

## Chapter 11

# The Pacific as rhizome: the case of Sir Henry Alexander Wickham, planter, and his transnational plants

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Isn't there in the East, notably in Oceania, a kind of rhizomatic<sup>1</sup> model that contrasts in every respect with the Western model of the tree?

— Deleuze & Guattari 1983<sup>2</sup>

Sir Henry Alexander Wickham (1846–1928), pioneer planter and adventurer, is remembered for his role in the founding of the hugely lucrative imperial British rubber industry.<sup>3</sup> He was knighted in 1920 for his services 44 years earlier, when he collected and took 70,000 seeds of the Pará rubber tree, *Hevea brasiliensis*, out of the Amazon rainforest and across the world by boat to deliver to the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew. Although fewer than 4000 of the 70,000 seeds germinated, those 4000 were enough to become the basis of thriving plantations in the British colonies, and the eventual result some decades later was of enormous economic benefit to Britain. At that time, the demand from the emergent American motor-car industry for rubber—for tyres in particular—was increasing exponentially and the market for plantation rubber was assured.<sup>4</sup> Previously, the rubber for European and American industry had to be bought from South America, where it was not in plantations but 'hunted' in the wild, supplied and sold at prices and with availability not under the control of Britain or the United States. After the successful British colonial planting of the stock of Kew seedlings in Ceylon and Malaya, there were, by the time of Wickham's death in 1928, 80 million rubber trees growing in British territories where none had grown before.

Wickham's name is most associated with rubber—'my rubber', as he would fondly refer to *Hevea brasiliensis*. In his long career, however, he promoted and grew many other plants, developing firm ideas for their best cultivation and inventing machinery for processing. He also promoted useful economic plants for other planters to grow, plants he claimed to have 'discovered' during his time in America, and specimens of which he periodically sent to Kew. He hoped that Kew would propagate and distribute these economic plants to planters (exclusively of British countries and dependencies) via its network of botanical

gardens. In his own planting years, he grew a great range of plants himself in diverse places. In Santarem on the Amazon River, he planted sugar, tobacco, manioc and other crops. In North Queensland, he tried his luck for 10 years with tobacco and coffee. Later, in British Honduras (now Belize), he grew bananas, cacao, oranges, lemons and mangoes, while trying to establish a small number of *Castilloa* rubber trees. In New Guinea, at the age of nearly fifty, he took out a 25-year lease on the Conflict Islands east of Samarai. He tried to develop sponge growing and the scientific cultivation of pearl oysters, and a plantation of coconuts for copra. A decade later, on yet another lease, in Mombiri, in north-eastern Papua, he tried for the first time in his career to grow *Hevea brasiliensis*, planting his trees along the lines he had long been advocating, with the trees spaced much more widely than in the Malayan plantations.

Amid all this variety of activity and location, however, the part of his life that has attracted attention is only the South American phase with rubber—a success story with high dramatic appeal, the tale of a ‘seed snatch’. Wickham first exploited the popular appeal of this story in a book he wrote and illustrated himself. *On the Plantation, Cultivation, and Curing of Para Indian Rubber*<sup>5</sup> narrates the story of a race against time, begun in February 1876, when he started to collect the *Hevea* trees’ just-ripening seeds in the wild and, at the same time, had to find a means to transport these oily seeds, which, even if he could gather enough in the time available, would soon grow rancid or dry out on the long boat journey to England. Wickham gave an account of smuggling and dodging the Brazilian customs service, though in fact there was no Brazilian regulation to prevent the exportation of seed. He also played up the element of chance, although the ship *Amazonas* was really on a scheduled voyage to Liverpool when Wickham commissioned it in the name of His Majesty’s Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew. In Wickham’s story, a threatening Brazilian gunboat added a further element of danger.<sup>6</sup>

Some of this story was used as movie material first in a classic 1938 German film *Kautschuk*, which was filmed partly in South America. In one scene, Wickham wrestles an anaconda. Today, the South American adventure is again being proposed for a film. Joe Jackson, author of a 2008 biography of Wickham, is advertising his story, *The Thief at the End of the World*, on a web site of film properties. It is a larger-than-life tale of bio-piracy:

