

‘This land of Barbarians’: missions and protectorates begin

Records from the Wellington Valley mission began with a death. In the spring of 1832, missionary William Watson wrote of his journey from Sydney to the Church Missionary Society station about 100 kilometres north-west of Bathurst. Watson, an energetic and cranky Yorkshireman, had worked as a shopkeeper and schoolteacher before moving to the colonies; for him, as for many of his contemporaries, missionary work meant an elevation through the ranks of the lower middle classes. He was accompanied in his journey by a ten-year-old Indigenous boy called Billy Black, who had been taken from the Wiradjuri country of Bathurst to Sydney by a Major McPherson. McPherson passed him on to the Watson household, where he became close to William and Ann Watson, learned to pray, and showed symptoms of the respiratory illness that would eventually kill him. According to Watson, Billy tolerated cruel treatment from white neighbours, who took his sickness for laziness and ‘repeatedly said that a horsewhip was the best medicine for him.’ He died quietly one night during the journey, and the missionaries wrapped him in a sheet of bark and buried him beside the bank of the Fish River. Watson wrote with mingled satisfaction and grief:

When his happy spirit had left the cumbrous clod behind though I felt assured of his felicity I could not forbear weeping and sorrowing exceedingly, for I loved him as a Brother or as a Son and it was with the greatest difficult[y] imaginable that I got through the funeral service over him. The ways of God are mysterious but I am persuaded always in wisdom and mercy. O that Billy Black may be the forerunner of very many of the Aborigines of New Holland to the realms of light.¹

This early tragedy might seem symbolic or prophetic, given the collapse of Wellington Valley a decade later and subsequent assessments of it as a dismal failure. What should also be considered, however, are the ways in which it was thought symbolic and prophetic at the time. Watson’s earliest writings show the presence of death, loss and grief, as well as the reinterpretation of some such scenarios in terms of Christian ideals of ‘good death’ and the triumph of the spirit. Watson, a man whose records were characterised by passionate, energetic use of narrative, had been warned in advance of the great obstacles he would face amongst Indigenous Australians. Through such accounts of his labours,

1 William Watson, journal, 3 October 1832, also, 19 September 1832, in Carey and Roberts (eds) 2002, *The Wellington Valley Project: Letters and Journals Relating to the Church Missionary Society Mission to Wellington Valley, NSW, 1830–42, A Critical Electronic Edition* [hereafter WVP]: <<http://www.newcastle.edu.au>>. Also, Bridges 1978: 30, 251.

he could convey to his Evangelical readers a sense of both hardship and hope, and construct himself as a significant up-and-coming missionary. Certainly, the publicity value of Billy's death was not ignored by the Church Missionary Society itself. In 1834, the Church Missionary Society's *Missionary Register* and *Church Missionary Paper* published lengthy excerpts from this story as part of their descriptions of the new station, adding their confident hope that Watson had witnessed a genuine conversion.² This convergence of optimism and death (unnerving to the contemporary reader) was not coincidental. Such tales fit broadly into worldwide missionary discourse; the *Missionary Register*, for example, published frequent articles about the pious deaths of native children from different countries. Australian Aboriginal demise, however, was already assuming a special significance.

This chapter uses the early records of the Australian colonies' first missions and protectorate stations to provide an overview of the origins of philanthropic involvement in Aboriginal policy. With the exception of John Harris, few historians have attempted a general examination of missionary beginnings across all the colonies, and yet this task is valuable, showing important contrasts and commonalities. There was a near-universal equation between Indigenous survival and Christian Evangelical success, and, at the same time, serious doubts expressed from the start about the prospects for such success. Despite most philanthropists describing their early meetings with Indigenous people as friendly, missionary publications also included derogatory descriptions of Indigenous Australians from as early as the 1820s, with Australia assuming a minor and often pessimistic place in imperial philanthropic discourse. However, the spectre of Aboriginal destruction took on a variety of local meanings. Particularly notable was the tendency, apparent in Watson's story of the loss of Billy Black, to read hardship and tragedy in terms of Christian inspiration, and to claim a certain fulfilment and hope in the midst of destruction.

'The vexations, the sluggishness, the ignorant prejudices': early attempts at missionary work

Missionary movements can be traced back to the Evangelical fervour growing in Britain since the late 18th century. The London Missionary Society (LMS) was founded in 1795, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1799 and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) in 1813. By the 1820s, this movement had assumed strong social importance. Two generations of the so-called Clapham sect had campaigned against slavery; these activists were politically influential, many from mercantile and intellectual backgrounds – notables included MP

² Church Missionary Society (CMS), *Church Missionary Paper: for the use of weekly and monthly contributions*, no LXXV, Michaelmas Day 1834; CMS, *Missionary Register*, March 1834: 133.

for Yorkshire William Wilberforce and Cambridge graduate and Lancashire landowner Thomas Babington. Meanwhile, missionaries were moving into the Pacific, the Cape colony and India, where they were already objecting to many of the impacts of settler-colonialism. Unlike their superiors in Britain, most of the agents sent out were from lower middle class or ‘mechanic’ backgrounds and were part of the general rise of a ‘respectable’ class during this era. (Many experienced class tensions with society authorities back home.) Missionary work was also assuming domestic importance, as Evangelical Christianity was mobilised in struggles between new and old elites and powerful and marginalised social classes, and membership of these new churches grew rapidly.³

Prior to 1825, however, little of this enthusiasm had reached Indigenous Australia. Anna Johnston attributes this slow start partly to the hard-headed politics of this penal colony, and partly because the strongest surge of missionary energy did not occur till some decades into Australian colonisation.⁴ A native school operated at Parramatta between 1814–20, and at Blacktown between 1823–29, supported by several Anglican, Methodist and Congregationalist missionaries and Governor Macquarie, who had alternately ordered punitive punishments of Indigenous people and hoped for their Christian ‘redemption’. Its primary aim was to train young Indigenous people as farmers and labourers, living apart from harmful European influences. (Older people were generally ignored, believed to be indifferent to European life.) Initially the school wanted no more than 12 students; in practice, numbers ranged from four to 15. Some children were recruited at the annual native feasts, but others were brought in from punitive expeditions and many ran away.⁵ Often referred to as an experiment, the institution aimed to prove that Indigenous people could become civilised, if only in theory or on a small scale. While many of its techniques – not the least the forced removal of children – set the tone for later efforts, widespread or regional governance of Indigenous people does not seem to have been the aim. Nor was this project characterised by tremendous optimism. The Committee of the Native Institution noted in their minutes of 1821 that prior to establishing the institution, Governor Macquarie had asked the opinion of powerful Church of England chaplain and missionary advocate Samuel Marsden, who supported the scheme in theory but was himself more interested in the Maori and warned that Indigenous Australians lacked ‘the finer feelings of affection and attachment which are the bonds of social life’.⁶

3 Elbourne 2002: 15, 21; Gunson 1978: 31–32; Johnston 2003a: 16–17; Lester 2005: 65–71; Mann 2004: 7.

4 Johnston 2003a: 169.

5 Brook and Kohen 1991: 30–35, 54–55, 61, 65–74, 87, 129–131, 146, 173, 212; Robert Cartwright to Governor Macquarie, 6 December 1829 and 18 January 1820, *British Parliamentary Papers (BPP): Papers Relating to Australia, 1830–36: Colonies: Australia*, vol 4, 1970: 156–159; Lydon 2005a: 202, 204.

6 Extracts from the Minutes of the Committee of the Native Institution, 12 December 1821, Church Missionary Society, Records [hereafter CMS], reel 46, AJCP M218, State Library of Victoria (SLV).

If the Church of England's interest in Indigenous evangelising was minor and equivocal during the 1820s, the Methodists were not very confident either. Throughout the 1820s and early 1830s, the Wesleyan Auxiliary Missionary Society for New South Wales often expressed regret that they had not done more for Indigenous people, but this did not lead to much action, or even much dialogue.⁷ Methodist preacher Rev Walter Lawry, for instance, wrote to the Methodist Missionary Society in 1820 calling for a mission school and a farming settlement for Indigenous people, but warned that they had virtually no notion of God; 'of all the heathen tribes they are the lowest'.⁸ The Methodist Missionary Society sent William Walker to Parramatta in 1823, concluding that there was little point in establishing a larger, independent mission; Indigenous people were, they claimed, nomadic and indifferent to material bribes.⁹ Public discussions were no more optimistic. In 1822, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society's *Papers Relative to the Wesleyan Missions and to the State of the Heathen Countries* published a rare article on Indigenous Australians, describing them as 'perhaps the lowest and most miserable of the scattered family of man', not yet inclined to respond to Christian teaching. Total destruction loomed, the journal claimed, due to the disappearance of their original staple diet and their refusal to become farmers. Only Christ's redeeming power could save them, and thus missionary work was imperative, not the least because only a missionary could bear to 'reside among them, and to struggle with the vexations, the sluggishness, the ignorant prejudices of such a race'.¹⁰ In 1823, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society's *Missionary Notices* aired similar concerns, via a brief letter from Mr Walker at Parramatta, recording with sorrow the deaths of two of his most promising students, as well as an article describing Tasmanian Indigenous people as the 'most destitute and wretched portion of the human family', and calling for mission work to elevate them and protect them from 'extinction'.¹¹

By the mid-1820s, Methodist energy was growing somewhat, as amateur preacher John Harper explored the region around Wellington Valley and found the Wiradjuri people there to be healthy and friendly. The tone in *Missionary Notices* for 1824–25 indicated a certain optimism for people in such districts not

7 For example, 'Design of the Wesleyan Missionary Society; with the plans and rules of the Auxiliary Missionary Society for New South Wales, 1821', 'First Report of the Wesleyan Auxiliary Missionary Society for NSW, 1821', 'Eighth Report of the Wesleyan Auxiliary Missionary Society for NSW, 1828', 'Twelfth Report of the Wesleyan Auxiliary Methodist Missionary Society of NSW, 1833', in Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS), *Reports of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, 1840–1851.

