‘Such Spiritual Acres’

Protestantism, the land and the colonisation of Australia, 1788-1850

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the transmission of Protestantism to Australia by the early British colonists and its consequences for their engagement with the land between 1788 and 1850. It explores the ways in which colonists gave religious meaning to their surrounds, particularly their use of exile and exodus narratives to describe journeying to the colony and their sense of their destination as a site of banishment, a wilderness or a Promised Land. The potency of these scriptural images for colonising Europeans has been recognised in North America and elsewhere: this study establishes and details their significance in early colonial Australia.

This thesis also considers the ways in which colonists’ Protestant values mediated their engagement with their surrounds and informed their behaviour towards the land and its indigenous inhabitants. It demonstrates that leading Protestants asserted and acted upon their particular values for industry, order, mission and biblicism in ways that contributed to the transformation of Aboriginal land. From the physical changes wrought by industrious agricultural labour through to the spiritual transformations achieved by rites of consecration, their specifically Protestant values enabled Britons to inhabit the land on familiar material and cultural terms.

The structural basis for this study is provided by thematic biographies of five prominent colonial Protestants: Richard Johnson, Samuel Marsden, William Grant Broughton, John Wollaston and John Dunmore Lang. The private and public writings of these men are examined in light of the wider literature on religion and colonialism and environmental history. By delineating the significance of Protestantism to individual colonists’ responses to the land, this thesis confirms the trend of much recent British and Australian historiography towards a more religious understanding of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Its overarching argument is that Protestantism helped lay the foundation for colonial society by encouraging the transformation of the environment according to the colonists’ values and needs, and by providing ideological support for the British use and occupation of the territory. Prominent Protestants applied their religious ideas to Australia in ways that tended to assist, legitimate or even necessitate the colonisation of the land.
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CONTENTS

Abstract 1

Introduction: Another Noah’s Ark 4

One: British Origins 26
   Religion and society in the eighteenth and early
   nineteenth centuries

Two: Exile and Colonisation 44
   Richard Johnson and the first British colonists of
   New South Wales

Three: Salvation and Conciliation 85
   First missionary encounters at Sydney Cove

Four: An Agricultural Imagination 121
   Samuel Marsden’s cultivation of soils and souls

Five: Inducing Industrious Habits 157
   Samuel Marsden’s attitudes to convicts and Aborigines

Six: Church and Country 191
   William Grant Broughton’s travels in eastern Australia

Seven: A Way in the Wilderness 233
   John Wollaston in Western Australia

Eight: Populating the Promised Land 264
   John Dunmore Lang’s promotion of Protestant
   migration to eastern Australia

Conclusion: ‘Such Spiritual Acres’ 297

Bibliography 318
George Worgan’s sense of humour came in handy during early 1788. ‘I think I hear you saying ‘Where the D--ce is Sydney Cove Port Jackson?’’ the junior surgeon joked in his first letter home to England after an eight-month journey to a ‘wild and uncultivated’ place on the opposite side of the world.\footnote{George Worgan, \textit{Journal of a First Fleet Surgeon}, Library Council of New South Wales & Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1978, p. 1. The ‘wild and uncultivated’ phrase is Richard Johnson’s. See Johnson, 16 April 1794, in John Moore – Papers of Richard Johnson and Samuel Marsden, ARCH/P/Moore22, Lambeth Palace Library, London, p.2; copy at MAV/FM3/476, Mitchell Library, Sydney.} The answer, he explained, was a good ten weeks’ voyage beyond ‘the last civilised country we should touch at,’ the Cape of Good Hope.\footnote{Worgan, \textit{Journal of a First Fleet Surgeon}, p. 1.} It is impossible to know whether, upon reading this, his brother Richard laughed. It is unlikely that many of his immediate companions found their situation funny, though. They had left behind everything they found familiar and ventured beyond the limits of what they considered the civilised world. It was some comfort, perhaps, that in a very material sense they had packed their civilisation into the ships’ holds and carried it with them to New South Wales. As one newspaper had explained shortly before they set sail, ‘by the number of Cattle now sending over of various sorts, and all the different Seeds for Vegetation, a capital Improvement will be made in the Southern part of the New World.’\footnote{St James Chronicle, 16-18 January 1787, cited in Alan Frost, “As it Were Another America”: English Ideas of the First Settlement in New South Wales at the end of the Eighteenth Century’, \textit{Eighteenth Century Studies} vol.7 no.3 (1974) p. 271} And at the Cape, as Worgan told his ‘dear good brother’, they had supplemented their British supplies by purchasing ‘Bulls, Cows, Horses, Mares, Colts, Sheep, Hogs, Goats, Fowls and other living Creatures by Pairs,’ as well as ‘a vast Number of Plants, Seeds and other Garden articles such as Orange, Lime, Lemon, Quince Apple, Pear Trees.’ Each ship had sailed on towards Botany Bay equipped with ‘every Article necessary for forming a civilised Colony’, ‘like another Noah’s Ark.’\footnote{Worgan, \textit{Journal of a First Fleet Surgeon}, p. 1.}
Worgan’s description of the British ships sailing towards Sydney like heavily laden Noah’s Arks gestures towards the three major themes of this thesis. In the first place it is richly suggestive of the particular ways in which the colonists expected to engage with their new environment: at the very least they would break up the soil, fertilise it with animal manure, plant a great variety of seeds and reap a harvest for their own sustenance. Second, it discloses their larger goal: to establish a colony and extend civilisation, as they understood it, to a new region of the world. Third, his use of ark imagery indicates the ease with which early colonists employed familiar Christian ideas and biblical narratives to make sense of their experiences of travelling and settling a new place. This thesis considers the new arrivals’ engagement with the land and the process of colonisation through the lens of the religious stories and ideas that informed their outlook and action between 1788 and the mid nineteenth century. It takes up the suggestion, implicit in Worgan’s account, that these themes were related in the early history of the Australian colonies and explores the connections between land, colonisation and religion in a particularly Protestant form.

During the last third of the twentieth century, it seemed obvious to some writers that religion barely mattered in modern Australia. It was a post-Christian society dominated by whitefellas ‘who got no dreaming.’ It was society, more particularly, that had grown up in a place which was itself ‘the most godless under heaven.’ Manning Clark vividly described how the early British settlers ‘sang songs about a God who cared for mankind’ until ‘nature’s vast indifference’ gradually undermined their belief in divine goodness and led them to conclude that ‘there was no God in the outback.’ Peter Carey told popular tales about flawed and lonely clerics who struggled to replant Christianity in a country where the stories of the gospels seemed to lie across the harsh landscape like sheets of newspaper on a polished floor. ‘They slid, slipped, did not connect with anything beneath them.’ Weighed down by what Hugh Jackson imagined as ‘a deep sense of alienation from nature’, immigrant Australians no longer felt the stir of religious

6 The phrase is originally the Reverend Richard Denney’s (1825), and more recently employed by Ian Beward in Australia: the most godless place under heaven?, Beacon Hill Books, Melbourne, 1988.
8 Peter Carey, Oscar and Lucinda (1988), University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2001, p. 300.
feeling in their hearts or lifted their eyes to the once familiar Christian God. Such writers doubted that the faiths the colonists brought with them from the old world would ever flourish on Australia’s hostile shores.

The historiography of religion in this country began to flourish even as others declared the early death of Christian belief. During the last four decades of the twentieth century, scholars have not only produced histories of churches and influential clergymen but delineated the contribution of Christianity to the development of colonial society and examined the complex culture of religious belief. Particularly since the 1990s, historians concerned primarily with the early colonists’ mental and imaginative worlds have also reflected deeply on the often subtle but significant influence of religious ideas, visions and values in nineteenth century Australia. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, religious belief is widely recognised as an important aspect of the colonists’ cultural and intellectual inheritance. Though Christianity is not quite uniformly

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considered an integral element of Australian colonial history, it is rarely dismissed summarily as marginal or irrelevant. The suggestion that the Australian environment has somehow tended to undermine belief in the Christian God, however, has not yet been considered at length in historical terms. The question of how Protestantism informed the colonists’ encounter with an unfamiliar land and was in turn reshaped in the course of transplantation into it, largely remains to be explored. The considerable discussion of the relationship of faith to place outside the academy suggests that it remains a compelling issue for many Australians.

The transmission of Protestantism to Australia by the British and the consequences for the new arrivals’ engagement with the land is a subject that necessarily stirs up issues concerning the nature of colonial society. It raises the question famously debated in North America by Frederick Jackson Turner and Louis Hartz, of the degree to which European settler societies have been shaped by the cultural and intellectual baggage the colonists brought with them from the ‘old world’, or by their experience of the environment they encountered in the ‘new.’ In Australia, that debate was enthusiastically entered into by well known historians including Russell Ward and Manning Clark. In The Australian Legend, Ward consciously applied Turner’s frontier thesis to this country and found that the manners and values that emerged as ‘a direct response to the new environment’ were ‘much more likely to flourish’ than those ‘transplanted’ from Britain in a ‘relatively unadulterated’ state. The latter apparently included traditional Christianity, which he presented simply as an aspect of the old world

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oppression thrown off by the convicts and ex-convicts who dominated the early pastoral workforce as they adapted to the frontier.\textsuperscript{16}

In the first volume of his \textit{History of Australia}, Manning Clark promised a Hartzian alternative by presenting early colonial society as the product of the struggle between the old world belief systems of Catholicism, Protestantism and the Enlightenment for supremacy in the new. But by volume three, published soon after his emergence as a public intellectual during the early 1970s, Clark had redirected his attention to the nationalists’ questions of how the colonists acquired a distinctively Australian identity and conscience, and how a uniquely Australian civilisation began.\textsuperscript{17} He pushed the contest between Protestantism, Catholicism and the Enlightenment to the margins of his narrative and gave pride of place to the battle between the forces of British philistinism and Australian barbarism, to the decline of the old dead tree and the growth of the young tree green. As he did so, he found it increasingly convenient to reduce the Protestant tradition he had initially described as a diverse and vibrant influence on colonial society, to moral prudery and sycophantic loyalty to Empire and King.\textsuperscript{18} In the wilds of Australia, he wrote, men rejected such ‘worn-out faiths’ and embraced ‘a new vision of the world’ born of the land itself.\textsuperscript{19} The ‘Protestant ascendancy’ became his shorthand, even off-hand, phrase for the conservative culture and values of the old world to which he considered the emerging Australian civilisation starkly opposed.

By insisting upon the association of Australianness with the land and, in turn, the opposition of Australianness to Britishness, radical nationalists like Ward and Clark


\textsuperscript{17} Clark, \textit{A History of Australia}, vol.3 p. vii. I am indebted to Mark McKenna for alerting me to the coincidence of the nationalist shift in Clark’s historical narrative with the development of his own public profile.

\textsuperscript{18} See Clark, \textit{A History of Australia}, vol.1 p. 107; vol.4 p. 395; vol.6 pp. 136, 155.