A riveting narrative of the true story of Henry Wickham, a reckless Victorian adventurer who went deep into the malaria-filled jungles of the Amazon and risked disease, death, and the loss of his entire family to grow rich in that contemporary El Dorado, the rubber trade. He failed, but in his despair agreed with the powers in London to raid the Amazon’s most treasured possession—its supply of *Hevea brasiliensis*, the valued source of ‘India-rubber’ which grew nowhere else in the world. His

unlikely success of smuggling 70,000 seeds to London changed the world economy, bankrupting Brazil, handing the world monopoly in rubber to the British Empire, and turning the US against the UK just as the American automobile revolution envisioned a world dominion of its own.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 11.1: Henry Alexander Wickham.**



[http://www.bouncing-balls.com/serendipity/images/photo\\_gallery/henry\\_wickham.jpg](http://www.bouncing-balls.com/serendipity/images/photo_gallery/henry_wickham.jpg)

In fact, towards the end of Wickham's life, it was a member of the Rubber Manufacturers Association of America who sought to secure him an American pension, and on Wickham's eightieth birthday, the American founder and manager of the US rubber plantations in Sumatra and Malaya sent him £5000, accompanied by a further £1000 contributed by the American oil kings.<sup>8</sup>

When Wickham died, his obituary in the *Times* eulogised him as ‘every inch the pioneer, broad-shouldered and heavily-built with an extraordinarily long wavy moustache, his physical strength...as great as his resolution’.<sup>9</sup> The entry in the current British *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* concludes that ‘[h]is shortcomings aside, he remains a paradigm of the nineteenth-century British adventurer and individualist’.<sup>10</sup> He is a representative figure at once typical and outstanding. The largely forgotten larger story of Henry Wickham, however, reveals the chronological and spatial deficiencies of a success-driven narrative. If his failed plant ventures are included rather than set aside, his activities are of more considerable historical interest. The failures are typical of the times too, but what is special about Wickham is the grand scale for a single individual and the vigorous proliferation of his ventures. In nationality, he was a proud citizen of empire rather than a Briton simply, and he was at different times an equally strong proponent of British investment in Brazil and in New Guinea, which he regarded as a country of great promise. Though he farmed for more than 35 years, he was not an emigrant-settler. Though he farmed in four different countries, he was not an itinerant contract worker. Transnational comparisons from the point of view of a settler-farmer are striking when focused by this single-minded man’s activities as planter and plant entrepreneur in widely diverse global locations. His experiences usefully show that problems of labour and the availability of capital investment or land concessions had common extra-national elements, sometimes simultaneously, in diverse parts of the late nineteenth-century world. As for the plants themselves, the lucrative successes of certain major British plant transfers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—of tea, anti-malarial cinchona, as well as rubber—are well known. Extrapolating from Wickham’s various endeavours, it becomes clear that a fairer representation of the activities of imperial transfers would include many attempts that did not meet with success. His various failed attempts are graphic reminders of how the fate of a plant transfer is determined by much more than just agricultural conditions. Indeed, timing and chronology in Wickham’s theatre of activity—the ‘New-New World’ of the nineteenth-century Pacific—become subjects for reconsideration. Here is a tale that shows coincidences that are not entirely matters of chance, initiatives that come just before the time is ripe and a life that crosses imperial and commercial modes of plant transfers.

One striking feature of Wickham’s life, if considered as a whole, is how extremely ‘transnational’ his activities were.<sup>11</sup> The historian of New Guinea plantations, D. C. Lewis, was surprised to find a figure as noteworthy as Wickham appear in New Guinea in 1896, ‘almost as if from nowhere’.<sup>12</sup> This rhizome-like behaviour of popping up in a new location, after ‘underground’ undetected transits, was typical of the man. In Wickham’s case, the emergences were in globally separate locations, and the pathways were cross-oceanic voyages. He

was in this way a case comparable with the London Missionary Society missionary John Williams in Polynesia: 'one of those nineteenth century figures who kept turning up on the edges of the world's maps.'<sup>13</sup> Williams, in an exemplary instance of the ethos of self-help celebrated in Samuel Smiles' 1859 book, hand-built his own boat, *The Messenger of Peace*, even manufacturing the smith's bellows, to take the gospel to every island along a 2000-mile (3200-kilometre) line in the Polynesian South Pacific. Williams built churches in Rarotonga (one of the Cook Islands) and in the Samoan Islands, reaching finally as far as the New Hebrides, where he was killed. In the latter part of the century, Henry Wickham pursued his secular form of idealism with imperial plant transfers across larger oceanic distances. Like Williams, Wickham wrote books to publicise his activities, and made frequent trips back to London to raise investment capital for his enterprises. The irony of such a mobile life for a planter underscores an important fact about the Pacific area at this stage. At a time when the voyages Wickham was making by ship lasted months in duration, the far-flung locations of Brazil, Queensland, British Honduras and New Guinea were nonetheless unusually integrated—all available to a planter such as Wickham. Each of these places offered opportunities and incentives in the form of land concessions to planters and cheap labour, and they were connected as a global area through new commerce-enabling technologies such as coal-powered shipping and underwater telegraph cables, as well as through international investment.