8 Rev Walter Lawry to Rev Joseph Taylor, 26 February 1820, WMMS, Records, 1819–1874, mfmG3726 (Record ID: 1040441), National Library of Australia (NLA).

9 Minutes of a Meeting of the Committee, 8 October 1823: 83–93, Methodist Missionary Society, Records [hereafter *MMS*], reel 2, AJCP M119, SLV.

10 WMMS, *Papers Relative to the Wesleyan Missions and to the State of the Heathen Countries*, no IX, September 1822.

11 WMMS, *Missionary Notices*: relating principally to the Foreign Missions, vol IV, no 95, November 1823: 163–164; WMMS, *Missionary Notices*, vol IV, no 96, December 1823: 180–182.

yet intensively 'settled'.¹² Hopes for a mission there were quashed, however, by attacks in the press on Harper's motives and expertise, and controversies over misuse of society funds. When the WMMS tried in 1826 to secure another site in Bateman's Bay, they were blocked by Governor Darling, who said it would endanger settlers' interests. The society continued to comment that Indigenous wellbeing was a painful, awkward subject, adding (curiously, in the light of years of inaction) that numerous attempts had failed.¹³ Claims that missionary work was hard and that 'heathens' were depraved did not, in themselves, indicate unusual pessimism; these were standard remarks in missionary discourse. However, descriptions of Indigenous Australians appearing in missionary journals were exceptionally derogatory, and the fact that these societies were already expressing doubts about any Australian success at all – at a time when very little had been attempted – suggests that hopes for this region were low from the start.

While there were cultural and political reasons behind this neglect, there were also some geographical factors. Ironically, concern for the plight of Indigenous Australia may have been lessened (perhaps subliminally) by the strategic importance of this region to Pacific missionary work. The nearby islands had attracted strong missionary interest from early days, from the London Missionary Society in Tahiti, the Marquesas, the Cook Islands and Samoa, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in Fiji and Tonga, and the Anglicans in New Zealand and Melanesia. These societies disagreed on some issues, but voiced similar denunciations of European beachcombers and Catholics. Their intensive work in the islands had ramifications for Australia, which was a vital Pacific base and transit point for missionaries travelling to the islands. They formed floating communities of sorts linking back to Sydney, where their activities were monitored, supported or hindered by Rev Samuel Marsden in particular.¹⁴ As early as 1820, Rev Walter Lawry was praising the growth of New South Wales to the WMMS, on the grounds that it would prove 'the refuge, and nursery & asylum of this Hemisphere for missionaries.'¹⁵ These views were still evident in 1848, when the Church Missionary Society's *Colonial Church Chronicle and Missionary Journal* stressed that British expansion in Australia was positive because it would enable missionaries to spread throughout the

12 WMMS, *Missionary Notices*, vol IV, no 107, November 1824: 363; WMMS, *Missionary Notices*, vol IV, no 116, August 1825: 498–499.

13 Ralph Mansfield, Report of the New South Wales Aboriginal Mission for the year ending 31 December 1825, *MMS*, reel 4, AJCP M121, SLV; Minutes of the Seventh NSW District Meeting, 2 January 1827, *MMS*, reel 4, AJCP M121, SLV; Roberts and Carey 2009 (online through Project MUSE).

14 Johnston 2003a: 173; Samson 1998: 9.

15 Rev Walter Lawry to MMS Committee, 26 August 1820, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Records, 1819–1874, mfmG3726 (Record ID: 1040441), NLA.

Pacific – ‘If we could plant another England at the Antipodes, the task would be incalculably easier.’¹⁶ Indigenous Australians were not mentioned here; in this context, this might have proven a disruptive and unwelcome topic.

‘Sitting among them’: evangelising begins at Lake Macquarie

By the mid 1820s, though, hopes were beginning to stir for a new London Missionary Society station, headed by LE Threlkeld. Threlkeld’s mission focused on the Awabakal people of Lake Macquarie; he set up first by the lakeside peninsula of Reid’s Mistake, then later moved across the lake to a site called Ebenezer, following his split with the LMS. The Awabakal were a fishing people, living off the sea, the coastal rock platforms and the nearby swamps. They had already experienced two decades of relatively minor colonialism, since an isolated penal camp was established in Newcastle in 1804. In these early days, Awabakal had done casual farming jobs, taken crops for themselves, recaptured escaped convicts for the military, and generally retained a certain autonomy. More intensive colonialism and free settlement arrived in 1823, though, shortly before the missionary did. By the 1830s, an increasingly dispossessed Awabakal become involved in violent clashes with colonists, soldiers and other Indigenous groups, and their destruction as a people became a real threat. Threlkeld’s mission, finally abandoned in 1841, would stand witness to these changes.¹⁷

Threlkeld’s early reports showed a guarded optimism. He was told in 1825, before he commenced his work, that Awabakal people had heard of him and were inquiring keenly when the missionary would arrive. They were probably influenced by the local clergyman GA Middleton, who had lobbied local government on their behalf and encouraged them to visit Threlkeld’s station. Awabakal people sang and danced to mark Threlkeld’s arrival, and camped outside his cottage, smoking and talking. They agreed to teach him language and promised to work on the farm he was planning in their country. Having inspected the site, he reported that the 20 people already living there ‘appeared pleased with the idea of my sitting among them.’ Threlkeld immediately began gathering information about Awabakal language, totems and clans, by talking to people while they hunted, fished and ate their meals.¹⁸

16 Church Missionary Society (CMS) 1849, *The Colonial Church Chronicle and Missionary Journal*, vol II, July 1848.

17 Clouten 1967: 70–75; David A Roberts, ‘Aborigines, Commandants and Convicts: The Newcastle Penal Settlement’, in Roberts, Carey and Grieves (ed) 2002, *Awaba: A Database of Historical Materials Relating to the Aborigines of the Newcastle-Lake Macquarie Region*, University of Newcastle, <<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/group/amrhd/awaba/>>; LE Threlkeld to London Missionary Society, May 1827, in Gunson (ed) 1974 vol 2: 227; Turner and Blyton 1995: 13–14, 28–29, 36–37.

18 Henwood 1978: 34; LE Threlkeld, Mission to the Aborigines, New South Wales, 7 March 1825, 14 March 1825 entries, London Missionary Society, Records [hereafter *LMS*], AJCP M11, SLV; LE Threlkeld to