\textsuperscript{19} See Clark \textit{A History of Australia}, vol.3 pp. 271-7, 356; vol.4 pp. 218, 346.
effectively concealed the question of how the colonists’ cultural inheritance, including their religion, may have actually influenced and been influenced by their encounter with an unfamiliar environment. In taking up that question, this thesis does not assume a division between the colonists’ old and new world cultures or an essential opposition between their intellectual and environmental influences. Nor does it avoid exploring the implications of their government’s larger goal to establish a settler colony, upon which their very presence in Australia was essentially contingent. Rather, this thesis seeks to open up these issues by asking how Protestants among the early colonists engaged with their new environment. What biblical narratives and ideas did they draw upon to make sense of the places they encountered and their relationship to them? In what respects did the physical and other characteristics of their new context prompt them to adapt their religious beliefs and practices? How did their religious values and ethics in turn mediate their engagement with their surrounds and inform their behaviour towards both the land and the Aboriginal people who belonged to it?

The following exploration of these questions has been enabled by the work of historians exploring the relationships between colonialism and belief, particularly in the field of missionary history. During the 1960s and 1970s, the early colonists’ Christian inheritance was commonly explored in terms of the establishment of religious and educational institutions, the lives of bishops and other prominent clergymen and the relationship of church and state.

The initial examination of Christian missionaries’ interactions with Aborigines was undertaken largely by historians who did not concern themselves primarily with religion but were attuned to issues of race conflict or influenced by the methods and concerns of anthropology. From the mid 1970s, though, the implications of the colonists’ Christian traditions for their assumptions about and interactions with indigenous Australians attracted increasing attention from historians of religion.


mid 1990s, it was well established as one of their major themes of enquiry and scholarly interest in colonialism more broadly was generally reshaping the field of religious history. The complicity of missionaries in the extension and consolidation of the British empire has now emerged as a specific issue of keen debate both in Australia and overseas, as the publication of the Missions and Empire companion volume to The Oxford History of the British Empire (2005) and essays exploring the missionary history of Australia, Evangelists of Empire? (2008), clearly indicate. Informed by Aboriginal history and postcolonial approaches to the past, the development of this area of research has contributed to a shift in the wider historiography of Australia away from issues of civilisation, whether imperial or national, in favour of themes of colonial power. The flourishing discussion of colonialism and belief in the history of Aboriginal missions suggests there may be great value in taking issues of colonial power seriously in the history of other aspects of religious activity, such as making sense of a new land and forging an attachment to place.

The second body of literature informing this study can be loosely categorised as environmental history. Historians with a debt to environmental history are among those who have done most, in the three decades since the 1980s, to undermine Ward and Clark’s assessment of the colonists’ relationship with the land. This is partly because


\[\text{For example Hilary Carey, Believing in Australia: A Cultural History of Religions, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1996; Journal of Religious History, vol.32 no.2 (2008), a special issue on religion and empire published after the research for this thesis had been completed.}\]


environmental history, although often presented in national terms, has fostered study on alternative scales ranging from the local to the global and thus contributed to the late twentieth century decline of national history more generally.\textsuperscript{26} In step with the emergence of environmental history elsewhere and, from the 1980s, increasingly influenced by the ‘spatial turn’ in the humanities, Australian scholars have also explicitly re-examined the relationship between white Australians and their physical environment in terms far broader than those conceived by the nationalists. The literature resulting from this rich discussion has contributed significantly to our understanding of both the colonists’ relationship with the land and the culture of colonialism in Australia, although the religious dimensions of the subject have not yet been fully explored.

The recent re-evaluation of non-indigenous Australians’ engagement with the physical environment might be usefully understood as having proceeded on three fronts. One group of scholars has debated the extent to which the colonists were destructive or conserving in their attitudes to and actual impact on their surrounds.\textsuperscript{27} Curiously, the colonists’ religious assumptions and ethics have not been as prominent in this discussion as they have in North America, where Lynn White’s thesis that Western Christian arrogance towards nature is the root of the present ecological crisis has generated continuing debate.\textsuperscript{28} A second group has examined the colonists’ cultural habits of perception and explored the particular values and meanings that European Australians have ascribed to the landscape.\textsuperscript{29} Again, the significance of religious ideas and biblical


motifs to migrants’ ideas about their surrounds has been more readily recognised by historians of the Puritan colonists of North America, the Boers in South Africa, and others outside Australia.30 A third group of historians has considered the complex manner in which non-indigenous Australians have forged a sense of belonging and articulated connections to place.31 Some of these, notably Don Watson and Mark McKenna, have set the example followed by this thesis in considering the consequences of how colonists attached themselves to the land for the Aboriginal people whom they displaced.32

The spiritual dimensions of non-indigenous Australians’ attachment to the land have been considered by a small number of historians. In contrast to Ward and Clark, who saw the environment disrupting the colonists’ Christian faith, these authors have stressed the obstacles posed to belonging in place by Christianity. Peter Read’s exploration of spirituality in Haunted Earth (2003) partly reflected his own early exposure to a variety of Anglicanism that displayed a ‘profound uninterest in inspired places beyond the structure of the church itself.’33 He dismissed Christianity by characterising it as a tradition typically ‘preoccupied with the placeless hereafter’ and focussed on global rather than local belonging. Confident that it has generally failed to help its adherents to


32 Don Watson, Caledonia Australis: Scottish Highlanders on the Frontier of Australia (1984), Random House, Sydney, 1997; McKenna, Looking for Blackfellas’ Point; Read, Belonging.

belong in new lands, he moved over it quickly and directed his attention to other forms of spiritual practice and belief.\textsuperscript{34}

Contemporary Christian thinkers have disputed the accuracy of such allegations of their tradition’s inherently otherworldly placelessness, often on scriptural grounds.\textsuperscript{35} Within the discipline of history, others have arrived at more nuanced views by exploring the implications of the particularly English form of Christianity first transmitted to Australia for the early colonists’ response to place. The colonial history of far south eastern New South Wales prompted Mark McKenna to reflect that ‘as the cultural identity of Aboriginal people was inseparable from the land, the settlers’ faith and civilisation was often inseparable from bricks and mortar.’ He observed that the kind of Christianity carried to the colony by the early clergy was so closely identified with ‘the physical structures of faith and civilisation’ such as churches, courthouses and schools, that in their absence the land seemed an empty void rather than a home.\textsuperscript{36} In \textit{The Europeans in Australia}, Alan Atkinson suggested other ways in which the spiritual attitudes of the early colonists were concerned with place. Orthodox Christian beliefs that God is omnipresent, the gospel has universal significance and geography makes no difference to one’s holiness or closeness to the Lord were tested by the experience of dislocation, he observed. This was especially true for colonists beyond the ranks of the clergy, who had probably found it easier to believe in a more provincial God who inhabited familiar places and dispensed the blessings of providence unevenly. For these people, ‘the very experience of sailing half way around the earth must have offered a challenge to the imagination.’ He speculated that some may have found the notion of a universal God more compelling than before, and derived comfort from the idea of there being spiritual continuity ‘between the two hemispheres.’ He suspected that for others, especially the

\textsuperscript{34} Read, \textit{Haunted Earth}, pp. 21-22, 37.


\textsuperscript{36} McKenna, \textit{Looking for Blackfellas’ Point}, pp. 98-99 and chapter five generally.
uneducated, the experience may have complicated the geography of heaven and hell such that they assumed ‘a feebler significance.’

These important insights might be developed by the further consideration of how the clergy negotiated the difficulties of displacement. The experience of being uprooted was perhaps more of a challenge to them than Atkinson and even McKenna supposed. And while Read and Atkinson have rightly stressed the importance of Christianity’s claims to universality, which the clergy of course repeated in the colonies, it is also true that in the biblical tradition neither all destinations nor all journeys have the same meaning. Places like the garden paradise of Eden, the wilderness of Sinai and the Promised Land of Canaan, as well as the scriptural narratives of mobility that linked them, could have a profound influence on the geographic imaginations of colonising Europeans. Subsequent chapters of this thesis open up their significance for the ways early Britons in Australia understood their location and indeed their standing before God.

The key themes of this study are explored biographically. In recent decades historians have recognised biography as a hazardous enterprise, not least because most no longer share R. G. Collingwood’s confidence in the possibility of entering a subject’s mind and ‘re-enacting’ their thoughts as a means of understanding their choices and behaviours. Since the second quarter of the twentieth century when Collingwood wrote, historians have become conscious of the impossibility of accessing and representing the inner life and acutely aware of the perpetual instability of the subject self. They have also been confronted by Michel Foucault’s radical view of the individual as ‘an effect of power,’ a fiction produced in a matrix of power and knowledge, and its implication that, as Lynn Hunt put it, the human subject ‘cannot provide the enduring foundation for historical method.’ Although the vast majority of professional historians have stopped short of

38 See n30 above.
embracing Foucault’s ideas wholeheartedly, the theoretical problems posed by deconstructionists have nevertheless tended to delegitimize biography as traditionally pursued and prompted more creative approaches to the writing of lives. Scholars have experimented with different forms including group biography, or prosopography, and partial or fragmented individual biographies. They have still had to confront difficult issues of selfhood and subjectivity, as all who seek historical knowledge must. But scholars have begun to develop approaches to the writing of lives that afford some insight into a subject and their context, without purporting or even appearing to account fully for what can be only partly known.

The exploration of the particular interests of this thesis affords an opportunity for further experimentation with biographical methods of history. As a history of ideas and ideology, it draws on the sub-discipline of intellectual history, which has an ambivalent relationship with biography. Some mid twentieth century intellectual historians including Arthur O. Lovejoy considered ideas to be ‘potent and stubborn things’ with a life and character independent of the particular communities and conditions in which they were embraced, and independent from the individual who acted upon them. Others such as Lucien Febvre and those associated with the Annales school emphasised that ideas did not transcend their context and that a society’s ‘mental tools’ were in fact specific to the time and culture in which they were utilized. They invested the social and cultural

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44 Perhaps the most innovative recent example is Jonathan Walker, Pistols! Treason! Murder! The Rise and Fall of a Master Spy, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2007.
circumstances in which particular ideas were held and expressed with such
overwhelming importance that the intellectual life of the individual who professed them
was made simply to illuminate colonial society’s ‘systems of belief, values and
representations.’ As Pierre Renouvin remarked, they produced histories of mentalités in
which the individual seemed as negligible as the event was disdained.

Mid century practitioners of the history of ideas tended, in their various ways, to accord
the individual very little significance. But their practice of history more broadly was
seriously threatened by the scepticism towards overarching narratives and the suspicion
of claims to coherence and continuity that surfaced within the historical profession from
the 1970s. Since then, perhaps paradoxically, some historians of ideas have embraced the
experiences and ideas of individuals as a method of problematising the dominant
narratives and interpretations of a period, even as the individual has itself been exposed
as a problematic subject characterised by instability. Recent intellectual histories, such
as that by Ann Curthoys and John Docker, may illuminate a way forward in retaining
ideas as the primary subject rather than fictitiously coherent individuals – and at the same
time recognising the impossibility of extricating those ideas from the idiosyncrasies and
personalities of the people who held them. This thesis draws on these approaches to the
history of ideas by examining Protestant beliefs through the particular experiences,
interests and circumstances of individuals who articulated and acted upon them. It
employs serial biography as a methodological strategy for understanding colonial
Protestantism as a specifically located and embodied set of ethics and ideas.

