THE

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PAPER

WAR

MORALITY, PRINT CULTURE, AND POWER IN COLONIAL NEW SOUTH WALES
In February 1832, Rev. Lancelot Edward Threlkeld was named by George Bennet as one of the ‘perpetual blisters’ that the London Missionary Society seemed ‘destined to carry’. Bennet nominated Threlkeld and eight others as key troublemakers: such men were ‘the least efficient (not in capability as to talents but in disposition and in fact)’ and ‘the most troublesome and dangerous to the welfare of the Society, and the cause’. Shown to be opinionated, self-regarding, litigious, and pious, Threlkeld disrupted each of the colonies in which he operated.

Threlkeld clearly wanted to strike an heroic pose in colonial evangelical work. He agitated to be moved from one mission station to another until he found a field that he considered worthy of his talents and ambitions. He finally found in New South Wales a nascent colonial culture in which, as the sole London Missionary Society (LMS) missionary, he hoped to make a significant contribution to both indigenous welfare and Christian culture; more significantly, perhaps, he imagined that here he would operate outside the restrictions of LMS
hierarchy and British society. When he discovered that he had to share the moral high ground with religious and humanitarian men who frequently possessed more education, social status, and influence than himself, Threlkeld’s worst character traits emerged: he published a ‘pamphlet of crimination’ against Rev. Samuel Marsden, the sole Australian Director of the LMS; he sued the Presbyterian clergyman, Rev. John Dunmore Lang, for maligning his character; and he alienated himself from most of the white settlers in Australia and the imperial gentlemen in Britain who could provide him with allies, advice, and financial assistance. Yet along with his imprudent gestures, Threlkeld located himself (not unproblematically, and certainly ambiguously) within another colonial community: that of the Aboriginal peoples rapidly being dispossessed by the spread of the very imperial culture that Threlkeld represented. It is this curious, uncomfortable, and interstitial position on the margins of colonialism that makes Threlkeld intriguing. It is a position which allows us to see the ways in which white men like Threlkeld ‘become colonial’: not simply as the descent of a mantle of authority and power, but as a bitterly contested negotiation of class, authority, and morality.

This book places this troublesome, divisive, and complex man at its centre. It does so to map a particular site within the archives of colonial Australia and the British Empire: the texts which relate to the Lake Macquarie mission in New South Wales in the 1820s and 30s. Tony Ballantyne argues compellingly for the value of reconceptualising empire as a web, rather than the old centre-periphery model of imperial history (and, indeed, much postcolonial literary criticism), for this enables a focus on empire as a ‘structure, a complex system of overlapping and interwoven institutions, organizations, ideologies, and discourses’. It enables us to see the interconnected nature of this structure and to identify different parts of the imperial archive as nodes in a larger project of imperial knowledge production. When allied to Alan Lester’s ‘imperial networks’, this provides a flexible and productive way to move beyond national boundaries and parochial debates. Lester emphasises the ways in which colonial sites were ‘knitted together within a global cultural and political fabric’ through British colonial discourses that were
'made and remade, rather than simply transferred or imposed, through the “geographies of connection” between Britain and settler colonies'.

A group of religious and humanitarian men surrounded the Lake Macquarie mission, literally in colonial New South Wales and by correspondence from around the British imperial world: these men embodied the particular ‘geographies of connection’ that connected Lake Macquarie to London, Auckland, Raiatea, and Cape Town, among other locations. In this network, Threlkeld functions often as a disuniting agent of Empire, rather than a knitter, and because of this he provides just the kind of opposition that reveals the precariousness of imperial ideas as they are being worked out in the colonies.

Threlkeld and the religious men who formed the Lake Macquarie network have generated a vast body of texts about this controversial colonial project. A ‘paper war’ is the phrase Threlkeld used to describe the proliferation of writing around him during his time, usually in relation to some local controversy, often of his own creation. The Lake Macquarie archive is a hydra-headed collection which is found in repositories in Australia and Britain, in major institutional archives and in minor personal holdings. Focusing on Threlkeld draws together this material in ways which are unexpected and compelling, and which reveal how colonial knowledge was generated and dispersed both locally and internationally through the mechanisms of Empire. Threlkeld is situated in relation to a local, colonial network, but this network has always been connected to the broader imperial world. The texts pertaining to Threlkeld’s Lake Macquarie mission demonstrate the two kinds of movement that Ballantyne identifies within imperial archives: centripetal – ‘as various webs of correspondence, institutional exchanges, and publication networks draw material together into the archival space where it is collected, organized, and stored’ – and centrifugal, ‘centers from which knowledge was distributed, whether through the act of reading, correspondence, the intertextual nature of print culture, or the exchange of manuscript or printed material’. The circulation of texts and ideas around colonial New South Wales and the British imperial network shows the generative nature of centripetal and centrifugal processes, particularly at a
destabilised site of empire such as the unsuccessful and divisive Lake Macquarie mission.