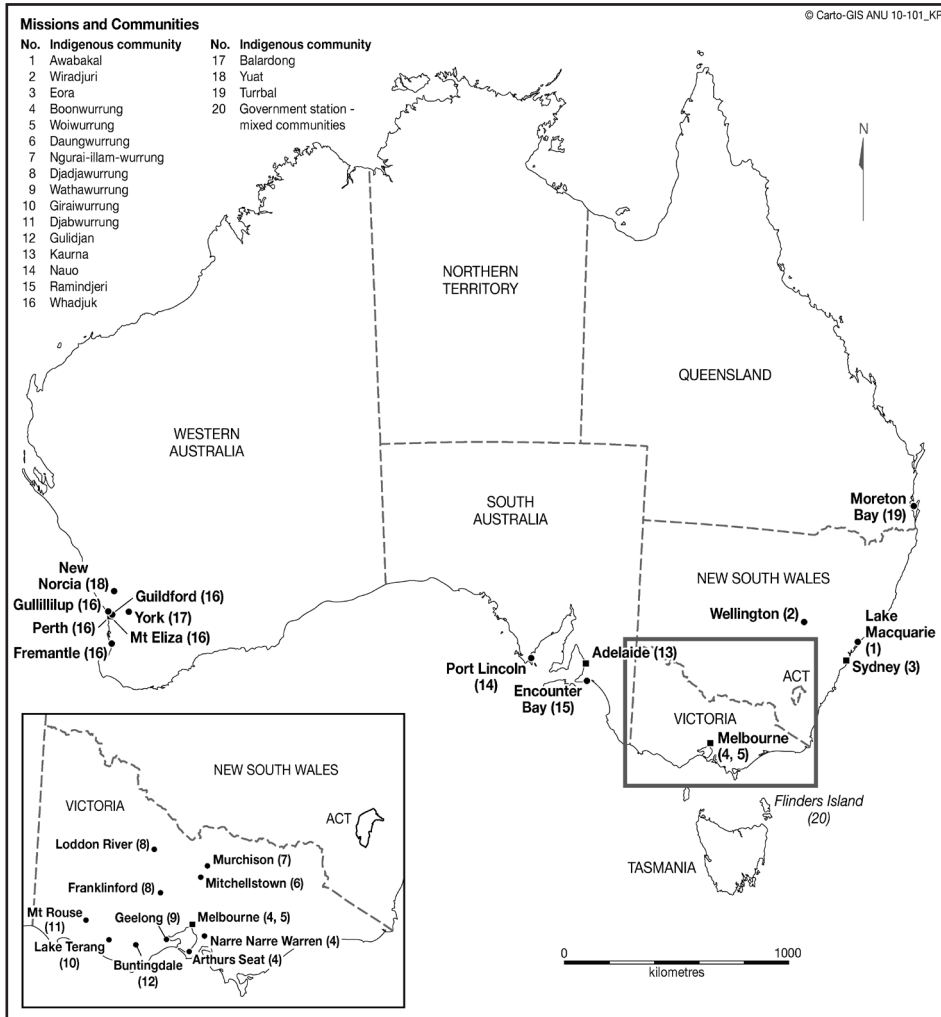


Fig 1. Map showing the locations of Indigenous communities and missions in Australia.

Prepared by Karina Pelling, Cartographic and GIS Services, Australian National University.

Threlkeld's work was unusual in several ways – notably his strong linguistic focus, his relatively subdued evangelising and his eventual political notoriety. Nonetheless, his early accounts demonstrate a number of elements common to many Australian missions and protectorate stations in the early 19th century. The first is the initial friendliness shown by Indigenous people. This was interpreted by missionaries as a promising sign of eventual conversion, but

George Burder, 25 April 1825, in Gunson (ed) 1974 vol 2: 182; LE Threlkeld, Second Half Yearly Report of the Aboriginal Mission, 21 June 1826, *LMS*, AJCP M73, SLV; Turner and Blyton 1995: 30; Windross and Ralston 1897: 11, 30.

it carried other local meanings. Much of missionaries' behaviour – giving gifts, exchanging names, trying to speak language, holding ceremonies and discussing with Indigenous people where they should locate their stations – may have seemed more or less appropriate for visitors in Indigenous country. Gwenda Baker, describing early 20th century Arnhem Land missions, observes that invitation, permission and negotiated passage were essential to Aboriginal people's use of space, and notes that later story-telling (although possibly rose-tinted) often stressed that missionaries were given approval to live in certain areas of land. Similarly, Fiona Magowan, focusing on the same era, argues that although missionaries' beliefs were radically different to Yolngu ones, some of their behaviour could still be assimilated into Indigenous relationships of reciprocity, caring for others and sharing skills.¹⁹ Close comparisons with the early 19th century are, of course, problematic, and deep cracks would soon appear in these philanthropic arrangements. Nonetheless, it seems possible that Indigenous people held early hopes for beneficial relationships with missionaries.

Another aspect of early philanthropic work intriguing to the contemporary reader – and especially notable in Threlkeld's records – was the commitment to learning Indigenous languages. Threlkeld published his first, partial effort at an Awabakal grammar in 1827, continuing to produce spelling and phrase books throughout the 1830s and working on translations of the Gospels of Mark and Luke.²⁰ This contrasts sharply with efforts by later institutions to ban local languages. However, it should not be equated with respect for Indigenous cultures, but rather with a particular Protestant view on the relationship between language and religion. Brian Stanley, for instance, notes that from the 1820s there was an Evangelical belief that translating the Bible into a multitude of languages was essential for worldwide conversions.²¹

Denominational loyalties presented different questions. Mistrust between missionaries of different backgrounds may have had a broad impact in lessening Evangelical commitment to the Aboriginal cause; Anna Johnston, David A Roberts and Hilary Carey, for instance, argue that tensions between Anglican and Methodist figures contributed to the failure of the first Wellington Valley project in the 1820s.²² However, there was little sign of different bodies competing directly for Indigenous converts. In 1826, for instance, Threlkeld discussed his mission with Archdeacon Scott, reminding him that the LMS did not require its missionaries to be Anglican and that he could not pledge to teach the Church of England liturgy. Scott responded 'he cared not by whom the Aborigines were

19 Baker 2005: 20–26; Magowan 2005: 162–164.

20 Hilary M Carey, 'Missionaries, Dictionaries and Australian Aborigines, 1820–1850', in Roberts, Carey and Grieves (ed) 2002, *Awaba*.

21 Stanley 2001: 193.

22 Johnston 2003a: 169; Roberts and Carey 2009.

civilised so long as it was done.²³ Meanwhile, Threlkeld was virulently anti-Catholic – he had worked in the South Seas and deplored the French Catholic presence there – and concerns about Catholic influences on the white population were raised by other missionaries working in the Indigenous field.²⁴ However, Catholics in eastern Australia were rarely engaged in Indigenous issues at this time and do not seem to have worried their Protestant counterparts in this respect.

However, Threlkeld's early papers also show signs of the greater tensions that philanthropists – especially in the south-east – would develop with their white neighbours. By 1826, Threlkeld was writing to the LMS in deep concern over frontier violence and dispossession, protesting that Indigenous people faced total destruction, in 'this vile, hypocritical country'. In this context, he had to consider whether missions could ever succeed, noting that most colonists had judged his project 'utopian' from the start, based on a 'forlorn hope'.²⁵ His own earlier experiences in Tahiti led to mixed feelings about Awabakal prospects. He told the LMS that he found his new work dull after the joy of preaching to large crowds of converts in Raiatea, remarking that the Awabakal, while friendly, presented a depressing heathen contrast to 'their sable brethren in the South Seas'. However, he added, his very experience of Pacific success also gave him hope for New South Wales.²⁶ Threlkeld's early work suggests that the idea of Australia as an uniquely problematic field, while discouraging, could also create a space where Australian work could take on a particular potential value. In 1825, he told the LMS 'I glory in this work because it [is] so much despised, so much considered as utterly impossible.'²⁷

'To make them like ourselves': Wellington Valley and Flinders Island

In the late 1820s, the Church of England in New South Wales remained fairly unenthused about Indigenous prospects. In 1827, Archdeacon Scott told Governor Darling that he saw little hope of Indigenous improvement. He did not relish the idea of funding Aboriginal projects when there were so many

23 LE Threlkeld to George Burder and William Hankey, 20 January 1826, *LMS*, AJCP M11, SLV.

24 For example, Niel Gunson, 'Introduction', in Gunson (ed) 1974 vol 1: 28; James Günther, journal, 28 July 1840, *WVP*; JCS Handt to William Jowett, 27 November 1841, *WVP*; John Smithies to General Secretaries, 25 October 1843, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Archive: Australasia 1812–1889 [hereafter *WMMS*], reel 2, Mp2107 (Record ID: 133095), *NLA*; LE Threlkeld to His Most Christian Majesty Louis Phillip, King of the French, 8 December 1838, *LMS*, AJCP M11, SLV; Tyrell 1993: 2.

25 LE Threlkeld, Mission to the Aborigines, New South Wales, 13 March 1825 entry, *LMS*, AJCP M11, SLV; LE Threlkeld to Burder and Hankey, 4 September 1826, and LE Threlkeld to Burder and Hankey, 11 September 1826, *LMS*, AJCP M11, SLV; LE Threlkeld to Burder and Hankey, 23 April 1825, *LMS*, AJCP M73, SLV.

26 LE Threlkeld, Mission to the Aborigines of New South Wales, extract, c1825, *LMS*, AJCP M11, SLV; LE Threlkeld, Second half yearly report of the Aboriginal mission, 21 June 1826, *LMS*, AJCP M11, SLV.