The resurgent significance of the individual in the history of ideas is mirrored in the
emerging literature on human relationships to place. As cultural geographers and spatial
theorists have stressed, the relationship of people to the places they inhabit and the

47 Chartier discussing Lucien Febvre in Cultural History, pp. 21-28.
49 See Sigurdur Gylfi Magnusson, ‘The Singularization of History: Social History and Microhistory within
Examples include Carlo Ginzburg, The Cheese and the Worms: the Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century
50 Ann Curthoys and John Docker, Is History Fiction?, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney,
2006.
environment they adapt is necessarily an embodied one. Histories by Maggie Mackellar, Julia Horne, Melissa Harper and others bear that observation out. Britons in late eighteenth and nineteenth century Australia engaged bodily with their environment by walking or riding through the bush, tending their gardens and cultivating their fields, or by consuming its plants and animals for food.\textsuperscript{51} The immediate physical sensations of grass brushing against their legs, tree trunks shivering under the axe, soil churning under the hoe and local game sliding down their throats were central to their experience of and engagement with their surrounds. Such interactions between colonist and continent are perhaps retrieved most easily from the experiences of individuals. The task of reimagining the flesh and blood of a biographical subject on the basis of merely documentary remains is plagued with difficulties, as Penny Russell observed.\textsuperscript{52} But biography affords the historian an opportunity to draw close and examine the personal experiences of colonists, including their experiences of the land.

The emphasis of this thesis on specifically Protestant engagement with and appropriation of the land is further reason for continued experimentation with biographical method. Biography has been one of the main forms in which the history of Christianity in Australia, whether Catholic or Protestant, has been presented to date. As J. D. Bollen and others noted, the early amateur histories produced primarily by clerical authors tended to be denominational in scope and biographical in approach.\textsuperscript{53} Even as professionally trained historians became increasingly responsible for the production of religious history


during the 1960s and 1970s, biography remained a prominent form. Their choice of subject often reflected the clericalism of the historiography more generally, though the attitudes and contributions of the laity have been recognised more widely and studied more thoroughly in the last third of the twentieth century. Traditional biography remains widely practiced among historians of Christianity in Australia, even though the form has encountered theoretical difficulties and the field has expanded far beyond the history of churches and clergymen.

There is an opportunity, then, to apply the insights of historians experimenting with the writing of lives to the subject of Australian religious history, and particularly to the history of Protestant ideas and their significance for their adherents’ engagement with place. There may be particular value in doing so, furthermore, because the biographical approach has special significance for the exploration of Protestantism. To a far greater extent than, say, Catholicism, Protestantism has been characterised by introspection and privileged the dictates of individual conscience over the decrees of the Church. Puritan culture, in particular, has emphasised the importance of self-examination and the internal


56 This is exemplified by the publication of Brian Dickey (ed.) The Australian Dictionary of Evangelical Biography, Evangelical History Association, Sydney, 1994.
struggles of the soul. From the middle third of the eighteenth century even up to the present day, evangelical Protestants have similarly stressed the necessity of personal conversion and the relationship of the individual believer to God. As Puritanism provided both a language and a theoretical basis for the genre of spiritual autobiography that flourished in England for several generations from the mid seventeenth century, so might the ideas and ethics of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Protestantism prove amenable to new biographical forms.

‘Such Spiritual Acres’ is structured around thematic portraits of five prominent colonial Protestants: Richard Johnson, Samuel Marsden, William Grant Broughton, John Wollaston and John Dunmore Lang. These people were among the most influential transmitters of Protestantism to early colonial Australia. In temporal terms, their lives spanned the formative period between the arrival of Phillip’s fleet in 1788 and the mid point of the nineteenth century. During those seven decades, Britons negotiated the dislocation of their culture and institutions in the course of transmission to the southern colonies, and first engaged with the Australian environment in direct and sustained ways. It was also a period of profound transition for religious life and society in Britain. Protestants confronted new questions concerning the relationship of people to their environment and the connections between belief and locality, both at home and in the colonies. In geographical terms, these men’s ministries spanned the continent from east to west. They proclaimed Protestantism in Van Diemen’s Land and the Swan River settlement, as well as up and down the east coast from Port Phillip to Moreton Bay. Although none made it to South Australia, that ‘paradise of dissent,’ all five clerics helped shape the society of which they were part. They actively created and defined the culture of Protestantism in the early colonies.

58 David W. Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s, Unwin Hyman, London, 1989, pp. 5-10.
The importance of these five individuals has been recognised by numerous scholars. All have attracted attention as subjects of large scale historical biography, with the exception of Wollaston, whose extensive personal journals were published in an abridged form during the 1950s and in full from the 1990s. These studies paid considerable attention to their religious beliefs and ministries. Johnson and Marsden were evangelical Anglicans who received their religious education in the period before Methodism formally distinguished itself denominationally from the established church. Evangelicalism was the first form of Protestantism officially introduced to New South Wales, the most widespread among the early colonial clergy and, at least in terms of organised expression, probably the most dominant form of religion in the early colony. Broughton and Wollaston were Anglicans of quite a different kind. They placed great value on Episcopal order and the intimate relationship of church and state. High churchmanship as well as evangelical Anglicanism contributed to the ascendancy of Church of England Protestantism in the colonies until at least the late 1830s. Around the middle of the nineteenth century, though, there was a cooling of relations between Anglicanism and other forms of Protestantism in the colonies. The effects of Tractarianism and the increase of the smaller Protestant denominations including the Congregational, Methodist and Baptist churches were among the reasons. As an evangelical Presbyterian, Lang was in deeper harmony with the ‘friends of scriptural Protestantism,’ of whatever denominational stripe, than the Tories of the Scottish church

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61 See Piggin, Spirit of a Nation; Hilary Carey, Believing in Australia, pp.10-19; Clark, A History of Australia, vols. 1 and 2; chapter one below.


establishment. In general terms these five men had Protestantism in common, and this thesis builds on the existing individual portraits by considering them together.

This thesis also examines the significance of these Protestants’ beliefs to their interaction with the environment, which has remained unstudied to date. It argues that their religious ideas were crucial to their engagement with their surrounds and their response to the land as colonists. Furthermore, their extensive writings are often concerned with ideas of land and place. Their extant works include personal journals, letters to close friends and relatives, as well as correspondence with church and government figures and various English mission societies. They also wrote sermons and published journalistic accounts of the colonies. These sources provide an insight into their Protestantism as a worldview or ideology, and occasionally offer glimpses into their inner spiritual lives. They enable the historian to position each individual within a wider religious network of organisations, supporters and friends. Most are addressed to British audiences, and reveal their particular impressions of a new environment and at the same time express their visions for what it might become. Throughout this thesis, they are examined alongside less overtly religious sources concerning colonists’ responses to their surrounds, such as first fleet journals, governors’ despatches, personal diaries and travellers’ accounts. They are also read in light of their authors’ identities as men. Recent work on colonists’ engagement with their surrounds in Australia and elsewhere, much of which has focused on the experiences of women, has indicated that gender was often an important influence on how people understood and related to their environment. The insights afforded by this literature, and by recent research on masculinities in Britain during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, inform the following discussion of each subject’s beliefs, opinions, experiences and actions.

66 For example William C. Barnhart, ‘Evangelicalism, Masculinity and the Making of Imperial Missionaries in Late Georgian Britain, 1795-1820,’ Historian, vol.64 no.4 (2005) pp. 712-732; John
One further observation must be made before turning to their particular ideas and experiences. As clerics, these five colonists held an office that rendered them in some important respects untypical of the general population, even of the male portion. But their ideas and experiences are worthy of study because they were all, in their different ways, actively committed to the foundation of a truly Protestant society on Australian shores. They were professionally concerned with the transmission of ideas and institutions to Australia not only as pastors and preachers but in their related capacities as university-educated community leaders, magistrates, politicians and teachers. Importantly, though, they were colonists as well as clergyman and the ideas and activities considered in the following chapters were not always those most obviously or directly related to their sacred office. They played an important role in colonial life as conduits of British religious practices and ideas, but at times acted as creators of colonial culture too. They had much in common with their neighbours, although they are not routinely assumed to speak for the whole population or even for the entirety of the church. Indeed the differences and even disagreements between them usefully illuminate the social, cultural, political and ecclesiastical diversity of the Protestant tradition initially introduced to Australia.

Four chapters explore evangelical Anglicanism. It was the lot of the young Richard Johnson to act as chaplain to the first British fleet. Chapters two and three consider the significance of exile narratives and missionary values to his relationship with the land as an early colonist. His particular contribution to the formation of the colony and his own response to the land was defined by his overwhelming sense of having been banished like Adam and Eve to a wild and barren place. He was also convinced of the importance of proclaiming the gospel to the unredeemed; and this commitment, characteristic of evangelicals, held him in Sydney for twelve years. His value for mission also shaped his relationship with Booron, an Aboriginal girl, and his consequent involvement in the colonists’ political negotiations with the Sydney tribes over their occupation of the territory. Samuel Marsden, his colleague and eventual successor, more readily established a home in the colony and ministered there for more than forty years. Chapters

four and five explore Marsden’s work ethic as it reflected both his evangelical Protestant inheritance and the particular circumstances of the colony. He understood godly labour in profoundly agricultural terms: sowing and reaping were central to his exertions both physically and spiritually. But the value he placed on diligent labour went beyond the personal to inform his vision for the convicts’ reform by working the land and to define his civilising interventions into Aboriginal lives.

The introduction of non-evangelical varieties of Anglicanism contributed to the diversity of Protestantism in the colonies from the 1820s. Chapter five explores the response of the high churchman William Grant Broughton to the difficulties posed for the church by the spread of settlement and the dispersion of the population. In his capacity as Archdeacon and then Bishop, Broughton travelled extensively in the eastern part of the continent and Van Diemen’s Land. His Episcopal powers of consecration enabled a particular connection to the land: he could create numerous sacred places. However the tensions between the patterns of congregation and clerical incumbency to which he was committed and the itinerancy which pastoral districts like the Monaro appeared to demand, disrupted his vision of Christian settlement and forced him to adapt some of his methods of ministry to suit his surrounds. On the western side of the continent, his co-religionist John Wollaston considered how he might adapt the environment and create a socially and morally ordered community. Having been attracted to the Swan River colony as a settler in 1840, Wollaston considered his new surrounds a wilderness in physical and spiritual terms. Chapter seven explores his efforts to bring Anglican order to the colonial wilderness and transform it into a garden of the Lord.