As a literary scholar, I find these new models of empire compelling, not least because they enable a focus on texts and the material conditions of their production, circulation, and influence. I spend long hours in archives, entranced by following the traces of lives and individuals and intrigued by the ways in which one document leads through a rabbit-hole of correspondence and citation to another so that each reader makes their own ‘web’ of information and meaning. Yet because this is a literary/cultural study, it examines the archive as a set of writing and reading practices, seeking to make different meanings than an historian might. *The Paper War* retells stories found in archives as well as revealing modes of construction, in order to create new narratives. It foregrounds the complexity (perhaps the impossibility) of efforts to establish coherent, credible narratives from partial sources. Robert Blair St George, working on archives of early America, likewise asserts the possibilities for uncovering ‘new pasts that reveal the cultural processes of becoming colonial’: such a claim ‘suggests those pasts are creatively invented rather than “discovered” in the arid climate of the archive’.9 Like St George and others, *The Paper War* approaches the archive as a highly charged site but it uses the archive to conduct an ethnography of white colonial culture rather than of Aboriginal Australia, for example, or as a site from which evidence can be extracted in a simple way.10

Ann Laura Stoler’s *Along the Archival Grain* (2009) foregrounds ‘the ethnographic space of the colonial archives’. In this space, she argues, ‘truth-claims compete, impervious or fragile, crushed by the weight of convention or resilient in the immediate threat of the everyday; where trust is put to the test and credibility wavers’.11 *The Paper War* circles around the deeply politicised debates that have characterised Australia’s history wars, but it pursues different questions about Australia’s colonial past. I ask not what evidence can be found to support a historical proposition but rather how a particular subset of the imperial archive – debates surrounding the Lake Macquarie mission – was created? What exactly are the texts from which warring historians draw their evidence? Can we rely on these texts as stable and authentic
guides to the past? What are the institutional structures – and individual actors within such institutions – that produced these archival traces?

Threlkeld serves as a conveniently situated guide through these questions. He is a minor figure in the debates between Henry Reynolds and Keith Windschuttle, but he is more interesting than either writer has made him appear. Threlkeld found himself in a range of seemingly contradictory roles in New South Wales. As he explained in 1838, he had a ‘threelfold office’:

1st As PROTECTOR – To which circumstances called me, ever since 1825.
2nd As INTERPRETER – In many cases which unhappily occurred at the Supreme Court, when several were transported and others hanged.
3rd As EVANGELIST – In making known the Gospel to the Aborigines in their own language, &c.\textsuperscript{12}

Threlkeld stressed that in these roles he had ‘endeavoured to act conscientiously and justly towards my own countrymen as well as to the aborigines’, but by 1826, Threlkeld had informed the LMS that he could not minister to both white settlers and Aborigines: ‘To be explicit no man can serve two masters, I cannot serve the Blacks and the Whites’. His assessment of the conflict between settler expansion and humanitarian interests was very clear: ‘No man, who comes to this Colony and has ground and cattle and Corn, can dispassionately view the subject of the blacks, their interest says annihilate the race’.\textsuperscript{13} Threlkeld chose to put his lot in with the cause of the Aborigines: ‘I glory in this work because it is so much despised, so much considered as utterly impossible’.\textsuperscript{14} With this self-sacrificial – or vain-glorying – gesture, Threlkeld set himself up in opposition to most white settlers, including other religious colonial figures such as Marsden and Lang, who held pastoral and agricultural interests.

In 2000, Windschuttle published in the conservative magazine \textit{Quadrant} a series of articles that sought to debunk claims made by revisionist Australian historians as to the nature and statistical significance of cross-cultural colonial violence. His third article attacked Henry Reynolds’ published history of
white humanitarian activists. As Threlkeld was one of Reynolds’ representative figures in *This Whispering in Our Hearts* (1998), he became a target for Windschuttle’s own revisionism. Their debate is, in part, about the reliability of Threlkeld’s testimony as historical fact – an insoluble argument in empirical terms, as it is based on subjective assessments of his writing and its authority. For Reynolds, Threlkeld is one of a number of ‘disturbing and even dangerous agitators’ convinced of their rectitude, who, for their efforts, were portrayed ‘as self-righteous, disturbing, dangerous, obsessive or mad’.15 For Windschuttle, Threlkeld had ‘an obsessive desire’ to exaggerate colonial violence to ensure his continued employment and may have ‘intentionally exaggerated’ the size of the pre-contact Aboriginal population so as to emphasise post-contact decline. Windschuttle opines that ‘his conscience must have been troubled at times by some of the gruesome details and inflated numbers he could not help himself adding to his tales’.16 Windschuttle’s gratuitous impugning of the integrity of his targets hardly promises to advance debate, but this dispute makes clear the cultural value that missionary texts continue to exercise in contemporary Australia. Given that such narratives continue to be replayed – directly, in debates between Reynolds and Windschuttle, and indirectly in popular understandings of relationships between missionaries and Aborigines – detailed analysis is crucial. Nicholas Thomas suggests that, instead of providing ‘alternative heroes’ to a celebratory national narrative, we need to understand the colonial past ‘as a set of transactions and relations that may be inaccessible to a national narrative, and morally incoherent or intractable today’. Only in this way will we be able to make the essential move: ‘to make the past less predictable’.17

Much about Threlkeld and the Lake Macquarie archive may appear predictable because of the accessibility to scholars, Aboriginal and non-indigenous community researchers, and general readers of key texts published in Niel Gunson’s (ed.) *Australian Reminiscences and Papers of L. E. Threlkeld* (1974). Gunson’s meticulous retrieval and impeccable annotation of many archival documents ensured that *Australian Reminiscences* is an oft-thumbed resource for those working on colonial history, cross-cultural contact, and anthropology, amongst others.18 More
recently, concerted digitisation work has broadened access to Threlkeld’s original documents, extending both the circulation of texts and the uses to which they are put. Making cultural heritage available online is changing the nature of the colonial archive, hundreds of years after its creation, by allowing us to make connections between bodies of documents that previously seemed separate. For example, Threlkeld’s linguistic studies were not included in *Australian Reminiscences* yet their digitisation means that they are now regularly considered alongside those ethnographic papers. Also not included are many of the texts under analysis in *The Paper War*. Like newspaper reports, these documents might have informed the scholarly apparatus, but not featured as independent texts. In *The Imperial Archive* (1993) Thomas Richards aptly describes the British Empire as ‘a paper empire’, characterised by vast information-gathering and publication made possible by nineteenth-century print technologies, even if the very excess of that imperial archive inevitably evaded control. New approaches to the archive shift debate by rethinking how meaning is made: ‘what counts as knowledge and who is in power to record their versions of it’ is central to colonial ethnography, Ann Laura Stoler suggests.