27 LE Threlkeld to George Burder and William Hankey, 10 October 1825, *LMS*, AJCP M73, SLV.

colonists without religious guidance, and suggested that ration stations and small schools would suffice. He scoffed at the Methodist hopes for Wellington Valley, insisting that the Wiradjuri people there had never shown an interest in Christianity.²⁸ In spite of this assessment, it was at Wellington Valley that the Church Missionary Society began their own mission work several years later, a project possibly hindered from the start by these Anglicans' neglect of the early Methodist records from the area.²⁹ The CMS *Missionary Register* (1831) claimed the impetus for this mission had come from the British government, hoping to avoid the vicious dispossession that had already occurred elsewhere.³⁰

Like the Awabakal, the Wiradjuri people of Wellington Valley had had years of mixed experiences of colonialism, initially in penal form. They lived in a large and ecologically diverse region, which included grass plains and eucalyptus forests, where they utilised fishing and firestick farming. Convict stations had arrived in their country in Bathurst in 1815 and in Wellington Valley in 1823 (this station closed in 1830). These were small and fairly peaceable outposts. However, as Heather Goodall notes, the massive increase in sheep, cattle and settlers around Bathurst in the 1820s damaged the Wiradjuri situation radically, leading to escalating violence and a declaration of martial law by Governor Brisbane in 1824. Indigenous casualties were estimated to be large, although it is hard to say exactly how this affected the people of Wellington Valley, in whose district a direct European presence was still fairly minor.³¹

When JCS Handt and William Watson arrived in September 1832, they found the local residents already waiting for the 'Misshinir'. Their first meetings were characterised by a cordial mistrust. The women and children kept their distance at first, having been threatened by local colonists that missionaries would abduct and enslave them. At the same time, however, Wiradjuri clearly expected the missionaries to distribute gifts and food. They did chores around the missionaries' camp, heard the missionaries' assurances that they had been sent by the King to teach the people how to live like Europeans, and took an interest in the hymns and prayers.³²

During the first few months, the mission papers recorded two particular elements of station life which would become potent and enduring, but which were handled equivocally in British publications. One was the conversational nature of evangelising. While the Wellington Valley records often complained of Wiradjuri indifference or rudeness, some religious discussions were energetic

28 Archdeacon Scott to Governor Darling, 1 August 1827, *BPP: Papers Relating to Australia, 1830–36*, vol 4, 1970: 165–169.

29 Roberts and Carey 2009.

30 CMS, *Missionary Register*, January 1831: 118–119.

31 Goodall 1996: 11, 30; Read 1988: 2–4, 9–12; Roberts 2003: 151–152.

32 JCS Handt, journal, 30 September 1832, *WVP*; Watson, journal, 30 September 1832, *WVP*; Watson, 1832–1833 Report, *WVP*.

and curious. Handt, for instance, recalled being asked whether God was a black fellow, and responded 'he was neither black nor white, but as bright as the sun.'³³ Watson recorded his early fascination with the claims of a young man called Oorimbildwally, who claimed to have significant dreams about the missionaries' God.³⁴ Also evident during the first few weeks in Wellington Valley – a sign of tensions to come – were missionaries' repeated requests for custody of children, 'to make them like ourselves'. An argument started early on when Watson tried to stop an old man, Bogin, taking a young boy, Peter, away from the station.³⁵

The CMS published mixed accounts of these early developments. Between 1832–34, the *Missionary Register* and *Church Missionary Paper* described the efforts at Wellington Valley to set up a vegetable garden, distribute rations and persuade people to attend church and leave their children there to be educated. (This last task was admitted to be difficult, but details of the tensions were often left out.) Descriptions of violence towards women, infanticide and behaviour labelled as 'witchcraft' and 'godlessness' were also included. Notable, too, were the publications' mixed treatment of Indigenous voices and viewpoints. The wide array of Wiradjuri ideas and comments recorded (or hinted at) in the missionaries' diaries were barely mentioned in these formal publications, with one exception: direct quotations and detailed conversations about religion were highlighted.³⁶

As in Threlkeld's papers, the Wellington Valley records showed suspicions from early on that missionary work might prove not only challenging, but impossible. In 1831, CMS secretaries Thomas Woodrooffe and Dandeson Coates wrote to the Watsons as they set out for New South Wales, wishing them energy and faith for the task ahead, and warning that they would encounter 'peculiar difficulties ... arising from the wrongs and injuries inflicted on the natives by the settlers, and from the depth of degradation into which the Aborigines are sunk.' The obstacles the Watsons would encounter, they suggested, were amongst the greatest in the world. Once again, however, difficulty itself could imply a certain nobility.

It may be given to you only to sow the seed, and reserved to another to gather in the harvest: God will, however, be glorified thereby, and in the great day of Christ 'he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together.'³⁷

33 Handt, journal, 4 December 1832, *WVP*.

34 Watson, journal, 19 April 1833, 12 May 1833, 20 May 1833, *WVP*.

35 For instance, Handt, journal, 12 November 1832, 24 November 1832, *WVP*; Watson, journal, 14 October 1832, *WVP*.

36 CMS, *Church Missionary Paper*, no LXXV, Michaelmas Day 1834; CMS, *Missionary Register*, May 1833 – October 1833: 238, 455–458; CMS, *Missionary Register*, February 1834: 114–119; CMS, *Missionary Register*, March 1834: 133, 151–154.

37 Thomas Woodrooffe and Dandeson Coates to Mr and Mrs Watson, 7 October 1831, *BPP: Correspondence and Other Papers Relating to Aboriginal Tribes in British Possessions*, 1834: 151–152.



Fig 2. During the 1830s, the Church Missionary Society published tales of bush life, cultural clashes and missionary work at Wellington Valley. As the picture indicates, many aspects of traditional Wiradjuri life were continuing, to the fascination and concern of the missionaries.

Missionary Register, September 1834, L & G Seeley, London. National Library of Australia, N266.3CHU.

Concerns about Australian prospects did not remain in-house either. Along with early, relatively optimistic accounts from Wellington Valley, the *Missionary Register* (1832) published Handt's description of a Sydney native feast, where he described the Indigenous people there as degraded and rapidly vanishing.³⁸ In early 1834, the journal mentioned explorers' depictions of Indigenous Australians as being 'at the very bottom of the scale of humanity'. It also approved the exile of the Tasmanian people to Flinders Island, on the grounds that they were too ferocious to live elsewhere.³⁹

This Tasmanian situation had particular meanings for missionary work in the 1830s. Christian evangelising had been introduced to these people, exiled first to Bruny Island, Gun Carriage Island and finally Flinders Island in 1835, where

³⁸ CMS, *Missionary Register*, May 1832: 238.

³⁹ CMS, *Missionary Register*, February 1834: 114.

coercion and institutionalisation were much greater than on other stations at the time. Catechists were employed from 1833 onwards and church services held, although commandant Peter Fisher remarked that he doubted how much of them were understood.⁴⁰ More broadly, Lyndall Ryan sees the Flinders Island experiment, promoted to other colonies by Lieutenant-Governor Sir George Arthur, GA Robinson and missionary advocates James Backhouse and George Walker, as premised on what would become a wider belief: that Indigenous people could be civilised if removed to reserves, where the young people would be trained to integrate into the lower ranks of colonial society. The failure of this approach in Van Diemen’s Land was blamed not on incarceration or poverty, but rather on the social impacts of the earlier war.⁴¹ These efforts received a mixed response in philanthropic publications. The Aborigines Protection Society’s 1839 annual report mentioned with some optimism ‘the actual improvement of the natives of Van Diemen’s Land’. However, by the following year they seemed more equivocal, describing Robinson’s optimism about Flinders Island residents learning to value money and live in permanent houses, but also publishing harrowing statistics about deaths on the island, referring to the residents as a ‘poor remnant of a banished and ill-used race’.⁴² Here, the prospect of Indigenous ‘extinction’ was apparent, and without the element of hope present in some other districts.

‘Bye & bye white men would come’: the complex rise of philanthropy and imperialism

At this time, though, there was an increasing interest in the new settlements of Port Phillip and South Australia. At first, this was due in large part to Joseph Orton, a Methodist missionary who had been previously in Jamaica, where his opposition to slavery brought him into conflict with white planters, before moving to New South Wales to coordinate regional missionary activities. In 1833, the WMMS’s *Missionary Notices* included a request from Orton for more missionary assistance for Indigenous people, whom he considered degraded but capable of improvement.⁴³ He went on to consult with Governor Bourke and Sir George Arthur about the prospects of a Port Phillip Aboriginal mission, having visited this new settlement himself in 1836, the year it was officially annexed.⁴⁴ This was a year after John Batman’s party had arrived and signed a treaty with a

40 Reynolds 1995: 170–173; Ryan 1981: 126, 180, 184–185.

41 Ryan 1980: 14–22; Ryan 1981: 176–178.

42 Aborigines Protection Society (APS), Second Annual Report, 21 May 1839: 7–8, 13–16, in APS, Transactions, c1839–1909, MIC/o6550, reel 1 (Records the property of Anti-Slavery International); APS, Third Annual Report, 23 June 1840: 30–32, APS, Transactions, reel 1.

43 WMMS, *Missionary Notices*, vol IV, no 215, November 1833: 366–367.

44 Meeting of the Committee, 5 May 1837: 503–509, MMS, AJCP M120, reel 3, SLV; Joseph Orton to Governor Bourke, 16 August 1836, MMS, reel 9, AJCP M126, SLV.

