

home for Mena de Lisle Phillipps prompted Weld to begin purchasing land some thirty miles north of Christchurch, near present-day Amberley. Appropriately, the one painting of Brackenfield in the Scrope/Weld collection is of the grounds of this 550 acre estate. For although the 16-roomed kauri mansion was a charming and comfortable residence for the Welds, their many visitors and their rapidly expanding family, it was the gardens which were their pride and joy. Trees, shrubs and flower gardens were planted in park-like proportions, English deer and game birds imported and liberated by this first President of the Canterbury Acclimatisation Society. Nor was such activity merely a passing phase. As Governor of Western Australia 1869–74, Weld made Government House grounds into an acclimatisation nursery. With an eye to the future, he set aside reserves for public recreation grounds. Now a much appreciated sanctuary in the heart of urban Perth, King's Park stands as a fitting tribute to that foresight.

Although there are no watercolours extant from the mid-1860s, Weld did a great deal of painting at Brackenfield in 1866, as he recovered his health following his resignation from the premiership in October 1865. His eleven months in office had not been easy. His policy of self-reliance in defence, quixotic in the extreme as far as Aucklanders were concerned, had been jeopardised by financial problems and by the clashes between Governor Grey and General Duncan Cameron. Some colleagues had proved fractious; opponents were too powerful; home authorities would make no more concessions about the deployment or payment of the imperial troops. Weld's resignation marked the end of a political involvement which had begun with his membership of the Wellington Settlers Constitutional Association in 1848. Yet he had never really enjoyed political life. Only a strong sense of duty and a desire to ensure that there was no discrimination against Catholics had kept him involved. Now, forbidden by his doctor even to attend political meetings addressed by others, Weld found much solace and pleasure in sketching and reading. He had not lost his political awareness though. As his long-time friend Charles Christopher Bowen noted after one visit: 'He is like the old wk-horse, & (contrary to orders) pricks up his ears at the sound of the trumpet'.³ Weld himself was relatively philosophical about his departure from office: 'If God wanted my services, he would not have turned me out to grass, I suppose'.

With the advance of planned colonisation into Canterbury in the early 1850s, colonists in the Nelson-Marlborough region had made considerable efforts to find suitable routes by which stock could be overlanded from their pastoral regions south to the Plains. Weld was actively involved in this search; his expedition of 1855 was