Interdisciplinary work, such as conducted in this study, brings together unexpected sources and approaches in order to see around the conventions of disciplines and their attendant presumptions. In *Making a Social Body* (1995), Mary Poovey argues that ‘it makes a difference to treat history-writing and textual analysis as facets of a single enterprise’ because it enables an approach that draws upon the explanatory power of both domains and reveals the constitutive role of narrative in the formation of culture. Materialist textual analysis also asks where those foundational texts come from, and by situating them within their originary domain of representation can reveal elements obscured by their extraction into a biographically-ordered collection. Stoler finds the Dutch colonial archives ‘a corpus of statements and a depot of documents, both sites of the imaginary and institutions that fashioned histories as they concealed, revealed, and contradicted the investments of the state’. The expanded Lake Macquarie archive lends itself to a similar approach.
Threlkeld’s missionary work meant that he became involved in colonial state institutions when they were under construction and particularly vulnerable to sectional interests. The 1820s and 1830s – Threlkeld’s most active involvement in the public sphere – was a liminal period between the predominance of penal and settler interests, a time when institutions had to shift to serve the community’s changing constituencies and ideologies. Positioning Threlkeld at the interstices of colonial society provides a vantage point from which to see the strange and difficult birth of the early settler state.

Because Threlkeld interacted strategically with key colonial institutions, the written trace of his public service – his texts and those produced by the Lake Macquarie network – is deeply implicated in the production and circulation of various ‘modalities of colonial knowledge’. These texts reveal Threlkeld’s enmeshment in institutions central to the colonial state: central, that is, because they regulate and license particular forms of subjectivity. Chapters two to five of this book locate these texts and their generative cultural history within four nodes of the imperial archive: language studies, newspapers, and civil and criminal law records. These texts frequently operate within key institutions – scientific societies, the media, the civil and criminal courts – which were in formation at this time in colonial New South Wales, and across the British Empire. In this way, I examine the discursive construction of colonial state institutions and the kinds of subjects and subjectivities that these structures authorised, allowing us to ask fundamental questions about Australian colonial culture: What could be said, publicly, and with what authority? In what spaces could things be said and by whom? Such institutions are centrally concerned with the construction and control of information; they regulate what is knowledge (what is true, what can be heard, what can be admissible) and reveal the intrinsic links between public discourse, colonial knowledge, and power.

Threlkeld was one of the first Europeans to study Aboriginal languages, and his translations of the language of the people near his Lake Macquarie mission were the first published word lists and grammars. Threlkeld’s work in colonial linguistics was pioneering, despite a lack of training and a functional motivation
for language collection (to effect evangelisation). At a time when, as he reported with outrage, many other settlers considered Indigenous languages as ‘the mere chatter of babboons [sic]’, Threlkeld found them to possess a completeness and extent, by the most simple combinations, that must eventually combat and defeat the bold yet groundless assertions of many who maintain, ‘that the blacks of New South Wales are incapable of receiving instruction’.25

For fifteen years Threlkeld worked closely with an Aboriginal man, Biraban, studying Awabakal language. His extended and careful explorations provide evidence of a multifaceted Indigenous culture even as he proposed to replace it with British Christianity. Threlkeld sent his linguistic studies to interested gentlemen in the colonies and in Britain. In ‘Colonial Linguistics’ Joseph Errington aptly describes the ‘collateral uses’ that empire made of such descriptive linguistic projects, suggesting that ‘language difference could become a resource – like gender, race, and class – for figuring and naturalizing inequality in the colonial milieux’.26 Chapter two analyses these matters in detail.

Many of the debates surrounding the Lake Macquarie mission were played out in the public domain. The religious men involved in the mission were prominent figures and their activities and attitudes were disseminated and critiqued in the colonial newspapers. Threlkeld’s involvement with the civil courts represents another modality of colonial knowledge production and connects him to the press: two important interlinked state institutions. The early years of the print media in New South Wales were highly competitive. Questions about ownership, audience, and content were under debate, and the public closely scrutinised relationships between competing newspapers, journalists, editors, and the government. The controversial events surrounding Threlkeld and the Lake Macquarie mission were avidly reported. Gossip circulated about the way Threlkeld ran the mission, what the LMS thought of his work, and the strained relationships between Threlkeld and Marsden. Threlkeld used the press to argue his case.
These media texts allow us to see how local colonial newspapers reported a transnational ‘imagined community’ with full awareness of provincials in other places. They reveal the ways in which these public figures made use of the media to construct and defend their roles and reputations. As Julie F. Codell notes, nineteenth-century readers ‘derived their sense of their own and others’ places and spaces from the press’, and the newspapers figured as a significant site ‘for the production and re-production of national identities’. The high visibility of the Lake Macquarie mission and its religious figures demonstrate that issues central to projects in New South Wales attracted considerable public attention and, in reporting, the colonial press provided a mechanism to work through broader questions and notions of colonial society: What, exactly, was the morality of colonisation? What relationship did Aborigines have towards the colonial state? Whose responsibility was their protection? Why could not the public upholders of morality – clergymen and missionaries – resolve these questions? And what was the role of Christian morality in a penal colony rapidly reinventing itself as a settler state through commerce and pastoral expansion? Chapter three situates Threlkeld and his heated debates about the morality of colonial processes within the press.