Woiwurrung delegation which Batman claimed ceded ownership of the district to him in return for gifts, but which the Woiwurrung probably understood as an attempt to invoke the *tanderrum* ceremony, allowing visitors temporary access to land in return for presents and conciliatory gestures.⁴⁵

When Orton arrived, Indigenous people around Melbourne received him amicably. Translating (possibly imperfectly) through Murranguruk, also known as William Buckley, an escaped convict found living with the Wathawurrung people, he told them that 'bye & bye white men would come to teach their children to read and write'. He distributed presents and invitations to his church service, which 50 Aboriginal people attended, watching the foreign ceremonies with interest. This left Orton in an optimistic mood. When washing in the river one morning, he prayed to God to make him useful in 'this land of Barbarians', and believed it was significant when he opened his pocket Testament afterwards and saw the phrase 'and the *barbarians* shewed me no little kindness'.⁴⁶ His 1836 publication *The Aborigines of Australia* called for further mission work in Port Phillip, portraying local people as heathen, savage and violent towards each other but also 'remarkably docile' towards Europeans and receptive to missionary work.⁴⁷ This mirrored his private comments to the WMMS, where he combined evangelical enthusiasm with warnings of severe spiritual hardship. This work, he said would suit only those who sincerely believed the teaching 'In the wilderness shall waters break out and streams in the Desert', 'and the parched ground shall become a pool and the thirsty land springs of earth'.⁴⁸

This slowly developing enthusiasm was part of a much greater mood of religious change in the 1830s. Philanthropists leaving for the Australian colonies at this time departed from a Britain in spiritual turmoil. The 1832 Reform Act⁴⁹ had enabled dissenters to enter the political process, while the 1836 Registration Act⁵⁰ took the administration of births, deaths and marriages out of the hands of the Church of England. The 1833 abolition of slavery in British dominions – a campaign spearheaded by independent backbencher Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton – was considered a triumph for Evangelical advocacy, and in turn encouraged the 1835 Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements), the report of which was co-authored and structured by members of Buxton's circle, who were influenced by the Clapham sect and had links to Quakers, missionary societies

45 Broome 2005: 10–11; Clark 1998: 82–83.

46 Joseph Orton, 21 April 1836, Joseph Orton, Journal 1832–1839 and 1840–1841 [hereafter *JOJ*], ML ref A1714–1715, CY reel 1119, State Library of NSW. See also 23, 24, 28 April 1836.

47 Joseph Orton 1836, *The Aborigines of Australia*: 7–9.

48 Joseph Orton to WMMS General Secretaries, August 1836, Joseph Orton, Letterbooks 1822–1842, ML ref A1717–A1720, State Library of NSW. Also, Joseph Orton to WMMS General Secretaries, August 1836, *MMS*, reel 9, AJCP M126, SLV.

49 The name commonly given to the Act to Amend the Representation of the People in England and Wales (1832).

50 A shortened version of the title: An Act for Registering Births, Deaths and Marriages in England (1836)

and movements for prison reform. Buxton himself networked with Evangelical Whigs and sympathetic members of the Colonial Office.⁵¹ The report made clear that Christianity was central to their notions of protecting and elevating colonised peoples. Elizabeth Elbourne draws attention to the Committee's aim 'to secure to them [the Aborigines] the due observance of Justice and the protection of their Rights; to promote the spread of Civilization among them, and to lead them to the peaceful and voluntary reception of the Christian Religion.'⁵² (The emphasis on voluntary conversion did not suggest that Christianity was non-essential, but rather implied the importance of personal, Protestant revelation.) This work was followed in 1837 by the establishment of the Aborigines Protection Society by Dr Thomas Hogkin, with Buxton as president and input from many figures who had been active on the Select Committee. The APS's earliest campaigns focused on the need for native reserves in the Canadian colonies and southern Africa and protesting against the treatment of Africans by the Boers. While supportive of missionary and anti-slavery movements, the APS was somewhat less religious and more scientific in its approach, and would become envious of the greater support available to missionary movements.⁵³

As Elbourne points out, this enthusiasm was in many ways specific to the 1820s and 1830s, an era of rapid expansion of colonialism, economic liberalisation and domestic political citizenship for white men. It would become a source of controversy worldwide, when missionaries were accused of encouraging slave revolts in the West Indies, and became caught up in British settlers' land wars with Xhosa in the Cape colony and Maori in New Zealand. Missionaries, while linked in various ways to the colonial state, nonetheless tended to contrast their model of civilisation with those of British officials and settlers from different national backgrounds, whom they often accused of neglecting, corrupting or destroying the natives. This position could make missionaries' standing unpopular and precarious. (Indeed, Roberts and Carey have suggested that colonists' knowledge of such clashes in Barbados and the Cape in the 1820s was one reason why the first missionaries in New South Wales were treated so suspiciously.) Moreover, the very liberalising impulses which had helped prompt developments like the 1835 Select Committee could also prove a double-edged sword. In settler-colonies in Australia, Canada and the Cape, debates were also raging at this time over the legal, political and economic rights of settlers. The ultimate results, including responsible government for the colonies, would often prove mixed or harmful for native peoples.⁵⁴

51 Armstrong 1973: 164–165; Laidlaw 2002: 82–83; Lester 2005: 65–66.

52 Elbourne 2003 (online through Project Muse).

53 Bourne 1899: 9; Laidlaw 2007: 133–161.

54 Elbourne 2003; Roberts and Carey 2009; Lester 2005: 65, 68–69, 78–80.

Given the relevance of the Select Committee to how philanthropic work was seen, it is worth considering this report in some detail. The New South Wales section drew extensively and strategically on records from Wellington Valley. CMS spokesman Dandeson Coates reported that the circumstances there were difficult and discouraging, due to disease, violence and sexual exploitation of women and children. Nonetheless, he added, there were some positive signs: children were learning to read and people were attending church services.⁵⁵ Wellington Valley aside, though, Australian missions were not prominent in this report. Due, probably, to his split with the LMS, Threlkeld's passionate views did not feature directly. Other Australasian witnesses (none of whom had much Aboriginal experience) made rather pessimistic statements. Rev William Yate did remark that Lake Macquarie and Wellington Valley had shown that Indigenous people could understand Christianity, but other commentators were less sanguine.⁵⁶ Rev John Williams, who spoke mostly about the Pacific, added that he thought Indigenous Australians 'the most degraded of any aborigines that I had met with'. While maintaining that they, like all people, were capable of salvation, he also observed that the Parramatta school had failed.⁵⁷ Archdeacon Broughton praised Threlkeld's translation work, hoped that the people on Flinders Island were better off there, and noted that the children living with Mr Cartwright in Blacktown showed some improvement. Nonetheless, he also described Indigenous Australians as idle and degraded, indifferent to property and Christianity, and especially difficult to civilise because of their unwillingness to give up their children. He concluded that they were decaying as a people and, in a short time, 'I will not say exterminated, but they will be extinct.'⁵⁸ Rev Walter Lawry of New South Wales also added that Aborigines would probably become 'extinct' soon, as a result of European vices.⁵⁹ The Committee's 1837 report concluded that Aboriginal Australians were corrupted by contact with settlers and in danger of destruction.⁶⁰

What stands out most, in some ways, is the Committee's relative lack of interest in Indigenous Australia. Zoë Laidlaw and Elizabeth Elbourne, who have pursued more transnational approaches, emphasise the central importance of the Cape colony to this report, noting that the Committee began work following concerns from the LMS over the oppression of the Xhosa. Laidlaw suggests that Australian historians have overemphasised their country's importance to the

55 Dandeson Coates, John Beecham and William Ellis, evidence, 6 June 1836, *BPP: Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements) together with minutes of evidence, appendix and index*, Anthropology: Aborigines, vol 1, 1836: 486–490, 520.

56 William Yate, evidence, 13 Feb 1836, *BPP: Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, vol 1, 1836: 201–206.

57 *BPP: Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, vol 1, 1836: 675.

58 Archdeacon Broughton, evidence, 3 Aug 1835, *BPP: Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, vol 1, 1836: 13–24.

59 *BPP: Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, vol 1, 1836: 498.