Henry Wickham does not figure in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, despite his more than 25 years in Queensland and New Guinea. The period spent in New Guinea, from 1895 to 1911, covered the time when Eastern New Guinea became an Australian colony, after very public confrontations of imperial and colonial authority. Queensland claimed New Guinea in 1883 in the name of Queen Victoria; the British Government then rejected the claim. Germany capitalised on the spat and 'Kaiser-Wilhelmsland' was annexed in the north-east. In response, Britain reversed its decision and New Guinea was made a protectorate in 1884. In 1906, administration of New Guinea was transferred to Australia. As a result, it was a governor answerable to Australia, Sir William Macgregor, who approved Wickham's application for a lease of the Conflict Islands Group, visiting the next year and reporting favourably on the progress with sponge farming and the planting of thousands of coconut trees. The omission of Wickham from the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* is therefore revealing of the conditions for becoming part of the national biographical record. This paradigm of a British adventurer is, from a historical point of view in Australia, a non-entity. Between 1877 and 1886, however, after delivering the rubber seeds to Kew, Wickham was an Australian colonial planter near the lower Herbert River in North Queensland, his entrepreneurial drive—evident in his exercises in public self-promotion and in his attempts to draw investment for his big-scale projects—undiminished. He presented himself in the press as a tobacco expert,

and published a pamphlet on tobacco growing and curing through the Government Stationers Office. He became a member of the Queensland Acclimatisation Society, a chief source of new plants for farmers, and in one of his first letters to them he claimed to be successfully growing the much sought-after Liberian coffee. This was a modestly presented case of a planter's boast, since at this time the Acclimatisation Society was eagerly trying to obtain seedlings and seeds of the coffee from Kew Gardens, but they were not surviving the voyage out to Australia.<sup>14</sup> Finally, after his tobacco plantation failed, Wickham, far from being cowed by the failure, sold the property for subdivisions for a new town that never eventuated.<sup>15</sup> In the years from 1895 to 1912 spent in eastern New Guinea, at a time when it was effectively being administered from Australia, Wickham pursued even larger, diverse planting, trading and investment schemes, while challenging certain legalities of his lease. He regarded New Guinea as a land of great promise for the cultivation of rubber, sugar cane, tobacco, cotton and other produce, a country that would certainly reward large-scale British investment.

Though not a personality to go unnoticed at the time, Wickham's South Seas phase is now mostly forgotten. At the time, his way of suddenly emerging in different locations worked to his advantage, contributing to his success in promoting his confident image of himself, his plant discoveries, his ideas for cultivation and his manufacturing inventions—a confidence little supported by reality. For example, the tobacco 'expertise' he claimed when he arrived in Queensland was based on his few years' struggles to establish a plantation at Santarem on the Amazon. In his first book, *Rough Notes on a Journey Through the Wilderness from Trinidad to Para, Brazil, by Way of the Great Cataracts of the Orinoco, Atabapo and Rio Negro*, he had 'come to the conclusion that the valley of the Amazon is the great and best field for any of my countrymen who have energy and a spirit of enterprise as well as a desire for independence'.<sup>16</sup> By the time Kew approached him about collecting the rubber seeds, however, this interruption to his farming was a saving windfall and he never returned to his South American plantation after delivering the seeds. Twenty years later, when he was trying to raise money for his schemes in the Conflict Islands, he estimated profits for the pearl shell and copra alone as being £9400 in the first year, rising to £26,100 in the third year. He justified his optimism to prospective investors by claiming that the ideal conditions for mother-of-pearl production in the Conflicts were unparalleled in the world—a belief that an associate who knew him well described as 'nonsense. It is not a locality where anyone would, or could, work MOP [mother-of-pearl] for the reason that the tides or currents are too strong there; and what few shells are to be found are very inferior'.<sup>17</sup> At the time of his knighthood, Wickham was advisor to a syndicate planting in Malaya. Shareholders, who knew him only as father of the rubber industry, were assured by the Arghan Company that 'there is no other man living with

whom we would have embarked our reputation and capital', a person with 'simply amazing' knowledge of tropical agriculture and forestry. Elsewhere, others had formed opposite assessments of Wickham's abilities. Sir Henry Ridley, director of the Singapore Botanical Gardens and the person who, more than any other, had persuaded farmers to develop rubber plantations in Malaya, said:

I looked on him as a failed planter who was lucky in that for merely traveling home with a lot of seeds had received a knighthood and enough money to live comfortably in his old age...He ordered natives to bring him in the seeds and to pack them in crates and put them on board ship. One cannot help feeling he was jolly well paid for a little job. He was no agriculturalist. He knew nothing about rubber...As for his abilities in planting I should say he had none.<sup>18</sup>

When a chief value in recovering the life of Henry Wickham is to bring into single focus diverse and far-reaching dynamics of plant economics in the trans-Pacific area, Wickham's failed enterprises are of importance. One venture that was typical of the long time scales involved, the high expectations and the disappointing results obtained, was with another of the South American trees he had promoted to Kew at the same time as the *Hevea*. This was the timber tree *Piqui-á*, whose nuts produced an oil that could provide an alternative in times of butter shortage. The high aim in this case was to introduce a new food staple. More than 40 years after his original proposal, Wickham succeeded in having *Piqui-á* planted, on Birkhall Estate in Kedah. By the time of his death, the *Piqui-á* trees had reached a height of 12 metres and were producing abundant fruits. The nuts produced by the Malayan trees did not, however, have the anticipated fat yields, and the cost of preparation proved very high. The Irai Company growing the *Piqui-á* was wound up in 1929.<sup>19</sup>

Even to divide Wickham's enterprises into successes or failures in a clear-cut way is, however, misleading. In a time of great ferment of investments in new locations, new crops and new technologies, Wickham was trying projects that might have succeeded if the location, or date, or his personality had been a bit different. For example, when, in closing up his Queensland enterprise, Wickham tried to sell his plantation for a new town site, all the buyers of his Mount Maragan property were absentee landlords, and no town eventuated, though in an apparently identical case, the nearby town of Halifax, initiated in the same way from scratch through the sale of land subdivisions, was successfully started in the same year.<sup>20</sup> In New Guinea, there was another property mishap. In 1895, the Governor of British New Guinea, Sir William Macgregor, had granted Wickham the lease of the Conflict Group for 25 years, with a clause inserted in the lease instrument that reserved for the lessee the option to purchase the freehold title during the period of the lease. Unluckily for Wickham, however, under the 1905 *Papua Act*, crown lands could now be granted on leasehold

tenure only, and Wickham failed in his several applications for the freehold purchase of the Conflict Islands. In 1920, however, the freehold title was granted to Anglo-Papuan Plantations Limited. In the Conflicts, Wickham was ahead of his time in adding to the usual trade items sea sponges, which he was the first to treat and export. He was even more strikingly ahead of his time when, in 1899, he invited an expert to come to see whether pearl culturing might be viable in the Conflict Islands lagoon.<sup>21</sup> These were very early experimental days in the cultured-pearl industry: William Saville Kent, the most eminent naturalist of the period, at this time Commissioner of Fisheries in Western Australia, developed his pearl-sac theory and produced the first genuine spherical cultured pearl in the 1890s, and formed a company to culture pearls at Somerset in the Torres Strait in 1906. In 1904, Japanese cultured-pearl researchers patented the Mise-Nishikawa Method. Wickham's plans for cultured pearls were therefore very far-sighted. This has, however, to be put cheek-by-jowl with clear errors of judgment, stemming from an excess of optimism common in his circles and his time that could readily lead to loss of money—especially other people's money—on a large scale.

If one of Wickham's plants could be taken as an emblem for the life and times of this planter, that plant would not be the *Hevea* rubber tree but one of the other American plants he promoted: the arghan.

**Figure 11.2: (Andre) C. H. Wright, bromeliaceae *Bromelia magdalenae*, 1923.**



Kew Centre for Economic Botany.