The visions of the high church Anglicans of a thoroughly settled community stand in contrast to the expansive ideas about mobility expressed by the evangelical Presbyterian John Dunmore Lang. Perhaps the most prominent Protestant in nineteenth century Australia, Lang boasted to Britons that the colony was a veritable Promised Land and urged mass exodus there. Chapter eight examines his idea of exodus to the Promised Land, particularly in his promotion of migration to the Moreton Bay district of what is now Queensland during the late 1840s. His confidence in the potential of the land and the glorious future intended by God for the Australian colonies is particularly striking when
compared with Johnson’s earlier pessimism as an exile to a barren country. The
dissimilarities between these two evangelicals, and indeed between all five people
studied here, reveal more than differences of personality. They reveal some of the
broader shifts that occurred in the meanings attributed to the land by its British colonists,
as well as changes of emphasis and temper within the Protestant tradition itself. By
delving into a number of prominent Protestants’ lives and beliefs, exploring what they
had in common as well as the differences in their responses to the land, this thesis aims to
maintain a complex, non-prescriptive picture of Protestantism and yet to trace the
implications of particular aspects of Protestant thought and behaviour as they informed
the new arrivals’ relationships to the land.

Like the story of Noah’s ark, the transmission of Protestantism to Australia has been
explained and interpreted in a number of different ways. This thesis directs attention to
the ways in which that tradition of belief informed colonists’ responses to the
environment and colonisation of the land. These are themes that have been combined far
more frequently in the historiography of North America than Australia to date. As even
Worgan’s brief account suggests, the early British colonists of Australia were quite
dissimilar to those pious men and women who travelled across the Atlantic to establish a
covenantal community in New England during the seventeenth century. Unlike the
members of Cotton Mather’s migrant congregation, they generally did not consider
themselves the bearers and beneficiaries of God’s biblical promises to his chosen people,
‘victoriously sailing around the globe’ with the ‘Puritan Ark of Christ.’

Those who
voyaged to Australia a century later did so in ships similar to Noah’s Ark more in a
material than a typological sense. The story of their journey was not elevated by a sense
of its covenantal significance nor made a foundation of an overtly religious national
myth. But Protestantism was nevertheless one of the most influential cultural and
intellectual traditions the British colonists transmitted to Australia, and it could be
profoundly important to their engagement with a new environment. By examining the
relationships between Protestantism, land and colonisation in Australia, it is possible to
deepen our historical knowledge of how the new arrivals’ traditions of thought, culture

67 Cotton Mather, Magnalia (1702) cited in Sacvan Bercovitch, The American Jeremiad, University of
Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1978, p. 104. See also Deborah Bird Rose, ‘Rupture and the Ethics of care in
colonised Space’ in Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (eds), Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the
and belief informed their occupation and adaptation of the land. It is possible to bring clearly into view what has often been overlooked: the importance of Protestant ethics and scriptural narratives for the colonists’ sense of entitlement to the land and their ideological justification for colonising the territory.
CHAPTER ONE

British Origins

Religion and society in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries

Protestantism was first transmitted to Australia by people whose cultural habits and intellectual assumptions had been forged in a deeply religious society governed by a deeply religious regime. This is not to suggest that religion was the only important influence on public and private life in Britain, or that religion was always a subject of consensus rather than conflict at this time. But it is to affirm, along with many recent scholars, that British society was substantially shaped by religious ideas and traditions, practices and beliefs during the period in which the British first established their Australian colonies.\(^1\) In the intellectual sphere, religious notions of authority and the essential character of humankind defined debates about the nature of government.\(^2\) Many philosophical and literary productions of the period were similarly informed by religious assumptions and theological categories of thought. University reading lists and the print media of the period were dominated by religious works that usually proceeded from clerical quills.\(^3\) And clergymen were active researchers and educators in fields ranging from geology and cosmology to aesthetics, literature and political economy.\(^4\) Some historians have interpreted clerical interest in such matters in terms of their failure to fulfil their religious task and the growth of secular forms of thought.\(^5\) But as Jeremy

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\(^2\) Clark, *English Society*, chapters one to six.


Gregory and others have convincingly argued, the eighteenth century was a deeply religious age with a broadly Christian intellectual culture which the clergy helped create and maintain. Where Christianity did not define the conclusions that intellectuals reached, it shaped the context into which they spoke and influenced the ways in which they thought.6

On a more popular level, religious ideas were supported by providentialist literature as well as overtly Christian texts. Chapbooks and almanacs propagated ideas of divine providence, fate, fortune and chance well into the nineteenth century. Such beliefs cannot be dismissed simply as relics of an older mode of thought soon to be overcome by more naturalistic or social-scientific explanations of the world: as Jonathan Clark insisted, they provided popular explanations for the vicissitudes of human existence alongside more rationalistic accounts.7 Cheaply printed titles such as Foxe’s Book of Martyrs and Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress were among the most commonly owned in Britain and strengthened the religious character of literate culture.8 Bibles or at least New Testaments could also be found in many poorer homes, as could Books of Common Prayer. The number of households in a parish that possessed a bible or Prayer Book could exceed the number of people who regularly attended the parish church, which suggests these texts were considered valuable in the domestic context and that even the poorest people sometimes attempted religious reading or family prayers at home.9 Importantly these texts were heard as well as read when used in church and privately. The rhythms and cadences of the Prayer Book’s Cranmerian prose made its expressions of both piety and theology all the more memorable for those who attended morning or evening service.10

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These texts, like the sermons preached in parish churches every week, fostered familiarity with religious forms and disseminated religious ideas.

For most eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britons, religion helped define their collective identity too. The annual fast days and festivals that marked events ranging from the gathering of the harvest to the anniversary of the Protestant restoration were central to local community life. And as Linda Colley has emphasised, a shared religious allegiance to Protestantism facilitated the emergence of a sense of British national identity alongside people’s older attachments to England, Wales and Scotland and to their region, village and family home. This shared allegiance was cemented by the repeated experience of conflict with Catholic states and also by the spread of popular histories that depicted the national past largely in terms of warning disasters and providential deliverances at the hand of God. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Britons were encouraged by a variety of means to believe that God watched over them with a special concern and had given them a distinctive mission and purpose in the world. British identity was largely defined in religious terms and many Britons considered their nation chosen by God.  

To a significant extent, then, the intellectual culture, social experience and national identity of most eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britons were shaped by religious ideas and traditions. Aspects of pre-Christian folk religion persisted in some rural areas and there was a small but growing number of Jews. A syncretistic Catholicism had survived the Reformation in the more remote highlands and islands of Scotland, in various pockets of England and throughout much of Ireland. Over the one hundred years to 1800, the number of Catholics in England and Wales grew approximately fifty

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percent to about 100,000. Protestant Christianity, however, was the dominant religious tradition during that time. Ranging from High Anglicanism to evangelical enthusiasm, from Presbyterianism to puritan Dissent, it could vary considerably in theology, ecclesiology, politics, social ethics and community life. But Protestantism helped define British culture and society in the period during which the Australian colonies were formed. To understand its transmission to Australia and trace its significance for the colonists’ response to the land, it is important to consider its character and challenges in the society from which they came.

At the time the first British fleet set sail for Australia, the established churches were the most visible representatives of Protestant religion in the country they left behind. In England, the reformed Anglican Church upheld the bible as God’s Word containing all things necessary to salvation and put forward a moderate Protestantism as a ‘middle way’ between puritan excess and the errors of Rome. Its prominence stemmed largely from its uniquely privileged status and its intimate relationship with the state. From the late seventeenth century, the church’s special rights and privileges were buttressed by the admission of its Bishops into the House of Lords and by legislative instruments which confined municipal and parliamentary office to communicant members who publicly subscribed to the Thirty Nine Articles. The Toleration Act of 1689 permitted Trinitarian non-conformists to worship publicly in registered meeting houses, and thus required the Church of England to persuade rather than coerce people into attending its own services

and adhering to its doctrines and liturgical forms. Until the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828, however, toleration extended only to matters of worship, not to the sharing of political power. The Anglican church retained its political hegemony and its adherents were dominant in the universities, the armed forces, the civil service and the state. From the mid eighteenth century, the burgeoning clerical magistracy also involved the church directly in local government and administration - as it did in the Australian colonies too. The established position and political prominence of the Church of England helped define Protestantism in the period and, as several historians have emphasised, was a major influence on the culture of Anglicanism in the colonies as well.

The Anglican church was prominent in English life in social and physical as well as political terms. The parish, an essentially religious designation of space, informed people’s sense of location generally. Its boundaries often marked the limits of community in a civil as well as an ecclesiastical sense. Parish churches were usually located at the centre of villages, their spires visible and their bells audible from the surrounding countryside. As Frances Knight observed, they were commonly constructed from local materials and surrounded by the final resting places of local inhabitants of past decades and centuries. They were familiar spaces that could easily appear the physical embodiment of a rural community’s stability and continuity. They could also express the social doctrine of the eighteenth century church: that each person, from the lord in his manor to the labourer on his land, had been allotted their place by God for the good order of society. The system of pew allocation certainly suggested order in the form of a static social hierarchy. Within the church walls, too, the clergy performed the religious rites

17 Walsh and Taylor, ‘The Church and Anglicanism in the ‘long’ eighteenth century,’ p. 16.
18 Clark, English Society, p. 438.
19 Between 1761 and 1831, there was an 18% increase in the total number of clerical magistrates in England, and a doubling to 22% of the proportion of magistrates who were also clergymen. See Eric J. Evans, ‘Some Reasons for the Growth of English Rural Anti-Clericalism, c.1750 - c.1830,’ Past and Present vol.66 (1975) p. 101.
21 Knight, The Nineteenth Century Church, pp. 61-63.
associated with birth, marriage and death that marked out the major stages of a person’s life. The established Anglican church was deeply embedded into the landscape of rural English life and its strong social and physical presence was something its representatives in the colonies sorely missed.

Similarly to its Anglican counterpart, the Scottish Presbyterian church and its clergy had important ties to the land and to the social and seasonal rhythms of rural life. Rural ministers were generally provided with four acres of arable glebe land or sufficient pasture to support sixteen cattle. And in most parishes, the church derived its main support from the teind, a notional ten percent of the produce from agriculture and fisheries, similar to the English tithe. As an institution, though, the Scottish church historically had more in common with John Calvin’s Geneva than the reforming Church of England. From the mid seventeenth century its doctrinal standards were formally defined by the Westminster Confession, which insisted on the total depravity and thoroughly evil inclination of humanity, salvation through Jesus Christ by grace alone, and the predestination of the elect to everlasting life and others to everlasting death. It also upheld the revelation of God in scripture and Christian liberty of conscience in interpreting God’s Word. It was governed by a hierarchy of synods rather than an episcopacy, and it was less closely identified with the state. It was not formally integrated into the apparatus of government as the Church of England was, nor were political office holders required to be Presbyterians. Religious and civil authorities nevertheless cooperated at the local level. Church leaders shared responsibility with local landowners, or heritors, for the education of children and the relief of the poor in their parish. And over the course of the eighteenth century, a system of patronage became entrenched.