60 *BPP: Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)* vol 2, 1837: 10–13.

report; the New South Wales sections occupied a space larger than originally intended because of the removal of more controversial African material.⁶¹ Even so, I would add, the Australian material still receives relatively minor attention, a tendency that was also evident in missionary society journals, which preferred to focus on India, southern Africa, China, the Pacific and North America. If Australia did assume a special status, it was often for having the most allegedly degraded natives or the most lamentable Indigenous record. For instance, when the *Evangelical Magazine* (issued by Calvinistic Methodists) promoted the work of the Select Committee, Australia was named among the colonies guilty of exterminating their native peoples.⁶²

'A kind and Christian procedure'?: hopes and fears for the new settlements

Despite these concerns, philanthropists of the mid-1830s did express some hopes for missionary work in districts that had been colonised only recently. In particular, for a brief period the new colony of South Australia was singled out by British philanthropists as unusually optimistic. While European whalers and sealers had been visiting the southern coast for decades, official colonisation did not begin until the mid-1830s. Unlike its neighbours, South Australia was colonised by a commercial company, distributing land systematically to free citizens, thus appearing to provide an alternative model. Some hopes were kindled for Indigenous policy; Lyndall Ryan, for instance, suggests that Sir George Arthur influenced the Colonial Office to urge the commissioners of the Wakefield Scheme to sign a treaty with Indigenous people and establish a protectorate.⁶³ Certainly, missionary societies and later the Aborigines Protection Society hoped that a more civilised settlement would develop. An LMS committee, lamenting that much of Australia was in a state of 'religious destitution and moral barbarism', looked forward to a better South Australian system, 'determined upon a kind and Christian procedure'.⁶⁴ In 1838, the *Colonial Church Record* and the APS rejoiced that this colony would take no convicts, and hoped for kinder Indigenous policies, with reserves, protectorates and schools.⁶⁵ South Australian protectors were indeed appointed from 1837

61 Elbourne 2003; Laidlaw 2002: 79–80, 88.

62 *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, vol XV, July 1837: 330–331; *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, vol XVI, April 1838: 188–189.

63 Ryan 1980: 14–22; Ryan 1981: 176–178.

64 *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, vol XIII, December 1834: 504.

65 APS 1838, *First Annual Report of the Aborigines Protection Society*, 16 May 1838: 23, 26 (original property of Anti-Slavery International); Colonial Church Society (CCS), *Colonial Church Record*, vol 1, no 3, October 1838: 42.

(although they were not full-time until 1839), with missions established in Adelaide in 1839 and at Port Lincoln and Encounter Bay in 1840. Protector Matthew Moorhouse also set aside several reserves in the early 1840s.⁶⁶

However, the earliest South Australian philanthropic records are characterised less by unique optimism than by tensions, some specific to this region, other familiar from elsewhere. One was the troubling place of charity and gratitude within Indigenous welfare policies. Protector Bromley had looked forward initially to a harmonious paternalism with the Indigenous people around Adelaide, planning to teach them to 'regard us as neighbours and brethren'. However, he soon complained that they were greedy and demanding, taking his own supplies for themselves, disdainfully refusing the unappetising oatmeal and rice he offered, and begging food from colonists instead. Bromley wrote despondently 'gratitude is out of the question with them'.⁶⁷ Later, when philanthropy became more institutionalised, other conflicts emerged. Ann Scrimgeour's work on the Lutheran missionaries to the Kurna people in the 1840s highlights the tensions between 'Christianity first' and 'civilisation first' approaches, as the missionaries disagreed with Governor Grey about whether or not the children should be taught in English and sent out as servants. Scrimgeour contrasts the missionaries' wish for 'a rarefied and idealised *Christian* civilisation', set apart from the rest of colonial life, with Grey's belief that capitalist imperialism was a force for good.⁶⁸ Moreover, hopes that South Australia would prove unusually humane were not realised. Indeed, the shocking participation of protector Moorhouse in a mass killing of Indigenous men near Lake Victoria in 1841 (his armed party had proceeded into this dangerous area to investigate attacks on settlers, despite Indigenous warnings) revealed a level of complicity with violent dispossession which arguably surpassed that of the Port Phillip protectors, for instance. As Peggy Brock points out, despite South Australia's early humanitarian rhetoric and alternative administrative models, the ultimate results for Indigenous people largely mirrored those elsewhere.⁶⁹

Also initiated in 1837 was George Langhorne's state-sponsored mission in Port Phillip, established following discussions between Governor Bourke and Chief Justice Burton. It was located in a key meeting and ceremonial area for the Kulin nations (the site of the present-day Botanical Gardens). Langhorne distributed

66 State Records of South Australia 2002: 8–15.

67 Protector Bromley to Colonial Secretary, 2 May 1837, State Records of South Australia (SRSA), GRG24/1, Colonial Secretary's Office, Letters and other communications received, no 117 of 1837; Protector Bromley to Colonial Secretary, 26 May 1837, SRSA, GRG24/1/1837/152; Protector Bromley to Provincial Secretary, 1 June 1837, SRSA, GRG24/1/1837/169; Protector Bromley to Colonial Secretary, 26 June 1837, SRSA, GRG24/1/1837/206; Protector Bromley to Governor Stirling, 29 June 1837, SRSA, GRG24/1/1837/210; Protector Bromley to Colonial Secretary, 6 July 1837, SRSA, GRG24/1/1837/224.

68 Scrimgeour 2006.

69 Brock 1995: 208, 218–222; Matthew Moorhouse to Colonial Secretary, 13 September 1841, in Protector of Aborigines, *Letterbook 1840–1857*, SRSA, GRG52/7, vol 1, unit 1.

rations and tried to encourage schooling and mild labour, but claimed little success, at a time when local people could presumably see little benefit in cooperating with him.⁷⁰ He left Melbourne in 1839. This was the same time, however, as the new protectors of Aborigines were arriving, on the instructions of Lord Glenelg, Secretary of State for the Colonies, who was a well-known supporter of anti-slavery and Protestant missionary movements. (These were often grouped together in popular discourse under the heading of 'Exeter Hall', a venue in London famous for its use for massive public gatherings by these bodies.) Glenelg had become concerned about the need to recognise Indigenous Australians as subjects and protect them from destruction. Following the Select Committee report, he informed Governor Gipps of the appointment of protectors GA Robinson, James Dredge, William Thomas, ES Parker and CW Sievwright.⁷¹ Robinson was fresh from his apparent success in Van Diemen's Land, negotiating with Indigenous peoples for their removal from the Tasmanian mainland. Of his assistants, Sievwright was a former army officer, while the others were schoolteachers. While a more secular and administrative undertaking than the earlier missions, the Port Phillip protectorate nonetheless demonstrated a number of common elements. These included the Evangelical commitments of protectors Dredge, Thomas and Parker (Dredge, in particular, was recommended for the post by influential Methodist leader Dr Jabez Bunting), the wish to learn local languages, and the brief to prepare Indigenous people for 'civilised' life and to promote 'moral and religious improvement'.⁷² Another commonality with mission work was the sense of apprehension about their prospects. While missionary discourse could find a certain glory in hardship, this was less available to protectors dependent upon reluctant public funding. Michael Christie notes that Governor Gipps was never keen on the protectorate – he delayed its onset, knowing it would be unpopular, particularly at a time of financial problems – and that the majority of Melbourne's media opposed it from the start. Port Phillip superintendent CJ La Trobe was more sympathetic initially, coming from a Moravian background with family links to the Clapham sect, but his enthusiasm would ultimately wane as well.⁷³ Meanwhile, philanthropic publications, while more sympathetic towards the protectorate's objectives, could be equally disappointed by its outcomes. The APS's 1840 annual report concluded that this body had already shown itself unable to prevent dispossession.⁷⁴

70 Michael Cannon, notes, in Cannon (ed) 1982, *Historical Records of Victoria (HRV): The Aborigines of Port Phillip, 1835–1839*, vol 2A: 191; Christie 1979: 82–84; James Dredge, 9 January 1839, in James Dredge, Diaries, Notebook and Letterbooks, ?1817–1845 [hereafter *JDD*], MS11625, MSM534, SLV; GM Langhorne to CJ La Trobe, 15 October 1839, in Cannon (ed) 1983, *HRV*, vol 2B: 508.

71 Christie 1979: 87.

72 Sir George Arthur to Lord Glenelg, 15 December 1837, in Cannon (ed) 1982, *HRV*, vol 2A: 33; Lord Glenelg to Sir George Gipps, 31 January 1838, in Cannon (ed) 1983, *HRV*, vol 2B: 375, also 365.

73 Christie 1979: 93–94, 100–103; Reece 1974: 198.

74 APS, Third Annual Report, 23 June 1840: 32–34.

Such dismissals were voiced from the very beginning of the protectors' projects. When they arrived in Port Phillip, they camped near Indigenous people outside Melbourne and distributed rations and gifts intended to demonstrate European technology and manners. One note by protector William Thomas from 1840 listed 'Presents for Natives in my possession' including tomahawks, pocket knives, knives and forks, cigars, mirrors and twine. Shortly after their arrival, the protectors staged a feast for 300 people, serving bread and mutton. Indigenous people demonstrated dancing, climbing and spear throwing, and fireworks were let off in celebration.⁷⁵ The protectors' reception from Indigenous people was friendly at first, but this would change as the land fell under settler control swiftly and intensively during the late 1830s and early 1840s. In mid-1840, for instance, protector Thomas made the controversial decision to move his station from Arthur's Seat to Narre Narre Warren, following arguments with Woiwurrung and Boonwurrung people over their insistence on living close to their country around Melbourne. Tensions around traditional land use and the protectors' complicity in expelling people from European settlements would plague the protectorate for years to come.⁷⁶

Meanwhile, his protectors James Dredge and ES Parker moved north and north-west, to a general Indigenous welcome. When Dredge arrived at his station near Mitchellstown, he found that Daungwurrung people there seemed friendly, did chores in return for food and said they would bring their families to live nearby.⁷⁷ This was at the same time as they were beginning to respond to dispossession by attacking stations along the Goulburn River, resulting in a controversial mass arrest by Major Lettsom in 1840, in which two Indigenous men were shot dead.⁷⁸ Such early developments contributed to Dredge's sense that the protectorate was corrupt and unable to save Indigenous people from destruction.