Civil litigation was very pervasive in the early years of the colony, when ‘Everyone, seemingly, sued everyone else’, and as chapter four demonstrates maintaining a good public reputation was crucial to religious men in New South Wales. Rev. Lang’s critical articles on ‘Aboriginal Missions’ resulted in a high-profile libel case: Threlkeld v. Lang (1836). The spectacle of two colonial religious men at loggerheads attracted crowds of onlookers and press and it reveals the highly contested nature of white middle-class identity in early colonial cultures.

Threlkeld used his familiarity with Aboriginal language to work as an interpreter at the new Supreme Court. The criminal courts constitute the third key institution of the nascent state in which he engaged, and chapter five examines Threlkeld’s involvement in cases pertaining to Indigenous people. Throughout the early years of the colony, debate had raged about the legal status of Aborigines. Were they entitled to the protection of the law? Could they be tried under English law? Could they bring
cases themselves? As Jane Samson puts it, 'At stake is nothing less than the history of who could speak within the colonial justice system.' When Threlkeld and Biraban appeared at the Supreme Court to translate for Aboriginal defendants, they were effectively enabling Aborigines as legal subjects. They appeared at a number of court cases in the late 1820s and 1830s, with varied results.

Like many other humanitarian activists of the early nineteenth century, Threlkeld was motivated by 'enlightenment concepts of equality, human rights and justice to the oppressed' in his translations in criminal cases. The contradictions of his work here reveal the contested nature of legal institutions and European principles in early New South Wales. The extremely limited role of the Aboriginal defendants in the court records reminds us of the 'role of legal processes in creating historical narratives of [indigenous] identity and [indigenous] invisibility', as Ann Marie Plane remarks of colonial New England. It also threw into relief what Samson refers to as 'empire’s self-doubts'. Threlkeld’s activism revealed the failings of the British legal system. His involvement in criminal cases demonstrated the impossibility of conclusive legal arguments or judgements regarding Aborigines, and thus the precarious and unstable forms of knowledge that were being generated on the colonial frontier, only inadequately and partially managed by the legal system.

Threlkeld’s involvement in each of these institutions ensured that his actions and views concerning colonial expansion were part of the developing public sphere – the space between state and society. Geoff Eley draws on Jürgen Habermas’s *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) to describe the gradual formation of the public sphere in nineteenth-century Europe. It involved bourgeois demands for representative government, a liberal constitution, and basic civil liberties, such as freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, and access to justice: 'the public sphere presumed the prior transformation of social relations, their condensation into new institutional arrangements, and the generation of new social, cultural, and political discourse around this changing environment'. The evolution of the penal colony to a settler colony proper, around the 1820s, can be marked in its gradual development of these constitutive elements
of the bourgeois public sphere. Troubled by its proximity to the plebeian sphere – represented not only by convicts but also by emancipated men and women who rapidly assumed positions of influence and profited from mercantile opportunities – bourgeois colonial culture in New South Wales formed unevenly and belatedly. Middle-class identities were tenuous and vulnerable precisely because of their colonial location. Public institutions provided a mechanism by which these fundamental aspects of modern civility could be negotiated. It was through his engagement with elements of the bourgeois sphere that Threlkeld sought to establish himself as an authoritative public figure.

Threlkeld stands before all these institutions as a legal, speaking, and writing subject, yet his interactions reveal the improvisational and partial mechanisms of the colonial state. The civil and criminal law courts, the press, and scientific societies variously fall into the Marxist categories of repressive or ideological state apparatuses, but, as Louis Althusser suggests of the latter, each are not only the ‘stake, but also the site of class struggle, and often of bitter forms of class struggle’. Institutions attempt to interpellate individuals as subjects, yet the formative nature of colonial New South Wales in this period means that this process is remarkably variable. Attending to the complications of race in colonial environments is outside Althusser’s purview, yet colonial New South Wales demands that race and class be considered together. Talal Asad suggests that public institutions create ‘modern realities of a special kind’: such realities ‘are special in part because they define social relationships – for individuals as well as for corporate groups – in terms of legal “rights” and “duties” within the modern state’. Social relationships – and particularly the rights and duties of white colonials in relation to indigenous people – consume many of the humanitarian debates which contextualise the Lake Macquarie mission, and their regulation is critical to the cultural formation of settler identity and the colonial state.

‘Becoming colonial’ in New South Wales was an intricate process, as with other settler cultures. St George suggests colonial America engaged a range of symbolic practices to manage that process: ‘vernacular theories of and lived experience of race and racial mixture, commercial exchange, kinship
alliance, aesthetics, creolization, language, civility, savagery, and ambiguity concerning one’s social position and personal power’. Both the distance from Britain and the proximity of indigenous cultures disturbed any easy formation of settler subjectivities. White colonial subjectivity was formulated in relation to each of these prior authorities, even as Aboriginal culture was shamefully denigrated. It was not only the land that needed to be cleared for settler expansion, but the conceptual space in which white colonial subjects could flourish. Maintaining colonial authority necessarily required the control of other kinds of potential subject positions, such as colonial indigenous subjectivities; or at least maintained both the right and the necessity to represent those other positions. The paper war that preoccupied Threlkeld and other humanitarian activists was a minor skirmish in material terms compared to the battle being fought by Aboriginal people as their land and social structure were systematically consumed by colonial expansion. That these humanitarians regularly recognised and denounced the depredations of colonialism did not preclude them from benefiting from it. Reams of paper testify to Threlkeld’s commitment to exposing imperialism’s excesses, but they also reveal the negotiations that Aborigines made with settler colonialism in order to survive.