Between the mid eighteenth century and the early 1830s, the dominant tone of the Scottish Presbyterian church was set by Moderates. These Protestants had generally moved away from the uncompromising, even militant faith of earlier decades and held ‘a more cultivated, tolerant and world-affirming faith’ that was more harmonious with the

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ethos of the enlightenment. They were positively disposed towards the close association of the church with both the state and the landed elite. They tended to oppose movements for popular reform and embrace the system of patronage. The more staunchly Calvinist Presbyterians comprised the Popular or Evangelical party within the church or, disillusioned with the Scottish establishment, founded dissenting groups. Many of these people were influenced by the rise of evangelicalism in both England and North America and saw themselves as part of a trans-Atlantic Protestant movement. They tended to place great value on regular bible reading, individual conversion and heartfelt piety, and perhaps articulated a spirituality tied less tightly to Scottish soil. They also tended, significantly, to oppose the connection of church and state and the system of patronage. Their dispute with Moderates on this point reached a climax in the Disruption of 1843, when more than a third of Scottish ministers abandoned their Presbyterian parishes and established a rival Free Church on a voluntarist basis. The fracture spread to the colonies where, as several authors have noted, Lang and his colleagues had similarly heated debates over the virtues of independence from the state.

The established churches were Protestantism’s most prominent representatives in Britain during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but they by no means had a monopoly on that tradition of belief. By the time of Australia’s colonisation, the ranks of religious dissent encompassed non-conforming Presbyterians, Baptists and Independents as well as Quakers, Ranters and many other smaller sects. These groups made diverse contributions to Britain’s religious life. As Jonathan Clark explained, they varied in devotional practice from formal liturgy to silent meetings to enthusiast hysteria, and they ranged theologically from orthodox Trinitarianism through Arian representations of Christ as a subordinate deity to the Father to the Socinian refusal to acknowledge Christ’s

divinity at all.\textsuperscript{28} Many flourished with the rise of evangelicalism and religious reform in the period of Australia's initial British settlement. In Scotland, the proportion of people dissenting from the established church roughly tripled to thirty percent between the 1790s and the 1820s.\textsuperscript{29} The Disruption had pushed the proportion even higher by mid century. In England, Dissenting and Catholic congregations attracted nearly half of the churchgoing population by 1851, though some Protestant non-conformists also attended their parish church.\textsuperscript{30} Trinitarian dissenters contributed to the transfer of puritan culture and Calvinistic theology to the Australian colonies, though their evangelical Anglican counterparts were its most influential agents at least until the middle third of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{31}

The relationship between established religion and other forms of Protestantism was further complicated by the rise of evangelicalism from the 1730s. As David Bebbington detailed, British evangelicals typically had a particular regard for the bible and placed great stress on the doctrine of atonement through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. They ardently believed lives need to be transformed through New Birth and expressed their own faith in individual effort.\textsuperscript{32} During the decades of Australia's colonisation, these views distinguished them from high churchmen, Moderates and other non-evangelical Protestants. Whereas high Anglicans generally upheld apostolic succession as a manifestation of the catholicity and apostolicity of Anglicanism as a branch of the universal church, for example, most evangelicals placed little value on episcopacy and endorsed the ministries of unordained women and men. And whereas high churchmen

\textsuperscript{28} Clark, \textit{English Society}, p.471
\textsuperscript{29} Stewart J. Brown, ‘Religion in Scotland’ in Dickinson, \textit{A Companion to Eighteenth Century Britain}, p. 270.
ascribed some value to church tradition and the writings of the early fathers as a guide to the exposition of scripture, most evangelicals insisted upon individual conscience in interpreting God’s Word. Perhaps most importantly, high churchmen cultivated a practical spirituality ‘based on good works, nourished by sacramental grace and exemplified in acts of self-denial and charity,’ as Peter Nockles put it, while evangelicals typically placed a high value on the subjective experience of conversion and sanctification by the Spirit. The two groups of Protestants were rarely opposed, but such theological and religious differences were a source of tension between them.

Emergent evangelicalism in Britain was influenced by both continental pietism and the Great Awakening in North America. From its beginnings, it was a transnational Protestant movement with an outlook that extended beyond the boundaries of Britain and its empire. However, it also had formative connections to the Church of England. Some of the movement’s early leaders, including John Wesley, were positively committed to Anglicanism and in some areas evangelicalism built on the earlier work and residual piety of the established church. Evangelicals among the Anglican clergy helped reinvigorate the religious life of their parishes from the second half of the eighteenth century. The slave-ship captain turned cleric and hymn writer, John Newton, was unflagging in preaching sermons nearly every day, as well as holding prayer meetings, conducting bible classes and ministering to the sick and needy while a curate at Olney during the 1760s and 1770s. Other evangelical parish ministers were similarly activist in that period. Methodism only distinguished itself formally from Anglicanism in the years after Wesley’s death in 1791, and for decades into the nineteenth century many of


34 For a detailed discussion of the relationships between evangelical Anglicans and high church or orthodox Anglicans during the early decades of the nineteenth century, see Nockles, ‘Church parties in the pre-Tractarian Church of England,’ pp. 334-359 and Nockles, The Oxford Movement in Context, pp.321-323.


36 Hindmarsh, John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition, pp. 186- 211 and also Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, p. 41.
its adherents continued to attend their parish churches and even to use the Book of Common Prayer at meetings of their own. A number of evangelicals remained ministers of the established church, including some who supported the ministry of the first chaplains in Australia. By the 1830s, evangelicalism had contributed to both the revival of Trinitarian dissent and the emergence of a formal Evangelical party within the Church of England.

Throughout the early period of Australia’s British settlement, evangelicalism had a close but complex relationship with Anglicanism. The Church of England provided a home to the emerging movement and benefited in a variety of ways from its growth. Methodism ‘nurtured itself, sometimes parasitically’ on that institution for much of the eighteenth century. But at the same time, there were tensions due to evangelicalism’s distinct religious temper and theological emphasis, and for social and political reasons too. First, the movement tended to flourish in places where the influence of the squire-and-parson establishment was relatively weak, such as newly populated rural areas, proto-industrial villages, ports and market towns. In the midst of the social disruption caused by gradual urbanisation and industrialisation, Methodism made some progress among sections of the working class which, by contrast, the established churches generally failed to attract.

Second, evangelicalism helped loosen Anglicanism’s hold in a very physical sense. During the peak period of Methodist expansion between 1780 and 1830, several hundred preachers itinerated through town and countryside denouncing the wicked and calling on their hearers to repent and receive salvation from the Lord. Their embrace of mobility and disregard for parish boundaries reveals their value for the spread of the gospel over

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38 Hempton, *Methodism*, p.18; Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol.2 p. 110
the preservation of religious order as generally understood by Anglicans. At a time of heightened political anxiety due to revolution in North America and France, followed by agitation for political and ecclesiastical reform at home, some high churchmen judged itinerancy so subversive of social and political stability that they campaigned unsuccessfully to have it banned. Instead, the evangelicals’ general success in itinerant preaching was accompanied by a dramatic rise in cottage-based religion. It thus helped to detach people’s religious life and experience from the structure of the parish and the spaces of the established church.

Significantly for Protestantism in early colonial Australia, evangelicalism owed a substantial debt to both Puritanism and the enlightenment. Methodism emphasised the necessity of individual conversion, holy living and ongoing personal devotion to God, as Puritanism did. The two were also similar in encouraging intense self-examination and lay participation in the activities of the religious community or church, and in aspects of liturgy, family piety and ethics. But there were also important discontinuities between Puritanism and evangelicalism which Bebbington traced primarily to the influence of the enlightenment. In more general terms, as Brian Stanley and other scholars have confirmed, the milieu within which evangelical Protestantism was shaped ‘was essentially one formed by the intellectual contours of the Enlightenment.’ Empiricism reshaped the ways in which evangelical leaders including John Wesley practiced theology, and enlightenment confidence in the possibilities of material and social progress reinforced the tendency of many evangelical Protestants to be optimistic in their

43 Ditchfield, ‘Methodism and the Evangelical Revival,’ p. 255; Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, pp. 34-43.
outlook and activist in their expression of faith. The extent to which evangelicals struggled for personal assurance of election like their puritan forebears remains a subject of debate.⁴⁶ But their sense of the seriousness of human sin was generally offset by a confidence that individuals could be reformed, society improved and that by their own strivings, under God, they could assist the realisation of these ideals.

At least to the extent that they were more cheerful in their spirituality and confident in their own salvation, evangelicals actively concerned themselves with the redemption of others and the improvement of society. In Britain they exerted themselves with such specific goals as the suppression of vice, the reform of prisons and the abolition of slavery. The impulses of evangelicalism and the English-speaking enlightenment perhaps coalesced even more readily in the colonies where improvers did not confront an entrenched European regime. In early British Australia, many evangelicals subscribed to the basic enlightenment tenet that ‘the world could be improved and human beings made better as the result of conscious human planning and disciplined endeavour.’⁴⁷ They concerned themselves with the improvement of the colony in physical, social and moral terms and in doing so, actively helped define the culture of colonial Protestantism and colonial society more broadly.⁴⁸

An emphasis on mission was one of the distinguishing features of evangelical Protestantism during the period of Australia’s initial British settlement and reveals both the pragmatic and activist temper of the movement. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) had supported Anglican ministry in Britain’s colonies since the start of the eighteenth century.⁴⁹ But with a distinctive confidence in the ability of believing

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people, as God’s appointed agents, to bring his Word to the world, as well as an enlightenment-fuelled curiosity about non-European humanity and an unswerving conviction that gospel had power to transform all peoples and societies to the glory of the Lord, evangelicals directed their attention to the wider world by forming their own societies. The London Missionary Society was established by non-conformists in 1795, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) by Anglican evangelicals in 1799 and the Wesleyan Missionary Society by Wesleyan Methodists in 1810. Contemporaries did not overlook either the critique of the SPG implied by the formation of the CMS or the openings apparently afforded to missionaries by the extension of the British empire into the South Pacific world.\(^5\)

As the prominent Anglican evangelical Henry Venn exclaimed joyfully when he heard of Johnson’s appointment to New South Wales, the southern settlement would yield new opportunities for ‘opening connexions with the heathen’ and lay ‘a foundation for the Gospel of our God and Saviour to be preached to them.’\(^5\)

The early British colonists of Australia came from a country in which Protestantism was a diverse and changing tradition of faith. Importantly for the settlements they founded, they also came from a country in the midst of broader social, cultural and political transitions with major consequences for religious life; transitions to which Protestantism had to adapt. Some of the most important changes occurred slowly over more than a century, such as the revolution in agriculture and rural life, gradual urbanisation and the cultural and intellectual shifts loosely associated with the enlightenment. Others occurred over the relatively short period of parliamentary reform between 1828 and 1832. The political developments of those years reframed the relationship between Protestantism’s different strands and significantly altered the position of establishment and dissenting religion in Britain. They admitted dissenters to public life and thus removed much of the stigma and the political disadvantage of non-conformity.\(^5\) The repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 and Catholic Emancipation in 1829 had numerous consequences for Anglicanism, too. Repeal and emancipation overhauled its relationship to the state, to the horror of high churchmen who feared that both the religious health and

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\(^5\) Henry Venn to his daughter, 28 October 1786, cited in Pigg, Spirit of a Nation, p. 4.