The enterprise with arghan was a latter-day commercial, stock market-funded variant of the earlier, scientific-economic, imperial, Kew-coordinated transfers of South American trees such as *Hevea brasiliensis* and, earlier, the anti-malarial drug producer, cinchona. While in British Honduras, Wickham had become interested in a plant that produced silky fibre of exceptional strength, used by indigenous peoples for rope, fishing nets and lines, bags, fans, sandals, sewing thread and strings for musical instruments. Wickham was convinced of the commercial potential of this fibre for British industry. Nothing came of his suggestion to transfer it until some decades later, when in 1919 a company was floated on the London stock market to develop the plant, newly renamed as arghan. At this time, American manufacturers were increasingly taking up cotton supplies and problems in Russia were causing a 70 per cent shortage in flax. Speculators therefore predicted that British manufacturers would gladly prefer the new fibre of the mystery plant arghan for their finest products. Trials on arghan had shown it to have remarkable salt-resisting power and 'tensile strength three times that of silk, and weight for weight as strong as steel'.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, arghan could apparently be grown in British colonies and dependencies by companies exclusively British owned.

In 1919, the newly incorporated Arghan Company, advised by seventy-three-year-old Wickham, sent an expedition to British Honduras. After 15 months of labour, the plants were transported to the Federated Malay States. By 1922, the company director reported to shareholders that he had secured a valuable land concession of 30,000 acres (12,000 hectares) free of all premium, and there were plans for further plantations in India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). He told the extraordinary general meeting—the purpose of which was to increase the capital of the company to £100,000—that no less a figure than the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Winston Churchill, had communicated his support for the company by telegraph to the Governor of Ceylon.<sup>23</sup>

The story of arghan presented to the public during the heady days when it was being 'boomed' in the media had melodramatic elements reminiscent of the story of Wickham and *Hevea brasiliensis*. It was a story fit for the optimistic large-scale commercial dreams of the times. One 1922 newspaper columnist even saw film potential in the arghan story:

Met a man yesterday who was telling me things about this new fibre 'arghan,' which seemed to me like extracts from a thrilling American film. It seems that one of our Empire builders found the plant abroad, and was struck with the strength of the fibre of the leaves. He gathered every plant he could find and had the lot transferred to British territory in Malaya. Most of the plants died, but several survivors found their new surroundings so agreeable that they passed the convalescent stage and formed the beginning of this new Empire product. The plants are

still grown in considerable secrecy, and foreign countries are very anxious to obtain specimens by various means. Representatives of one great nation have tried to get specimens of the plant, but have been suavely refused, while another interested country has tried to obtain specimens and information by less straightforward methods. Apparently 'arghan' is being as carefully guarded as an Oriental potentate's treasures, or as a child millionaire in danger of abduction. Both similes, I suppose, are near the mark.<sup>24</sup>

Off the public stage, too, there were elements of high drama in plenty. The chairman of the Arghan Company was himself a centre of controversy. The credibility of this Jewish financier and businessman, Abraham Montefiore (previously Abraham Rosenthal, who had taken his wife's name), was much questioned by the various government officials and botanists discussing the company's applications for land in the Federated Malay States and in British North Borneo, as well as the merits of the mystery plant itself. Was the venture speculative or honest? Was Montefiore himself 'a slippery Jew', attempting a gigantic stock-selling swindle? Was the Arghan Company merely a promotion company, wanting 'to get hold of a large concession which they can hawk round for sale'? And what relation, if any, was the Arghan Company to Eastern Cultivation Limited, operating from the same London Pinner's Hall address, but making separate bids for land in Malaya to cultivate argan? Was Montefiore dishonest and conniving, or just venial but infuriating? He was perhaps rather an 'irrepressible optimist', impossible to deal with in a business-like way, who undermined his colleagues' confidence to such an extent that a committee of shareholders formed in December 1923 to investigate the company's affairs recommended the formation of a new board.<sup>25</sup>

The outcome of the argan story was the opposite to that of the rubber transfer: the venture came to nothing. The argan plants did not thrive in their new locations in Malaya and no satisfactory machine was invented that could decorticate the leaves economically. As the company collapsed with the loss of its entire capital in 1924, some months after Montefiore died,<sup>26</sup> the plants in the field were dead, the European estate manager and his assistants in Malaya had been left for months without their salaries and the Chinese labour force had to be taken off by the local authorities and fed from the police station in Kuala Lipis.<sup>27</sup>