Before moving to a detailed analysis of each of the nodes of the imperial archive in which Threlkeld’s work and writing were embedded, chapter one maps Threlkeld and his mission as a contested site at the centre of a network of colonial commentators who functioned within imperial and humanitarian circles and who linked the key British and colonial activists for humanitarian ideas. The recursive design of this book, in which the biographical narratives of chapter one are followed by chapters that trace particular instances or aspects of Threlkeld’s colonial experience, should signal two things to the reader: this is not a biography of Threlkeld (at least not in a conventional sense); and the act of reading texts and tracing the movement of ideas complicates a chronological teleology.
Humanitarian networks and the British Empire

On establishing the Lake Macquarie mission in 1825, Daniel Tyerman and George Bennet printed a pamphlet which also functioned as an open letter to Threlkeld. It circulated in New South Wales and was sent back to Britain. In both form and content, the London Missionary Society (LMS) deputation established the public and performative nature of the role Threlkeld was about to assume:

The novelty of an undertaking which proposes the conversion of the debased Aborigines of this Country to Christianity, and their instruction in the arts of civilized life, will fix upon you the eyes of all in this Country especially, and the Christian world in general, and awaken at once a universal interest, and a peculiar curiosity in observing your operations, and in anticipating the results of the pending experiment.¹
An influential network of colonial and international commentators surrounded the formation and the dissolution of the Lake Macquarie mission, and their eyes remained fixed upon Threlkeld and his missionary work throughout his career. The nearest components of this imperial web were a group of religious men either temporarily or permanently based in Sydney: the LMS deputation of Rev. Daniel Tyerman and George Bennet who established the mission; the colonial chaplain for the Church of England and southern hemisphere LMS director Rev. Samuel Marsden; the Presbyterian clergyman and prominent social commentator Rev. John Dunmore Lang; and the travelling Quaker missionaries James Backhouse and George Washington Walker who visited most of the Australian colonies and many of its religious representatives in the 1830s. Each was linked through humanitarian associations to a range of religious and humanitarian reformers in Britain and her colonies. Like Threlkeld, these men were crucial to the production and circulation of humanitarian debates, even if sometimes they interacted acrimoniously. The men of the Lake Macquarie network were active participants in the reinvention of nineteenth-century British middle-class masculinity through the vehicles of empire and religion, and as such they reveal both the promise and the problems of Britain’s ‘second empire’. They were deeply embedded in the struggles over Britishness and settler identity that marked humanitarian debate both in the imperial metropole and in various colonies.

Just as Threlkeld’s working-class background was typical of the LMS’s early representatives, the middle-class solidity of the Lake Macquarie network which surrounded him (and which felt authorised to assess, advise, and adjudicate his work) exemplifies the ways in which colonial humanitarianism invented and consolidated nineteenth-century bourgeois identities. As a variety of new imperial historians have established, early nineteenth-century Protestant evangelicalism provided metropolitan middle-class groups with opportunities to establish social networks and associations that challenged the aristocratic hold on power. Churches, voluntary associations, and prayer meetings provided men and women of the newly emergent middle-class with connections to like-minded others, and with opportunities for social engagement that (particularly for women) might otherwise have been quite
limited. The politicised focus of these associations attracted many men and women of conscience, and linked those within Britain to expatriates serving in the colonies. The abolitionist cause had galvanised thousands of religious Britons, particularly at the evangelical end of spectrum, as a result of concerted campaigning from the pulpit and strenuous and successful fund-raising. Such political campaigns provided people with a chance to engage energetically in philanthropic and political activities, bringing about measurable public reform while satisfying their sense of both moral and social responsibility to those less fortunate.

For many, the anti-slavery movement galvanised their energy and experience for public action: its success left a community looking for a new cause. Zoë Laidlaw’s illuminating analysis of the evangelical men and women who supported Thomas Fowell Buxton, the influential member of parliament and chairman of the Aborigines Select Committee, shows how family members transferred their skills and attention from anti-slavery issues to broader humanitarian concerns in the British colonies. Laidlaw meticulously retrieves the critical role played by the Quaker Buxton/Gurney women behind the scenes of the deeply politicised Aborigines Select Committee, and shows the deliberate and strategic concealment of women’s involvement in what was perceived a male affair.