\(^5\) Colley, Britons, pp. 342-354.
political stability of the nation were being dangerously undermined.\textsuperscript{53} The weakening of
the church-state relationship entailed by the extension of political rights to non-Anglicans
also prompted a re-evaluation of the authority and identity of the English church in which
Tractarians played a prominent role.\textsuperscript{54}

Four years later in 1832, the success of the Reform Bill prompted further clarification of
the position of Anglicanism in relation to evangelicalism and dissent. Reform increased
the parliamentary representation of new industrial and commercial centres especially in
England’s north and Midlands, and had the effect of enfranchising numerous non-
conformists.\textsuperscript{55} Some Protestant dissenters were dissatisfied with the changes because
they did not go far enough: some joined the Chartist campaign for the extension of the
franchise while others migrated to such places as Moreton Bay and South Australia in
search of a ‘paradise of dissent.’\textsuperscript{56} But in the immediate aftermath of the Act, newly
enfranchised dissenters were among those who advocated the disestablishment of
Anglicanism and supported the new Whig administration’s interventions into the
property and government of the English church. These changes drove a wedge between
church and chapel, as Bebbington noted, and divided Anglican evangelicals committed to
the preservation of the established status of their church from dissenters who opposed the
very principle of religious establishment.\textsuperscript{57}

Reform was a major turning point in the history of religion in Britain, but long range
changes occurring in rural and urban life had consequences for the ways in which
individuals and communities related to their surrounds as well as for the churches and the
character of religious life. Over two and a half centuries, enclosure entailed a variety of
changes in landholding that reshaped rural society including the role of the established
church and clergy. Fenlands were drained, forests were cleared and considerable tracts of
ground were reclaimed. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, wasteland and

\textsuperscript{53} Clark, \textit{English Society}, chapter six.
\textsuperscript{54} Nockles, \textit{The Oxford Movement in Context}, chapter two.
\textsuperscript{56} Douglas Pike, \textit{Paradise of Dissent: South Australia 1829-1857}, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne,
1957. On Lang’s Moreton Bay scheme see chapter eight below.
\textsuperscript{57} Bebbington, \textit{Evangelicalism in Modern Britain}, pp. 98-9; Owen Chadwick, \textit{The Victorian Church},

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open-field arable land amounting to just over twenty per cent of the area of England was enclosed by acts of parliament.\footnote{Overton, Agricultural Revolution in England, p. 147.} These changes were often accompanied by the establishment of leasehold, the removal of common property rights, the amalgamation of farms and radical alterations to land use.\footnote{Overton, Agricultural Revolution in England, p. 147.} The nucleated character of some villages was gradually undermined as enclosure redefined rural society. Tithe system was also overhauled, which removed a common source of tension between clergy and the inhabitants of their parishes. But tithes were usually commuted favourably such that many clergy acquired substantial tracts of land and became more integrated into local elites.\footnote{Evans, ‘Some Reasons for the Growth of English Rural Anti-Clericalism,’ pp. 84-109; Peter Virgin, The Church in an Age of Negligence: ecclesiastical structure and problems of church reform 1700-1840, James Clarke, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 192-3, and Taylor and Walsh, ‘The Church and Anglicanism in the ‘long’ eighteenth century,’ pp. 6-8.}

One of the benefits of the agricultural revolution and the corresponding increase in output was that it provided for a population that was growing rapidly. During the fifty years to 1801, the population of Scotland increased by approximately twenty five percent to 1.6 million and that of England and Wales rose by more than thirty percent to the unprecedented size of 8.9 million.\footnote{Robert Gildea, Barricades and Borders: Europe 1800-1914, 3rd edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, p. 4.} This rise was accompanied by anxiety in some quarters about whether such a large population could be sustained, and by an increase in migration both externally and internally. The departure of people from Britain, most commonly across the Atlantic to the North American colonies, occurred very haphazardly.\footnote{See Eric Richards, ‘Emigration to New Worlds: Migration Systems in the Early Nineteenth Century,’ Australian Journal of Politics and History, vol.41 no.3 (1995) pp. 391-407.}

While this presented challenges to colonial administrators, for the migrants it raised questions about what it meant to be British elsewhere in the world. Their culture and identity and their relationship to institutions including the Church were issues to be resolved in very different and unfamiliar places.

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\footnote{59 Overton, Agricultural Revolution in England, p. 147.}


Within Britain, an increasing proportion of people left the land where they had lived and worked in favour of the towns and cities. A substantial portion of the population also left the agricultural sector and moved into manufacturing and trade. By the mid point of the nineteenth century, half the population resided in urban areas for the first time in British history. Only about one in five workers remained engaged in agriculture, fishing or forestry while almost half the active population worked in building, mining and manufacturing. The population drift towards the large towns and cities and the turn away from agricultural employment on rural estates weakened the relationship between servant and master and the paternal social fabric which had knit them together in previous centuries. It detached people from the land and also from the established church which had been so central in rural village life. The new industrial centres were often located in places beyond the nexus of squire and parson and posed a challenge to the Church of England to extend her parochial ministrations to them. The conventional view that the slovenly Georgian church failed to respond to the rising urban population’s spiritual needs has been heavily qualified by historians in recent decades. Its church building efforts were substantial, including in new population centres, even if Anglicans had abandoned the ideal of providing a pew seat for every person by mid century. In general terms, though, urbanisation did not favour the growth of Anglicanism but undermined its settled parish ideal.

Another important effect of agricultural modernisation was that it fostered the development of an idea of improvement subsequently applied not only to the environment but to human nature and society. The ethos of improvement helped define

64 Clark, English Society, p. 481.
the culture and spirit of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Emboldened by an enlightenment faith in the possibilities of progress, many educated Britons, including many among those who ventured to the Australian colonies, understood the application of human reason and industry as the basic means for bettering their condition and adapting their surrounds to better suit their needs. As John Gascoigne has shown, a value for improvement was a significant influence on the way in which early British colonists engaged with the Australian environment, particularly in their agricultural and pastoral endeavours and their efforts to extend European scientific knowledge of the continent. Improvement was perhaps the aspect of the enlightenment that thrived best within Protestant piety. Improvement was also an ideal that found theoretical description and exposition in the work of the leading thinkers of the Scottish enlightenment, to whom some colonists turned to understand the stadial progress of their own and other societies.

Significantly for colonial Protestantism, British society underwent several substantial changes during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It was not becoming inexorably more secular, nor was Christianity conceding ground before the rapid advance of a godless modernity. But the established churches did experience a loss of political power in consequence of parliamentary reform. They also faced new challenges to their influence as the working population became more mobile, non-conformists were enfranchised, and agricultural and urban change profoundly reshaped the contexts in which they ministered. The social, cultural and even physical transformations of the period raised questions concerning the relationship of people to their environment. They drew attention to the role of religion in the state and society. And importantly they stirred up the relationship between belief and locality.

The established churches negotiated all these issues at the same time that they negotiated their relationships with dissenting and especially evangelical forms of Protestantism. The rise of evangelicalism, along with the cultural and intellectual shifts fostered by the enlightenment, substantially reshaped British religious life during the early period of Australia’s colonial settlement. It contributed to the diversity of Protestantism, not least by founding the Methodist denomination, reinvigorating Trinitarian dissent and prompting the formation of an evangelical party within the Anglican and Presbyterian churches. At the same time, it re-emphasised aspects of the older strands of Protestantism such as the supreme authority of the bible as God’s Word. Such developments within their religious tradition, as well as the broader changes occurring in British social and cultural life, meant that Protestant Britons were articulating their beliefs and values in response to new circumstances within their own country as well as its colonies. These transformations ensured that, between 1788 and 1850, British colonists carried cultural assumptions and habits to Australia that were already in a state of flux.
CHAPTER TWO
Exile and Colonisation
Richard Johnson and the first British colonists of New South Wales

The Reverend Richard Johnson was not the adventurous kind. He had seen a little of England having grown up in the evangelical stronghold of Yorkshire, received his education at its intellectual centre, Cambridge, and then worked for a period in Hampshire. He had very likely been told about the beauties of its other regions and the pleasures of travel as well. William Gilpin, the clerical traveller who wrote several well-known works on the picturesque, was rector of the parish in which he served his first curacy. Johnson thought highly of his senior minister and remained for many years an occasional correspondent of his, but the incurious young man did not absorb from him either an interest in new places or a desire to undertake extensive or independent travel.

When Johnson moved to the capital in early 1785, his thirtieth year, he appeared content to declare the Gospel of the Lord in one place.

Johnson settled into London at a time when the evangelical Anglican community there was still small but the fellowship among its members deep and rich. Johnson probably fitted into it quickly and easily as assistant to the evangelical Henry Foster, who held a number of lecturing and casual preaching posts. Senior evangelical clerics including John Newton were based in the centre of the city and lay leaders including John and Henry Thornton and William Wilberforce also spent considerable time there. As the 1780s unfolded into the 1790s Anglican evangelicals were increasingly active and influential in


London. It was there that the Clapham sect, so influential in the campaign to abolish slavery, and several of the most active Protestant missionary societies of the nineteenth century were formed.\(^3\) By the early 1800s, the city appeared to one pious observer to be in the midst of a ‘Gospel blaze.’\(^4\)

The earnest young evangelical was happy in London and valued the fellowship of his evangelical friends and associates there.\(^5\) But one autumn evening in late September 1786, one of those friends called on him and asked if he had ‘the spirit of missionary’ or the wish to go abroad. Perhaps the question came as a shock to Johnson; perhaps he gave a slight shake of the head. He later recalled that he smiled and replied ‘No, I had no inclination or thoughts of ever leaving my native Country.’\(^6\) His unnamed friend, who was undoubtedly involved with the recently formed Eclectic Society of evangelicals, from which the Church Missionary Society eventually emerged, remained undeterred. Johnson’s spiritual mentors considered that, despite his assertions to the contrary, he was proper for ‘arduous work’ abroad. Exactly a week after his denial of any desire to depart England Johnson received a letter, probably from Newton, Foster or Wilberforce, offering the position of Botany Bay chaplain to him.\(^7\)

The news hit Johnson hard. ‘For several nights and days,’ he later recalled, ‘both my sleep and appetite were in a great measure taken away.’ He ‘did little else than weep and sigh’ as he considered the prospect of departing civilisation and going ‘to the very ends


\(^7\) Richard Johnson, 16 April 1794, Johnson papers, pp. 1-2; John Newton to Richard Johnson, 9 November 1790, *Historical Records of New South Wales* [hereafter *HRNSW*] vol.2, p. 443; Macintosh, *Richard Johnson*, p. 27.
of the earth, to a country wild and uncultivated, to be exposed to savages and perhaps to
various wild beasts of prey.’ He was distressed by the thought of leaving ‘my parents,
relations, friends and the respectful connections which I had formed’ and was acutely
aware of ‘the danger of the sea.’ Yet he recognised the ‘necessity of some person going
out’ with the convicts to seek their reformation and redemption. He also believed that
God would protect him, sustain him and ultimately reward him should he go. After
several days fasting and praying, the sensitive young cleric resolved to give his ‘free
consent to enter upon this hazardous expedition.’ It was a decision motivated more by a
sense of duty to God and perhaps also to his ‘respectful connections’ than particular
passion for his missionary task.