The management of argan's transfer was poor, but even if it had been well administered, even if the plants had flourished in the Malay plantations and even if the machinery had been developed to mechanise the fibre's extraction, it probably could not have become the fibre equivalent of Pará rubber on the London market. There was no problem with the quality of the fibre itself, which was genuinely extraordinary. According to the report of the two scientists,

Messrs Cross and Bevan, commissioned by the Federated Malay States Government to conduct thorough tests: '[O]f all the innumerable fibres submitted to us during our long professional practice, of potential industrial importance, Arghan stands out pre-eminent.'<sup>28</sup> The timing, however, was against it. The development of human-made textiles, after centuries of experiment, made swift strides under pressure of pre-wartime shortages of natural fibre. Soon the market had no need of another natural fibre such as arghan. In a striking example of how closely one development could impinge on another, the same Cross and Bevan who conducted the tests on arghan were also the discoverers and patentors of the two great new processes for making artificial fibre: the viscose process, patented in 1892, and the cellulose acetate process, patented in 1894.

Furthermore, as the botanical identity of arghan was investigated, it was found that, though new to British investment, and at first not properly distinguished botanically from other plants in the same family, the plant newly named 'arghan' was far from being a plant 'discovered and pioneered' by Henry Wickham. It was in fact a South American plant known as pita or ixtle, whose fibre had been known and sold in Europe since at least the 1800s. Because of its extreme salt-resistant powers, it had been used for rope for rigging sailing ships crossing the Atlantic.<sup>29</sup> 'Arghan' was an even newer name for the plant identified rather belatedly by botanical classification in the nineteenth century as *Aechmea* (or *Bromelia*) *magdalenae*. It is a larger-than-life member of the pineapple family, the bromeliaceae. It has leaves up to 2.5 metres long. As the plant is a rhizome reproducing from suckers rather than seeds, the strange result is that it sometimes grows in large mono-specific clusters, along streams, in swampy areas and on hillsides in lowland tropical rainforests from Mexico to Ecuador. These large clusters were called 'pitales' (plantations), an anachronistic marvel of nature imitating European civilisation's horticultural art of plantations.<sup>30</sup> Already with its own history of trans-Atlantic travel as rope on ships, and with its familial relationship to a more famous earlier traveller, the pineapple (brought to Europe from the West Indies by Columbus in 1493), *Aechmea magdalenae* failed to make its early twentieth-century Wickham-prompted transit to Malaya.

With arghan/pita, as with Henry Wickham, a biography with wide extra-national geographical range and chronological elasticity works best. And, as an image for Wickham's larger-than-life activities, large-scale ambitions and failures, and his sudden personal emergences in different parts of the British tropical empire, the rhizome *Aechmea magdalenae* is a good choice.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I gratefully acknowledge the generous help of Dr Robert Cribb, Department of Asia-Pacific History, The Australian National University; Dr John Loadman, author of *Tears of the Tree* (2005, Oxford University Press, Oxford); and Dr Mark Nesbitt, Centre for Economic Botany, Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew.

A familiar example of a rhizome is the potato. Its pathway of growth is via a horizontal stem that lies flat underground, emitting adventitious roots at intervals below and leaves above ground or buds that develop into new plants. The visible parts of a rhizome are not discreet plants, but are interconnected underground.

<sup>2</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix 1983, 'Rhizome', *On the Line*, Translated by John Johnston, Semiotext(e), New York.

<sup>3</sup> The fullest source of information about Wickham's life is a set of articles by Lane, Edward V. 1953, 'Sir Henry Wickham: British pioneer. A brief summary of the life story of the British pioneer including an account of the inception of plantation rubber', *Rubber Age*, August, pp. 649–56; and 1953–54, 'The life and work of Henry Wickham', *The India-Rubber Journal*, December 1953 – January 1954, I — 'Ancestry and early years', II — 'A journey through the wilderness', III — 'Santarem', IV — 'Kew', V — 'Pioneering in North Queensland', VI — 'Pioneering in British Honduras', VII — 'The Conflict Islands and New Guinea', VIII — 'Piqui-á and arghan', IX — 'The closing years'.

<sup>4</sup> In 1907, Henry Ford introduced the assembly line into the manufacture of cars; sales rose from 44,000 in 1907 to 65,000 in 1908 and to 187,000 in 1910.

<sup>5</sup> Wickham, Henry 1908, *On the Plantation, Cultivation, and Curing of Para Indian Rubber*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd, London.