The new missionary societies of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were founded by men of commerce and Christianity, men who had achieved sufficient financial success in the relatively new sphere of middle-class business to be able to donate time and money to establishing mission societies. For them, evangelical religion was important in maintaining middle-class respectability and they performed their civic responsibilities through the church and mission societies. The evangelical revival of this period also provided a language of religious and national confidence, as Catherine Hall notes: ‘[r]eligious belief provided a vocabulary of right – the right to know and to speak that knowledge, with the moral power that was attached to the speaking of God’s word’. That authoritative vocabulary was naturally associated with, and appropriated by, those men already awarded cultural leadership. Thus masculinity became intricately tied to the exercise of this authority. As Hall describes
it, ‘for evangelical Christians the action of combating sin, of enlisting in the army of God provided a worthy arena within which they could prove their manhood’.\(^4\)

Each of the men in the Lake Macquarie network was involved in missionary societies and other religious organisations that linked Britain and the colonies. Although they represent various positions on the spectrum of evangelical Protestantism all were energised and enabled by the rise of evangelical concerns in the early nineteenth century. Focusing on the micro-level, the differences between their religious beliefs and ideologies become evident. There were disagreements even though from the outside they represented a core sample of the evangelical community. Hall describes the ‘missionary public [that] was one of the diverse publics which overlapped to create “the public sphere” of the nineteenth century’.\(^5\) Jürgen Habermas identifies the public sphere as a politically ‘functional element’ when given the status of ‘an organ for the self-articulation of civil society with a state authority corresponding to its needs’.\(^6\) Niel Gunson suggests evangelical Christians too were ‘encouraged to mould their environment according to their own convictions. Rarely could any society withstand the onslaught of the social ethic which had all the force of a class struggle?’.\(^7\) For men such as Tyerman, Bennet, Marsden, Lang, Backhouse, and Walker – as well as Threlkeld himself – evangelicalism enabled new forms of identity: in Hall’s terms, ‘the creation of new subjects, civilised and civilising subjects’.\(^8\) These forms of bourgeois identity were thus inextricably bound with ideas of empire, which connected forms of affiliation and responsibility beyond the limits of the nation.

Ann Laura Stoler’s identification of the densities of class relations in colonial contexts is particularly telling for any consideration of missionary and humanitarian projects, for as Stoler notes ‘the philanthropic moralizing mission that defined bourgeois culture in the nineteenth century cast a wide imperial net’. Stoler is insistent that ‘colonialism was not a secure bourgeois project. It was not only about the importation of middle-class sensibilities to the colonies, but about the making of them’.\(^9\) The humanitarian movement is a particularly explicit example of this negotiation of identities and ideologies across metropolitan and colonial sites. Alan Lester describes humanitarians in the
Cape Colony during the 1820s and 30s as peripheral groups who ‘strove continually to fashion circuits of communication with vital metropolitan interests, and thus to shape British understandings’ of colonial places and peoples. In such complex discursive relationships colonies and metropole were knitted together. Knowing about what was happening at the Cape, or in New South Wales, or at Morant Bay was crucial to British evangelicals, and the more adventurous of them made personal engagement with those places a priority. In this way, Lester suggests, we can imagine the situated humanitarian politics of a particular place as one part of the invention of a

new bourgeois subjectivity in Britain and its empire as a whole. An entire, uneven global network, and a discourse of humanitarianism was constructed during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, at least in part through middle-class opposition to aristocratic reaction at both colonial and metropolitan sites.10

As the following prosopographies demonstrate, each of the members of the Lake Macquarie network sought to be part of that broader evangelical community as well as seeking a role at the local level. Elizabeth Elbourne notes that the international connections that were crucial to the missionary movement’s early organisation ‘found direct expression both in the personal networks maintained by prominent evangelicals, especially clergymen, and in the public world of shared texts’.11 Men such as Lang had sufficient financial resources to make long sea voyages back to London regularly, and thus present opinions to British humanitarians and politicians in person, but others had to rely on epistolary networks, and letters streamed back to individuals and institutions key to religious debates in Britain and beyond. Crucially, it was in the field of textuality that the real battles of the Lake Macquarie mission were fought. Each member of the Lake Macquarie mission network produced the extensive array of texts – from private letters and diary entries, to official reports and plans for the new mission – expected of nineteenth-century missionaries. These texts are curious artefacts: both personal and institutional, private and public, they resound with
extraordinarily colourful, impassioned language and forceful political opinion. Their authors corresponded with key colonial figures, from governors to newspaper editors, and made a number of recommendations about progressing humanitarian cross-cultural relationships to improve the moral stature of both Aboriginal and settler communities. Despite their well-intentioned Christian sentiments, however, their texts reverberate with the Eurocentric rhetoric of the early nineteenth-century British Empire. More specifically, they simultaneously participate in and critique the discursive violence of colonialism.\textsuperscript{12}

Lancelot Threlkeld

Threlkeld’s biography has been variously recounted, from the early nineteenth-century pages of LMS missionary registers to twenty-first-century websites commemorating his service to Australian Aboriginal communities.\textsuperscript{13} This section provides a brief life narrative which emphasises the extraordinary distance – both literal and metaphorical – this man of empire travelled. In doing so, it establishes the prevailing ideologies of class and morality that formed Threlkeld in a cultural milieu that is profoundly typical of British evangelical missionaries in this period.

Threlkeld was born in 1788, the year the First Fleet arrived to establish the penal colony of New South Wales (Figure 1.1). Threlkeld’s understanding of his place within the British Empire was not, however, sparked by that natal coincidence. Instead, throughout his meagre childhood in London, Threlkeld imagined other imperial connections. Living with his aunt, who could provide more than his parents for the boy’s education and employment prospects, the teenaged Threlkeld was offered the opportunity of going to the West or East Indies as a sailor, but after a serious fall on board ship after only a few days, homesickness ensured his return home. This pattern of disappointing opportunities, or perhaps self-sabotaging incidents, in colonial climates became common throughout his life. On the death of his aunt, Threlkeld was able to buy himself out of an unsatisfactory apprenticeship when his restlessness fed a ‘strong inclination to go on the Stage’.\textsuperscript{14} Working at the Royal Circus and later the Royalty Theatre did not prove to be quite what he expected,
Figure 1.1 Lancelot Edward Threlkeld.
and, after his marriage in 1808 to Martha Goss, Threlkeld started a business. Financially troubled, he attempted a return to the acting profession (which he would later term ‘the School of Satan’) but was unable to secure work. Poor, unemployed, and under twenty-one years of age, Threlkeld and Martha had to reside with her friends in Devonshire and it was here that Threlkeld’s conversion to evangelical Protestantism began.