Six months was all the time Johnson had to prepare. In October the wealthy evangelical
philanthropist John Thornton arranged for him to meet ‘two hundred and fifty of his
future congregation’ on a visit to the hulks at Woolwich. In December, Mary Burton, a
pious Londoner whom Johnson later described as ‘about half a Baptist and half a
Methodist,’ agreed to marry him. In the weeks after the wedding the couple spent quite
some time enjoying the company of friends before resuming the considerable task of
preparing their outfit for the expedition and procuring the books, bibles, communion
vessels, service registers and other items thought necessary for the proper conduct of
religious life at the southern extremity of the earth. By May 1787 everything was ready
and Richard and Mary Johnson set sail with Arthur Phillip’s fleet. The chaplain was one
of the few men on board to be accompanied by his wife. It was a sign, perhaps, that he
did not expect to return.

Upon arrival in Sydney eight months later, Johnson acted more like a home missionary to
the wayward working classes than, as John Newton grandly dubbed him, an ‘Apostle to

8 Richard Johnson, 16 April 1794, Johnson papers, p. 2
9 Henry Venn to his daughter Jane Venn, 28 October 1786, cited in Macintosh, Richard Johnson, p. 38.
10 On Mary Johnson see Johnson to Fricker, 30 May 1787 in George Mackaness (ed.), Some Letters of the
Reverend Richard Johnson, B.A., First Chaplain of New South Wales, Review Publications, Dubbo,
1978, vol.1, 14; Macintosh, Richard Johnson, pp. 39-40; Neil Macintosh, ‘Johnson, Mary’ in The
the South Seas.’\textsuperscript{11} His colonial experience was defined by his persistent efforts to reclaim the convicts from their former wicked course and awaken them, by preaching the Gospel, to ‘a sense of their duty to God, to society & to themselves’ – and also by his pervasive and at times overwhelming sense of exile.\textsuperscript{12} In New South Wales, he felt banished from his friends, alienated from the soil and cut off from the enjoyment of the means of grace.\textsuperscript{13} His displacement from England opened up a new and important opportunity for him to do the work of the Lord, and yet placed a physical and spiritual burden upon him of a very heavy kind. In the attempt to make sense of his journey to the colony and the many difficulties and challenges he subsequently confronted there, the evangelical Protestant chaplain resorted to the biblical idea and image of exile. Like Adam and Eve he and Mary had been cast out from Eden and had great difficulty cultivating the ground; like the Israelite exiles in Babylon they lived at a great distance from their home in the midst irreligious and immoral people who appeared not to acknowledge God. For nearly thirteen years until he returned home to England in very poor health, Johnson laboured as an exile in eastern Australia and lived as an alien in that land.

Ideas of exile have been prominent in discussions of settler Australia and its history, particularly since the 1980s. The bicentenary of British colonisation in 1988, the \textit{Mabo} decision in 1992 and the referendum on the republic in 1999 each prompted public reflection on the relationship of white Australians to the continent they occupied, its original inhabitants and to the country from which their own ancestors had come. Historians as well as academic commentators on Australian art and literature have contributed significantly to this discussion in numerous books and articles exploring themes of alienation and belonging, exile and home.\textsuperscript{14} While this wide-ranging literature has applied the label of exile very liberally, one important strand of the discussion has focused on white Australian narratives of expulsion and alienation and their implications for settler relations to land. Suffering, labour and possession have been key themes. In his

\textsuperscript{11} John Newton to Richard Johnson, 24 May 1793, \textit{HRNSW} vol.2 p. 27.
\textsuperscript{12} Richard Johnson, 16 April 1794, Johnson papers, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{13} Johnson to Fricker, 15 August 1797, in Mackaness, \textit{Some Letters}, p. 19.
exploration of contemporary modes of belonging, Peter Read highlighted that many non-Aboriginal men in rural Australia have considered attachment to the land to be ‘born out of labour; the harder the labour, the greater is the implied right of attachment.’\textsuperscript{15} Andrew Lattas has similarly observed that suffering has been widely seen by white Australians as an antidote to alienation from the land. Non-indigenous Australians have constructed an identity crisis for themselves, he suggested, that is characterised by a sense of distance from the land they occupy but from which they did not originate. One consequence of this cultural construction of alienation is that ‘the land becomes a testing ground’ on which its colonial claimants must prove their worth. The heroic struggles of explorers, pioneers and artists against the land thus serve to legitimate white presence in and possession of the land. Their suffering, as he put it, ‘takes on the epic proportions of a pilgrimage that redeems and heals the nation.’\textsuperscript{16}

The possessive implications of settler Australian narratives of alienation and suffering have also been explored in more historical terms. In an important article published in 1999, Ann Curthoys interrogated historical narratives of settler suffering and emphasised the ways in which they have been used to justify the colonial occupation of the land. She drew attention to the pervasiveness of victimological narratives in popular presentations of white Australian history, especially concerning the convicts and white pioneers. She agreed with Deborah Bird Rose that the historical Australian myth of expulsion tended to ‘situate home as Eden, the monarch as God and the convicts as sinful fallen people doomed to a life of toil and sweat amidst thorns and thistles.’\textsuperscript{17} Such myths, drawing heavily on ideas and images from the biblical tradition, could give settler suffering metaphysical meaning and elevate an experience of struggle into an explanation, even a justification, of a colonist’s place in the world. In popular culture, Curthoys suggested, such narratives have worked against ‘substantial acknowledgement and understanding of

\textsuperscript{15} Read, Belonging, p. 118.


a colonial past,’ and tended to ‘inform and inflame white racial discourse.’ As Mark McKenna’s study of south eastern New South Wales has since confirmed, narratives of struggle, neglect and failure have been deeply ingrained in the ethos of settler culture up to the present day. They ‘obscure empathetic recognition of indigenous perspectives’ because their subjects, ‘self-chosen white victims’ or battlers, find it extremely difficult to recognise the ways in which they have benefitted from colonialism and acknowledge what they have done to others.

Narratives of struggle and alienation have been probed primarily for their significance to contemporary Australian identity and relationships to the land, and thus to the cultural politics of reconciliation. But the discussion of such narratives since the 1980s has raised questions and issues that might be explored fruitfully in relation to the early colonial period. How were the first colonists’ identities informed by ideas of alienation such as exile? To what extent did they understand their experiences in the colony in terms of struggle and suffering? How did biblical ideas of expulsion, exile and sin inform their thought? And what were the implications of those ideas for the colonists’ engagement with the land and for the relationship between Protestant Christianity and colonisation in Australia more broadly still? Richard Johnson was prominent among the early British colonists of New South Wales who employed the exile narrative in a way that speaks to such issues and themes. His experience casts light on the implications of exile for early colonial life and for issues of possession and colonial legitimacy. Reverend Johnson’s personal experiences of living and ministering in the colony, as well as the situation of the church he represented in New South Wales, suggest the need for a deeper appreciation of the influence of biblical Protestantism on the complex ways in which colonists understood themselves in relation to the place they appropriated, and the need for a more complicated understanding of the contribution of the Anglican church and its agents to the foundation of British colonial society in New South Wales.

ENTERING INTO EXILE

Even as the weeping Richard Johnson considered whether or not to accept the position of chaplain to far off Botany Bay, he realised that hundreds, maybe thousands of convicts were soon to be banished there. He contemplated his own potential separation from the people and places he held dear in light of the British government’s plan of penal exile. As Atkinson has stressed, the political architects of penal colonisation understood criminals convicted of serious crimes to be people who had, by their actions, forfeited their lives. But in a society deeply informed by Christian notions of justice and mercy, obligation and redemption, the state permitted most felons to determine their own fate by choosing between banishment and death. A convict might thus regain his or her life by accepting that they had lost their place in civil society and agreeing to abandon their home. Transportation was the means by which the choice of banishment was made effective: exile was the very essence of the punishment under which the convicts were conveyed to New South Wales.

Penal exile was thought to have several advantages in Johnson’s time. It removed those elements from British society that might criminally threaten or morally degrade the whole; it averted the risk of disease erupting in the close confines of the hulks and spreading to other parts of the city; it restored the use-value of convict labour otherwise underemployed at the docks. Such pragmatic concerns were complemented by religious ones. Transportation had a ‘religio-moral economy,’ as Richard Ely put it, as a means by which prisoners were relocated to a place beyond Britain where they might be reformed. English evangelicals sometimes interested themselves in penal issues including transportation precisely because of the opportunities it presented for experiments in the redemption of wayward souls. John Gascoigne has suggested that most penal administrators understood redemption in moral rather than conversionist terms, but Johnson’s exertions among the convicts during his time in New South Wales

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23 Piggin, *Spirit of a Nation*, p. 4.
indicate that he, at least, sought both their eternal salvation and their transformation in more worldly ways. He urged them to repent of their sins and accept the forgiveness won by the blood of Jesus Christ, and then to live moral lives in keeping with the commands of their God.\textsuperscript{24} He also identified himself with the policy goal of moral reformation, recalling in 1794 that he had ‘always understood that it was the intention of the government to see whether some reformation might not be affected’ amongst the convicts exiled to New South Wales.\textsuperscript{25} Although the convicts’ exile was an economic and political convenience it had redemptive possibilities as well.

The convicts’ banishment was fundamentally a penal one, but for Johnson and others whose transportation to the colony was contingent upon theirs, ideas and experiences of exile were informed by far more than penal theory. Biblical narratives, in particular, exerted an important influence on contemporary notions of exile. The \textit{King James Bible}, the most commonly owned book in Britain, furnished readers and hearers alike with exile stories of several kinds. The most prominent concerned Israel’s captivity in Babylon during the sixth century BC. According to the books of Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Lamentations and Isaiah, God allowed Israel’s enemies to carry them into exile as punishment for their religious infidelity and idolatry, among other communal sins. They experienced removal from their homeland as a national crisis and suffered profound spiritual despair. In contrast, the stories of Joseph’s sale into slavery in Egypt and Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness of Judea presented the experience of exile in a more individual, positive light. Both these men entered into a kind of exile because of their faithfulness and obedience to God, not as a consequence of sin. Their ordeals, moreover, are presented as having a redemptive importance in God’s providential plans for Israel and the world. The circumstances of Johnson’s own entry into exile in Australia bears some resemblances to these biblical exile narratives.

The biblical account of Adam and Eve’s banishment from Eden was the exile story that proved most influential for the Johnsons and other British colonists of eastern Australia.

\textsuperscript{24} Richard Johnson, \textit{An Address to the Inhabitants of the Colonies established in New South Wales and Norfolk Island ... written in the year 1792} (1794), Libraries Board of South Australia facsimile edition, Adelaide, 1963.
\textsuperscript{25} Richard Johnson, 16 April 1794, Johnson papers, p. 3.
That narrative – so evocatively amplified in the previous century by Milton’s *Paradise Lost* – presents exile from paradise as neither an individual nor national calamity, but as the basic condition of humankind:

‘Unto the woman [God] said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return... So the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from whence he was taken.’