Parker moved first to Jackson's Creek, then to the Loddon in June 1840, and in 1841 to a site near contemporary Franklinton. His work took him through the country of the Djadjawurrung and Djabwurrung people, who lived around the open plains and swamplands at the base of the Grampians and Pyrenees mountains. They had been trading European items and meeting explorers from the mid-1830s, but Parker arrived at the beginning of a rapid and devastating process of dispossession. Ian D Clark estimates that almost half of Djabwurrung country was taken by squatters by 1841, and virtually all of it by 1846.

75 Cannon, notes, in Cannon (ed) 1982, *HRV*, vol 2A: 434; Dredge, 28 March 1839, *JDD*, MS11625, MSM534, SLV; William Thomas to GA Robinson, 1 January 1840, William Thomas, Papers, 1834–1868 [hereafter *WTP*], ML MSS 214, reel 4, State Library of NSW.

76 Christie 1979: 97; William Thomas to GA Robinson, 26 August 1840, *WTP*, ML MSS 214, reel 4; Thomas, journal, 2 and 5 September 1840, *WTP*, ML MSS 214, reel 1, State Library of NSW.

77 Christie 1979: 94; Dredge, 21–26 August 1839, *JDD*, MS11625, MSM534, SLV.

78 Broome 2005: 31–32; Christie 1979: 65.

Nonetheless, Parker himself was received politely, greeted 'with some degree of ceremony'. They divided their camp into family sections, introduced Parker around and reminded him carefully of their previous meetings.⁷⁹

At the same time, his colleague CW Sievwright travelled initially through Geelong and Lake Terang before moving into the tumultuous country of the Gundidjmara people at Mt Rouse. The Gundidjmara harvested the coastland and marshes and lived in eel farming villages around Portland, Warrnambool and Lake Condah. They had a history of both trading and violence with whalers and sealers along the coast, and from the early 1840s they became notorious for their attacks on Europeans around Hamilton, the Grampians and the Glenelg River. Sievwright claimed that colonists, in turn, were launching vicious retaliatory raids. This protector was amongst communities whose struggle for autonomy was ongoing and bloody.⁸⁰

Of all the protectors, GA Robinson had the greatest number of meetings with new people, as he travelled around Port Phillip taking a census and urging people to move to the protectorate stations. These are also the main meetings to have been discussed in cross-cultural terms by historians. Jan Critchett and Vivienne Rae-Ellis focus on the anthropological value of Robinson's accounts, noting his guides' orchestration of ceremonial encounters, and his own distribution of gifts and adherence to courteous behaviour, conveying a sense of formal, rather ambassadorial meetings.⁸¹

As the protectors were setting out, Joseph Orton's aim of establishing a Methodist mission was being realised nearby. Missionaries Francis Tuckfield and Benjamin Hurst set up at Lake Colac, 40 miles west of Geelong and inland from Corio Bay, on land used by a number of Indigenous communities, notably the Gulidjan and Wathawurrung. The Gulidjan – apparently a small group even before colonisation – lived on compact, fertile tracts of lake country, while the Wathawurrung were fisherpeople whose country also included the open plains towards the Great Dividing Range. They had encountered explorers from the turn of the century and sealers and whalers from the 1820s, meetings profitable or violent but fairly minor in terms of land control. This changed with the arrival of permanent settlers. The Gulidjan in particular seem to have been dispossessed so quickly that by the 1840s they had few options besides mission life, station work and

79 Clark 1990: 94; Morrison 2002b: 204; ES Parker, *Quarterly Journal*, December 1840 – February 1841, Public Records Office of Victoria (PROV) VA512 *Chief Protector of Aborigines*, VRPS4410, unit 2, 1841/55 (reel 2).

80 Christie 1979: 11, 27, 97; Clark 1990: 33–34; Corris 1968: 26, 112–115; Critchett 1990: 55–61; Lourandos 1977: 208, 214.

81 Critchett 1990: 5–18; Rae-Ellis 1988: 177–179, 201–205; GA Robinson 1998, *Journals: Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate*, Clark (ed) vol 2: 150–155; GA Robinson 2001, 'A Report of an Expedition to the Aboriginal Tribes of the Western Interior during the Months of March, April, May, June, July and August, 1841', in Clark (ed) vol 4: 14–24.

begging.⁸² Tuckfield and Hurst wrote little about their initial meetings with Gulidjan or Wathawurrung, other than to comment that they were interested in the missionaries' ceremonies.⁸³ However, Tuckfield's journal from 1839 did describe what may have been 'Dantgurt' (Djargurdwurrung) people's first visit. A hundred people arrived, ceremonially painted and armed, and sat silently 200 yards from the buildings. They ignored Tuckfield's greetings, waiting instead for the people resident there to acknowledge and welcome them; the missionary was, at this moment, a marginalised figure.⁸⁴ This did not imply a hostile atmosphere, though; when Orton visited Buntingdale in 1839, he found the local people friendly with Tuckfield, embracing Orton affectionately when he was introduced as Tuckfield's brother.⁸⁵

Early reports from Buntingdale featured some notable elements. As Methodists, they felt somewhat isolated and apprehensive amongst the settler population; even Tuckfield's journey to the colony, on a ship full of 'high church people', was uncomfortable. (Indeed, Judith Binney has noted that missionary journeys 'out' were often experienced as disturbing transition points, exposing them to the wickedness of their fellow European travellers.⁸⁶) Also notable was their commitment – again, relevant to most south-eastern missions – to ministering to Indigenous people as far from other Europeans as possible. They stated repeatedly that only Christianity could save people, and resisted suggestions of economic integration into settler society. Benjamin Hurst, for instance, wrote to Port Phillip superintendent CJ La Trobe in 1841 that he disagreed with South Australian plans to make Indigenous people useful by training them as rural labourers. Hurst argued that Aborigines were 'useless and dangerous neighbour[s]' because their hearts were still 'desperately wicked'; they would only become peaceable and industrious when they realised they were sinners and experienced atonement.⁸⁷

Buntingdale's early records show a mixture of optimism and apprehension. In an initial memorandum for Hurst and Tuckfield, Orton described their prospective work as challenging but potentially great; 'you are engaged in an arduous and difficult mission, one that will call forth all your piety, zeal, diligence, patience, perseverance and implicit confidence in the promise of almighty God.'⁸⁸ The *Missionary Register* and the WMMS's annual report for 1840 stated

82 Clark 1990: 222, 277; Corris 1968: 52–53, 71, 102; Lourandos 1977: 215.

83 Francis Tuckfield, 18 August 1839, in Francis Tuckfield, *Journal, 1837–1842* [hereafter *FTJ*], MS11341, Box 655, SLV.

84 Tuckfield, 14 December 1839, *FTJ*, MS11341, Box 655, SLV.

85 Joseph Orton to General Secretaries, 13 May 1839, *WMMS*, reel 1, Mp2107, NLA; Orton, 17 May 1839, *JOJ*, ML ref A1714–1715, CY reel 1119, State Library of NSW.

86 Tuckfield, 3 January 1838, 27 June 1841, 4 July 1841, *FTJ*, MS11341, Box 655, SLV; Binney 1968: 16

87 Benjamin Hurst to CJ La Trobe, 22 July 1841, *MMS*, reel 4, AJCP M121, SLV.

88 Copy of Memorandum left with the Brethren Hurst and Tuckfield by Mr Orton, June 1839, *WMMS*, reel 1, Mp2107, NLA.

that good progress in schooling, labour and linguistics had occurred there.⁸⁹ However, Hurst and Tuckfield's reports, from which this hopeful information presumably derived, betrayed greater concern, describing with horror the local depopulation, which they blamed on a combination of colonial cruelty and violence between Indigenous peoples. Hurst wrote 'But oh! how painful is the thought that perhaps in a very few years the whole of the tribes of Australia Felix will be annihilated.'⁹⁰ Tuckfield, somewhat more optimistically, reiterated the link between hardship and Christian triumph: 'surely the day of small and feeble things must not be despised. Our work is a scene of toil, difficulty and danger, but God is with us and we are happy.'⁹¹