Convinced that God was angry with him (‘this was the reason that my affairs did not prosper’), Threlkeld struggled with depression. Intense religiosity promised an escape, both spiritual and geographic, and with his ‘Soul now filled with joy’, Threlkeld’s next plan was to serve the ‘heathen’ abroad. At first discouraged by Martha, however, he had to settle for becoming an itinerating preacher in ‘some of the dark parts of Devon’ until Martha later relented following an illness and extensive reading of missionary texts. Threlkeld had thought she might not survive the illness and he had insensitively mused that ‘no obstacle should be in the way of my going abroad’. The religious community in Devon supported Threlkeld’s application to the LMS and from 1814 he became one of their most regular (and often least welcome) correspondents. ‘We are not prepossessed in favour of any part of the World’, he assured the Directors in 1814, ‘wherever we may be thought most useful to Immortal Souls there may the Lord incline the Directors to send us’.

Such letters flooded into the LMS in the nineteenth century from young Protestant men eager to serve God and Empire in foreign lands. The LMS was founded in 1794, and in the following century rapidly became the largest and most influential British missionary society. Broad-based and non-denominational, at least in theory, its home constituency was nonconformist or dissenting church-goers, aspiring working-class and middle-class Britons whose solid respectability and public spiritedness was consolidated by charity. In its early history, the LMS attracted and appointed mostly working-class men as its representatives abroad, even if its culture firmly inculcated middle-class values and identities. Susan Thorne’s cultural history of the LMS in Britain during this period shows that the foreign missionary movement was ‘one among the myriad sites at which ordinary Britons encountered the colonies’, and missionary ties profoundly
influenced social relations within nonconformist communities and beyond. Attending religious meetings, reading magazines and books published by missionary societies, and collecting money for foreign missions were key leisure activities for the ‘real Christians’ who emerged from the evangelical revivals of the late eighteenth century. Thorne notes: ‘It is a commonplace in Victorian historiography that evangelicalism “set the tone of British society”, that evangelicalism inspired much of what we think about when we consider Victorian values’. The LMS, as the ‘largest evangelical institution peddling its spiritual wares in the arena of empire’, was at the very heart of evangelical Britons’ understanding of religious responsibility.

Whilst evangelical ideologies proved to be an important vector of Victorian identities, they were also intimately entwined with that other great social force of the century: imperialism. Thorne argues that missionary experience contributed to the making and remaking of social relations in metropolitan Britain itself. Missionary imperial identities were not alternatives to but were the medium through which domestic identities of class as well as gender were forged.

Indeed, the evangelical movement sought to make a profound impact on imperial representation and ideology, and on British self-fashioning at both an individual and a national scale. Across the Empire, British missionary commentators sought, by their zeal, to remake colonial projects in the image of religious conversion and in doing so they remade domestic British identities as well. In this way, life narratives of men such as Threlkeld become significant not only individually, but as part of wider national and imperial stories.

From the moment that the LMS appointed Threlkeld, he sought to undermine the hierarchical relationship that existed between the LMS and their missionary representatives. Specifically, he sought to position himself quite carefully within the imperial realm in which the LMS operated. Initially employed to go to
Africa, Threlkeld never truly accepted his subsequent posting to Polynesia. Despite agreeing to LMS appointment regulations to obey their decisions without question, by 1815 Threlkeld sought to convince the directors that he would be more gainfully employed in their new mission ‘to the Afghans and to the Tartars’ than their established Polynesian mission because of ‘the smallness of the Islands, the inconsiderable number of their respective Inhabitants and the large number of Missionaries at that Station...being already there’. Besides, he suggested, ‘It is the most earnest desire of my Soul to preach Christ crucified, and to do it not upon another Man’s foundation would be inexpressibly delightful’. Threlkeld’s desire to find an originary colonial landscape on which to make his mark – prefiguring Bronislaw Malinowski’s ‘imagined primal scene of the anthropological encounter’ in New Guinea – ensured that when he stopped at South America on his way to Polynesia he again petitioned the LMS. Choosing to break the voyage in Rio de Janeiro to ameliorate his wife’s and child’s health (Martha had given birth to a sickly son on the voyage from England, and the child died in Rio soon after their arrival), Threlkeld found troubling signs of competing empires, both religious and economic in nature. ‘There are swarms of monks &c. but no Inquisition’, he reported: ‘It is very shocking to our feelings to see the shiploads of slaves brought and sold at this place. When will that abominable traffic cease’. Discovering that the English settlers in Rio were keen to retain a Protestant minister, soon this temporary stop en route seemed to provide him with a ‘providential’ opportunity of ‘improving this Harvest which is fully ripe’. The LMS disagreed, and after their third reply insisting that Threlkeld leave Rio, he finally acquiesced, albeit ungraciously:

it is solely from your peremptory order accompanied with the threats of disgracing my character as a Missionary and of withholding your support by which means the most effectual Method is taken to prevent the entrance of the Gospel in S. America that I leave this place.

