European or African, so long as the persecuted exemplified British ideals."[148] What we would add to this is that although a good refugee could indeed be African, if they were, the discourse of enslavement was central to the framing of their plight. Flight from conflict within Africa itself, which was what Ned fled to Natal from in the first instance, was not validated in the same way. In Ned's case as soon as the enslavement narrative was refuted, his claims were significantly weakened. One of the consequences of this is that it reinforced ideas that the agency, even when negative, was invested in Europeans and that enslavement continued to operate as a powerful way in which Africans were represented long past abolition. While the wide public interest and involvement in Ned's case could reflect, in part, popular enthusiasm for anti-slavery and a desire to "save" Ned, it also reflected a fascination with Ned's presence as an African man specifically. Evidently, perceptions of Ned's "race" were also central in commentators determining his very capacity to exemplify "British ideals" and live in this country. Ned's relationship to all this is complex but it seems that in October 1859 his possible enslavement situated him within the framework of the "good refugee". But, by late November, having refused to comply with the aspirations of his humanitarian

[147] Land, "Bread and Arsenic," 104.
[148] Shaw, "The British, Persecuted Foreigners and the Emergence of the Refugee Category."

"saviours," both by it becoming believed that he had not been enslaved, and by running away and allegedly stealing, he no longer fitted this narrative.

In Ned's case there was no "happy ending." He refused to perform victimhood according to the cultural script demanded, and his persecution similarly did not fit the mould of enslavement in the way in which it was needed to secure him belonging in Britain. In the discourses around Ned's existence, some of the shifts around racialization and status can be seen as occurring within representations of the same person, in the space of a few months. The refusal to conform to a passive victimhood paved the way for exclusion, rejection and tragedy.