If reports from these southern districts were, at best, ambivalent, those from the northern regions of New South Wales known as Moreton Bay (later to separate as the colony of Queensland) were more discomfiting still. There had been a penal settlement there since 1824, initially outnumbered by Indigenous people and characterised by tumultuous but fairly localised developments: Indigenous labour, theft of crops, spread of introduced diseases, and incidents of violence. JCS Handt, having left Wellington Valley after hostilities with Watson, was posted there to preach to both Aborigines and convicts. This time, his early reports showed no optimism. In 1837, he told William Cowper of the CMS corresponding committee that his hopes were few; his supposed congregation seemed to him 'savage and cruel' and reluctant to live with him.⁹² Further comments from 1838 were published in the *Missionary Register*, describing the people of Moreton Bay as 'rude and savage', treating missionaries only as a useful source of food.⁹³ Despite this, another German mission was being planned nearby, after New South Wales politician John Dunmore Lang lobbied the Scottish Missionary Society. Their 1837 records indicated that they lacked enthusiasm from the start. Rev Johannes Gossner, who trained missionaries in Berlin, agreed to send a party to Moreton Bay, but even he hoped the mission could be extended to New Zealand or the Pacific; he considered Indigenous Australians 'the lowest grade of humanity'. Accounts of early meetings between these German missionaries and Indigenous people are sparse and highlight the linguistic and philosophical barriers between them. Handt commented that he could barely understand what he heard about Indigenous spirituality, and doubted that his efforts to tell them about the Supreme Being's love and the punishment of sinners were understood.⁹⁴ Moreover, from the early 1840s, these

89 CMS, *Missionary Register*, May 1840: 230; Report of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, 1840, in WMMS, *Reports of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*: 29–31.

90 Benjamin Hurst to WMMS General Secretaries, 14 January 1840, WM Tennant Letters 1837–1883, MS12699, Box 3504/9 (1–40), SLV.

91 Francis Tuckfield to WMMS General Secretaries, 29 January 1840, MS10623, MSB281, SLV.

92 JCS Handt to William Cowper, 13 September 1837, CMS, reel 40, AJCP M212, SLV.

93 CMS, *Missionary Register*, August 1839: 389–390.

94 Extracts from the Minutes of the Committee of the Scottish Missionary Society, 10 May 1837, in John Dunmore Lang, *Papers 1811–1887*, vol 30, reel 18, mfmG24821, NLA; Johannes Gossner to Samuel Jackson, 1

small missionary efforts were eclipsed by intense colonisation, as pastoralists moved into the area and widespread violence followed. These northern districts would become notorious over much of the 19th century for their histories of bloody dispossession.⁹⁵

‘Docile and faithful labourers’: the unusual case of Western Australia

Philanthropic reports from Western Australia during the late 1830s and early 1840s were more hopeful, although still guarded. Evangelical efforts there began when Methodist settler Francis Armstrong was employed as an Indigenous interpreter near Mt Eliza, running a small institution between 1834–38. This was followed by Louis Giustiniani’s short-lived Anglican school at Guildford (established 1836), John Smithies’ Methodist institutions in Perth and Gulllililup (established 1840 and 1844), and George King’s small Anglican school in Fremantle (established 1842). Both King and Smithies received small amounts of government funding. Western Australia did not seem to attract the high philanthropic hopes that South Australia did, and by the mid-1830s punitive expeditions and violent racial clashes were being reported.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, Western Australia was still something of a focus for philanthropic writers concerned to avoid the excesses they had witnessed in older colonies. The Australian Church Missionary Society (thereafter the Colonial Church Society) commented in 1837 on the need to send missionaries to minister to the settlers of Western Australia, with the hope that the benefits would flow on to Indigenous people.⁹⁷ The *Colonial Church Record* also described frontier violence in Western Australia (blamed on the loss of Indigenous food sources) and asserted that only Christianity could turn Indigenous people into ‘a body of docile and faithful labourers’.⁹⁸

Like their eastern counterparts, the Western Australian institutions focused largely on children. King, setting up his Fremantle school, wrote optimistically to the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel of how wonderful it would be to ‘gain over the sons & daughters of these warriors to the holy standard of the cross’, but added that their parents were too unreliable to be taught.⁹⁹ This

April 1837, JD Lang Papers, vol 30, reel 18; Handt, journal, 26 October 1832, 7 November 1832, 13 November 1832, WVP; JCS Handt to William Cowper, Annual Report of the Church Missionary Society Mission at Moreton Bay for the year 1838, Sir William Dixon, *Documents relating to Aboriginal Australians, 1816–1853*, Dixon Library, ADD 80–82, CY reel 3743, State Library of NSW.

95 See for instance Evans 1992: 7–30; Mackenzie-Smith 1992: 58–68; Reynolds and May 1995: 169.

96 George King to Ernest Hawkins, 1 January 1846, United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, *Records* [hereafter *USPG*], AJCP M1222, SLV; McNair and Rumley 1981: 42–43; Toussaint 1995: 245.

97 First Report of the Australian Church Missionary Society, c1837, in Colonial Church Society (CCS), *Report of the Australian Church Missionary Society, now formed into the Colonial Church Society, 1838–1840*: 2–3.

98 CCS, *Colonial Church Record*, vol 1, no 2, September 1838: 25–29.

99 Rev George King to Rev E Hawkins, 9 Sep 1841, *USPG*, AJCP M1222, SLV; Rev George King to Rev E Hawkins, 28 Oct 1841, *USPG*, AJCP M1222, SLV.

did not necessarily mean that relations were hostile, however; as in the other colonies, some Indigenous people apparently hoped to utilise connections with missionaries. George King claimed in 1847 that people in King George's Sound, suffering greatly through dispossession, had requested a missionary, asking 'what time you make native school? boy & girl plenty go.'¹⁰⁰ Unlike in the east, though, the missionaries' aim here was to incorporate young Indigenous people into the labouring classes of colonial society, instead of isolating them – a policy due partly to the initial scarcity of migration and convict labour in this colony.¹⁰¹

Another element that made Western Australian philanthropists unusual was their stronger denominational competition. John Smithies complained to the WMMS that 'Romish emissaries' were trying to lure his students away to the Sisters of Mercy school. Such complaints may have had an ulterior motive; Smithies, who wanted greater funding, commented pointedly that the 'Romanists' had sent a large group of priests into the wilderness (they would later establish New Norcia mission); 'in zeal and labours, and privations, they outdo us.'¹⁰² George King was similarly concerned about Catholic missionaries, but he was also suspicious of Smithies himself and horrified in 1846 when the government suggested merging his small Anglican school with the Wesleyan one. He wrote to the Bishop of Australia:

This would be a sad alternative indeed: these native children have been educated under the nurture & admonition of the Church ... since they were first taught to lisp the English tongue; & now that they are able to mingle their voices with that of the people of God in the sanctuary, & to join in the responses of our beautiful liturgy ... must we now cast them off & constitute them aliens & disinherit them from the blessings & privileges of the Church?¹⁰³

He fretted that the colonial government meant to combat Catholicism by encouraging Methodism;

in attempting to shun the Scylla of popery, we have dashed our precious charge against the Charybdis of dissent; & thus robbed our children of the high & holy principles which we have inherited through the church, from our fathers.¹⁰⁴

This rivalry may have stemmed from the greater proximity of different mission stations around Swan River, and perhaps also the greater Western Australian

100 Rev George King to Rev E Hawkins, 11 June 1847, *USPG*, AJCP M1222, SLV.

101 Hetherington 1992: 41, 47–48; Hetherington 2002: 34–35, 116–117

102 WMMS, *Report of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society for the year ending April 1845*, April 1848: 37–39.

103 Rev George King to the Bishop of Australia, 9 April 1846, *USPG*, AJCP M1222, SLV.

104 Rev George King to the Bishop of Australia, 9 April 1846, *USPG*, AJCP M1222, SLV.

belief that Indigenous people might prove useful members of colonial society. This is not to say, though, that the spectre of missionary failure was absent. By 1840, for example, Western Australian protector Peter Barrow was already stating that his hopes for Indigenous people were low. He called them unpredictable and treacherous, concluding 'They have no inclination for civilization and a strong dislike to be interfered with.'¹⁰⁵

It has been commonplace for scholars to assess Australia's first Indigenous missions and protectorates as failures, and given philanthropists' disputes with settlers and government, their rare conversions, and their often gloomy evaluations of their own work, this is unsurprising. However, such a dismissive conclusion is problematic. These philanthropists were part of a vital, passionate conversation about colonialism, which stretched from personal encounters with Indigenous people to Evangelical publications in Britain. Furthermore, the spectre of mission failure did not emerge simply as a result of local obstacles. It was present from the start and was in many ways constitutive of Australian missionary work and Aboriginal policy-making. The prospect of spiritual failure and Indigenous doom could be interpreted by philanthropists initially as a challenge, part of a redemptive struggle, yet its long term implications were far more ominous.

¹⁰⁵ Peter Barrow to Ernest Hawkins, 15 November 1840, also Peter Barrow to Ernest Hawkins, 29 July 1840, Peter Barrow to Ernest Hawkins, 10 August 1840, *USPG*, AJCP M1222, SLV.