Travelling to Polynesia via New Zealand – where he reported of the Church Missionary Society station that ‘the management
of the affairs of this Mission...is very improperly done by a Majority’ – and the Australian colonies, Threlkeld finally arrived at the island of Moorea in 1817, two years after leaving London. His first letter from here to Marsden reported officially on the behaviour of his fellow missionaries:

I am glad to find Mr Ellis has behaved with the greatest propriety since his arrival, not so with Mr Orsmond who has I am informed by the Old Missionaries been in the habit of getting frequently intoxicated you may judge how far this is correct or at least a probability of the truth of it when you are informed that all their abundant supply of wine &c. is consumed by them already, such things ought not to be!

Threlkeld’s elongated and argumentative passage from the imperial centre to his allocated mission station clearly demonstrates his difficult personality, characterised by a high self-regard and a pompous and self-righteous sense of moral and intellectual superiority. It also demonstrates his tendency to put in writing matters that more prudent men might have withheld. It is evident that the controversies that almost continually surrounded Threlkeld were in some regard a result of his infuriating character. Yet these personal weaknesses ensured that he identified strongly with the marginalised and dispossessed, and that he invested fully in the complex colonial politics of each location he inhabited. What for some missionaries might have been local issues of little significance to their greater commitment to God became highly personal crusades for Threlkeld and the means through which he negotiated his identity and authority. One of the new breed of missionaries sent to reinvigorate the LMS Pacific missions after 1815, Threlkeld and his companions were ‘supposedly better trained than their predecessors, more practical and less pietistic, more appreciative of knowledge for its own sake, more imbued with a sense of their own destiny’. In his clashes with earlier generations of missionaries and their evangelical practices, Threlkeld demonstrates the reinvention of missionary subjectivities in particularly modern terms.

Threlkeld worked closely with two of the most significant missionaries of his generation. He was ordained at Kensington
Chapel in London with William Ellis, and he shared his mission station in Polynesia with John Williams. Ellis and Williams became figureheads of the modern missionary movement: Ellis in his role as a prominent author and later LMS Director; Williams because he would become the ‘Martyr Missionary of Polynesia’.\(^{30}\) Ellis wrote the foundational two-volume *Polynesian Researches* (1829) which was key to the emergent genre of missionary ethnography, a form of writing about the heathen other that enacts the new ‘scientific’ mode of early nineteenth-century evangelising.\(^{31}\) Christopher Herbert argues that missionary ethnography is often

so impressive as science as to overthrow entirely the notion that the rigorous, methodologically sophisticated study of primitive society began with the establishment of the twentieth-century vocation of fieldwork by ‘scientific specialists’.

Yet it also embodies a paradoxical dilemma: ‘how can a Christian missionary justify laboring to preserve in minute detail the memory of a satanically inspired system of degradation and evil? Is not oblivion its proper fate?’\(^{32}\) Williams’ *Missionary Enterprises* foregrounds the other major element of the new evangelism in the Pacific: trade and labour reform.\(^{33}\) Less scientifically impressive than *Polynesian Researches*, *Missionary Enterprises* nonetheless was a bestseller.\(^{34}\) A highly constructed, ideologically and politically conscious text, it successfully advertised LMS evangelising in the Pacific. Threlkeld’s association with these two innovative men of the LMS continued throughout their respective careers and, while Threlkeld was never as prominent or famous as either, he obviously shared the modern evangelical principles of Williams and Ellis.\(^{35}\)

Threlkeld did not settle down when he eventually reached the Society Island group. He spent time on Moorea, before moving to Huahine in 1818, then moving again to Raiatea, where he remained from 1818 to 1824. At no point did Threlkeld accept his position within the mission community, for he regularly criticised the first generation of LMS missionaries and continually asked to leave Polynesia. Threlkeld’s writing from
this period of his imperial career inaugurates a focus on the precariousness of white identities that typifies his despatches from the southern hemisphere for the rest of his life. His letters provide repeated evidence of missionary misbehaviour, or suspected transgressions, but details of religious ministry are rare. Threlkeld clearly undertook his religious duties with diligence and skill,\(^\text{36}\) though one wonders how he found the time amongst his voluminous correspondence and various campaigns against pre-existing missionaries and missionary practices. William Burd, an itinerating preacher in Devon, wrote to Threlkeld:

> I am glad that your allowance is at last made certain; now you can go on more easily. I am glad that you opposed the wicked conduct of Mr Davies; and trust the Lord had this design among others in sending you where you are. But your main concern is to save souls...Think of the value of 1000 souls.\(^\text{37}\)

Burd’s admonition to Threlkeld – to focus on ‘the individual success of your own labours’ rather than the failures of other missionaries and the immorality of Islanders – did not make a difference to his modus operandi.

Forced to capitulate to the authority of his missionary elders, Threlkeld continued to chafe under the strictures of Pacific mission stations. But in early 1824, Martha Threlkeld’s short illness and subsequent death provided him with an opportunity to leave Polynesia with dignity. He was going to find another wife: the LMS had learnt by experience that it was not wise to leave unmarried men in Polynesia. Threlkeld joined the visiting LMS deputation, Tyerman and Bennet, on their voyage to the Australian colonies. In Sydney, Tyerman and Bennet found ‘a party of the natives...surely, there never trod on the face of this earth more abject creatures’. They reported: ‘All attempts to civilize the savage occupants have been fruitless; – it must be confessed, however, that those attempts have been few and feeble’.\(^\text{38}\) By October, the deputation had negotiated with Sir Thomas Brisbane, then governor of New South Wales, for a land grant of 10,000 acres on which to institute a new mission station outside Newcastle, with Threlkeld as the sole missionary.