<sup>6</sup> Lane, 'Life and work of Henry Wickham', III — 'Santarem', p. 20. See also Loadman, John 2005, *Tears of the Tree*, Oxford University Press, Oxford; and 'Sir Henry Alexander Wickham', available from [http://www.bouncing-balls.com/timeline/people/nr\\_wickham1.htm](http://www.bouncing-balls.com/timeline/people/nr_wickham1.htm) (accessed 20 August 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Jackson, Joe 2008, *The Thief at the End of the World: Rubber, power, and the seeds of empire*, Viking, New York. For film rights, see <http://www.lukeman.com/film--rights--list.htm> (accessed 20 August 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Quincy Tucker's commentary on Lane, 'Sir Henry Wickham: British pioneer', p. 653. See also a 1928 American journal's obituary notice cited by Lane.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in entry on Sir Henry Alexander Wickham in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (electronic publication), Oxford University Press, 2004–06.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> I am using 'transnational' loosely here, since while Brazil was independent in 1822, Australia was pre-national during Wickham's years there, and New Guinea (independent in 1974) and British Honduras/Belize (independent in 1981) were not even pre-national.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis, D. C. 1996, 'The plantation dream: developing British New Guinea and Papua 1884–1942', *The Journal of Pacific History*, Canberra, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> Daws, Gavin 1980, *A Dream of Islands: Voyages of self-discovery in the South Seas*, W. W. Norton & Co., New York, p. 45.

<sup>14</sup> Queensland Acclimatisation Society Records, Reports of monthly meetings 1876–78, Heritage Collections, State Library of Queensland. The Liberian coffee plants were from 175 seedlings presented to Wickham by Kew in a Wardian case for their sea journey. See Lane, 'Life and work of Henry Wickham', V — 'Pioneering in North Queensland', p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> Barrie, Douglas R. 2003, *Minding My Business: The history of Bemerside and the lower Herbert River district of North Queensland Australia*, S. & D. Barrie, Brisbane, pp. 133–5.

<sup>16</sup> Wickham, H. A. 1872, *Rough Notes...*, W. H. J. Carter, London, cited in Loadman, *Tears of the Tree*, p. 86.

<sup>17</sup> Lane, 'The life and work of Henry Wickham', VII — 'The Conflict Islands and New Guinea', p. 9. Wickham did not get the additional £20,000 capital he sought from London investors to develop the conflicts, to build a steamer for cargo and passengers and a smaller steamer for collecting produce from neighbouring islands, and to hire 100 native workers and European overseers, clerical staff, sailors and scientific experts. He had to settle for selling his enterprise and remaining on as manager until the owners paid him to keep away from the islands.

<sup>18</sup> Lane, 'Life and work of Henry Wickham', IX — 'The closing years', pp. 7–8.

<sup>19</sup> Lane, 'Life and work of Henry Wickham', VIII — 'Piqui-á and arghan', p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Barrie, *Minding My Business*, p. 135.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, *The Plantation Dream*, p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> Arghan Company Limited, Report of Extraordinary General Meeting, 3 April 1922.

<sup>23</sup> Arghan Company Report.

<sup>24</sup> Unidentified newspaper clipping, 22 October 1922, File on arghan fibre, UK National Archives (hereafter UKNA). This 1919–26 archive (CO874/950) is not listed in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Wickham. For secrecy, see Wickham, *On the Plantation, Cultivation, and Curing of Para Indian Rubber*, quoted in Lane, 'Life and Work of Henry Wickham', IX — 'Closing years', p. 5; for identification, see *Bulletin of the Imperial Institute* XVI (1918) and XVIII (1920); Dawe, M. T. 1920–21, *Tropical Life*, December 1920 – January 1921; and Stockdale, F. A. 1923, 'Fibres: Colombian pita', *The Tropical Agriculturist*, vol. LX, pp. 337–45.

<sup>25</sup> UKNA.

<sup>26</sup> 'Wills and Bequests', *The Times* (London), 12 May 1924, p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> Clipping from the *Truth* newspaper, 9 April 1924, UKNA.

<sup>28</sup> Lane, 'Life and Work of Henry Wickham', VIII — 'Piqui-á and arghan', p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> Tickin, Tamara 2002, 'The history of *ixtle* in Mexico', *Economic Botany*, vol. 56, no. 1, p. 92.

<sup>30</sup> Dawe, cited in Stockdale, 'Fibres: Colombian pita', p. 337.