The Genesis narrative of original expulsion emphasised several points. It made clear that for both men and women, hard physical labour was a basic consequence of exile. Adam and Eve had been commanded to work the garden in their pre-fall state, but strenuous labour in tilling the soil and bearing children was a central aspect of the curse. The second of the narrative’s key features was the unproductive and uncultivated character of the place to which the disgraced humans were sent. Denied access to the abundance of Eden, they would struggle to raise food from cursed and thorny ground. Thirdly, the biblical narrative stressed that the spiritual consequence of sin and expulsion was a loss of intimacy with the Lord. And fourthly, although the narrative contained a tiny suggestion of future redemption – one day the serpent’s offspring would be crushed – it gave no explicit promise of the possibility of return. ‘[God] drove out the man’ and placed ‘Cherubims and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.’ Once Adam and Eve had been exiled from the Garden, human existence would be characterised by difficult toil and frustrated agriculture until the day of inevitable death.

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26 Genesis 3: 16-19, 23 (*King James Version*).
27 Genesis 3:24 (*King James Version*)
The idea of exile haunts a number of passages in the first British colonists’ extant letters and journals. The better educated would have been aware of classical narratives of banishment as well as religious ones, but for earnest Protestants like Johnson and others influenced by the biblical tradition, it was the scriptural suite of expulsion stories that gave the idea of exile its shape. Even within the biblical framework, though, exile was a complex notion that could be applied to the infant colony and its residents in several ways. For a number of early colonists, it appears to have resonated most deeply with the experience of banishment from home and the difficulty of cultivating the ground. Johnson’s sense of himself as an exile was similarly informed by his experience of having been cut off from home and the physical struggle of tilling the apparently barren and hostile earth. Significantly, though, it was also informed by his impression of the convicts as sinful people, Mary’s experience of sorrow in childbirth and his sense of spiritual isolation, as the sole minister of a dislocated and fragile church, from fellowship with the people of God. Biblical notions of exile were at the heart of the first chaplain’s understanding of himself and the colony and informed how many of the new arrivals’ engaged with the land.

Johnson’s departure from England in May 1787 was a departure from everything he found familiar – from the country of his birth, the company of his friends and the fellowship of the faithful in Christ Jesus his Lord. It was also a departure for a ‘wild and uncultivated’ place not unlike that to which Adam and Eve had been banished from Eden. Johnson did not make an explicit comparison between his own situation and that of the biblical parents of humankind when he reflected on the experience of entering into exile some seven years later, in the midst of his bitter conflict with the colony’s then Lieutenant Governor, Major Grose. But his reminiscences emphasised the difficulty of leaving his relations and friends, the ‘fear and terror’ he felt when he considered what lay ahead and the terribly uncultivated character of the place in which he was to toil. They convey a sense of beleaguerment mixed with a tired resignation that hints he did not expect ever to be restored to his home. Johnson appears from them to have entered his colonial exile with a deep sensation of loss.

28 Richard Johnson, 16 April 1794, Johnson papers, pp. 1-4.
It is difficult to know what the convicts thought about their situation or anticipated for the future when Phillip’s fleet set sail. Some later transportees who managed to publish an account of their experiences described leaving their homeland as a cause of ‘serious gloom.’\(^{29}\) Others like Joseph Lingard, sent to what had become a thriving colony in the mid 1830s, wrote more playfully of the opportunity ‘to go abroad.’\(^{30}\) People like him may have had friends in the colony and access to information about their destination – which the first convicts certainly did not. For the women and men who sailed with Phillip and on immediately subsequent fleets, Botany Bay was a virtually unknown place they might create with their minds. It is likely they imagined it in a range of ways from the fearfully pessimistic to the cautiously optimistic. Some probably expected it was a place full of savage men and terrible beasts, as Johnson himself did. But according to an officer on board the *Scarborough*, writing soon after the fleet got to sea, some ‘new settlers’ hearts were filled ‘with gratitude.’ ‘The more rational part of them are convinced’ that ‘the disgrace they suffered in England’ will be ‘buried in oblivion’ and ‘by industry and attention they will enjoy all the requisites reasonable beings can desire,’ he judged.\(^{31}\) This account may reveal more of the officer’s own sense of the reforming effects of transportation than the convicts’ attitudes, but it nevertheless suggests the possibility that even very early transportees to Australia harboured some hope. Whatever their expectations, though, the convicts could not avoid the fact that they had been expelled from their home. ‘I don’t think I ever shall get away from this place to come again to see you,’ wrote one transported woman from Sydney soon after she arrived.\(^{32}\) By referring to the transportees as ‘settlers,’ even the *Scarborough* officer implied that they would at best found a new society and were unlikely ever to return home.

\(^{29}\) John Slater, *A Description of Sydney, Parramatta, Newcastle, etc, settlements in New South Wales, with some account of the Manners and Employment of the Convicts, In a letter from John Slater to his wife in Nottingham, Sutton and Son, Bridesmith-Gate, 1819, p. 3.


\(^{31}\) ‘Letter from an Officer on board the Scarborough transport’, November 1787, *HRNSW* vol.2 p. 742.

\(^{32}\) ‘Voyage of the Lady Juliana’ by a female convict transported by her, Sydney Cove, 24 July 1790, *HRNSW* vol.2 p. 767.
Whether or not they returned to Britain – a fair number, like Johnson, eventually did – several convicts reflected upon their experience in explicitly exilic terms. The celebrated pickpocket George Barrington lightheartedly declared himself ‘a poor banished sinner’; the artist Thomas Watling wrote more seriously and bitterly of himself as ‘an exile at Botany Bay’. The prisoner poet John Grant felt ‘twice exil’d, ill at ease’ while one repatriated man reflected on his transportation in terms of ‘banishment from family, home, friends, and all endearing connections and social ties of life... to a country at the other side of the globe.’ These transportees referred to themselves as exiles both gravely and playfully. They sometimes did so, furthermore, in ways that suggest their general association of exile with expulsion and sin. The term had scriptural meanings to which some convicts referred as easily and as casually as George Worgan had drawn upon the biblical image of Noah’s ark.

The expectations of the officers and soldiers probably ranged across a wider spectrum than those of the convicts. For Lieutenant Ralph Clark, the sensation of exile was acute at the outset. ‘Never did poor Mortal feel himself so unhappy as I doe at this present moment,’ he lamented the night he boarded his ship to sail. ‘I wish to god that I was Returning home.’ He had agreed to undertake the voyage in the hope of achieving a promotion in the navy but felt he was ‘going every moment father [sic] from all that my soul holds dear’ – namely his ‘dear beloved wife’ Betsy Alicia and their ‘dear sweet boy.’ ‘When ever I am restord to them again [I] will never leave them,’ he promised himself in the pages of his private diary.

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If Clark’s free companions were equally grief-stricken by their separation from family and home, their extant journals do not show it. Their accounts, many of which were written with later publication in view, convey various positive attitudes to the voyage to Botany Bay. Some undertook the trip in fulfilment of their duty, perhaps glad of employment despite the conclusion of the American wars. Some sought adventure and even an experience of the exotic at a time when the South Pacific occupied an increasingly prominent place in the escapist fantasies of the European reading classes. They tended not to express strong sensations of banishment, perhaps because they knew their tour of duty, should they survive it, would not extend beyond four or five years.

Upon reaching the southern continent and beginning a European settlement on its shores, however, great numbers of officers began to interpret their experience and describe their destination in very negative terms. ‘We expected,’ as one unnamed officer wrote, ‘to find a beautiful county ... as well as to rest ourselves from our fatigues.’ But these hopes were swiftly disappointed. ‘There is not a spot of ground large enough for a cabbage-garden fit for cultivation within several miles of [the bay], and barely fresh water sufficient to supply our present wants,’ he explained. Even Watkin Tench, the generally optimistic captain-lieutenant of the marines, agreed: ‘of the natural meadows which Cook mentioned near Botany Bay, we can give no account; none such exist about Port Jackson.’ The Captain of the Sirius, John Hunter, confirmed these damning assessments. Contrary to what the great voyager had written and Sir Joseph Banks had led them to believe, there was ‘nothing to recommend it as a place on which to form an infant settlement.’

39 ‘Letter from an Officer at Sydney’, 12 July 1788, HRNSW vol.2 p. 743.
40 Watkin Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, being a reprint of The Expedition to Botany Bay and A Complete Account of the settlement at Port Jackson by Captain Watkin Tench, L. F. Fitzhardinge (ed.), Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1979, p. 65. For Phillip’s account, see Governor Phillip to Lord Sydney, 15 May 1788, HRNSW vol.1 pt. 2 pp. 121-122.

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It was perhaps expressive of his intention to stay in the colony that Johnson immediately sought the familiar while the naval officers looked for a site to establish a settlement that would endure long after they planned to leave. A terribly long way beyond the world he had known, he did not know what to make of his new surrounds. He did not comment on the coastline, the vegetation or anything he saw. Words literally failed him when he attempted to describe the scene and he simply referred his friends to Cook. ‘I will not give you any very particular account of Botany Bay, as this is needless,’ he wrote to his Baptist friend Henry Fricker in February 1788. ‘The account which Captain Cook has given of it is very just in general, both as to its situation, produce or production, whether of plants, trees, fishing woods etc, and the Natives very much the same as he describes them.’ 42 ‘Cook’s description of [Botany] Bay is more particular and more full than I can give you,’ he repeated to Reverend Stonnard in May. ‘[I] do think that what he says of it is very exact.’ 43 Such unreflective deference to the famous navigator suggests Johnson’s disorientation in a place ‘so new and strange.’ 44 Perhaps he did not offer an initial description of his surrounds at Botany Bay because he could not comprehend what he saw.

During their very first few days in Australia, the colonists were repeatedly made aware that, wherever they determined to settle, they had arrived at another people’s home. When a party of convicts began clearing the ground in preparation for a possible landing on the southern shore of Botany Bay, a group of Aborigines expressed great displeasure at their actions and evidently wanted them to go. 45 Again, when the British landed their first substantial haul of fish, the Aborigines who observed them shouted with astonishment and took hold of them ‘as if they had a right to them.’ 46 When a group of officers including Johnson went ashore, several Aboriginal men ‘came out of the water, joined in a body together, and stood till we came up with them,’ as Johnson later put it to a friend. ‘As we came near them, they spoke to us in a loud dissonant manner, principally

42 Johnson to Henry Fricker, 10 February 1788, in Mackaness, Some Letters, p. 15
43 Johnson to Jonathan Stonard, 8 May 1788, in Mackaness, Some Letters, p. 16
44 Johnson to Joseph Banks, 8 July 1788, in Mackaness, Some Letters, p. 20
uttering these words, warra, warra wai, which we judged to be to tell us to go away.'

Phillip’s officers had similar encounters. But the Aborigines’ request was heeded neither by Johnson and his companions, nor by Phillip and his. Within days the Governor had ordered the colonists’ disembarkation at the place known to the Gadigal people as Warrane, which he re-named Sydney Cove.

An acute sense of disappointment with the land persisted among the early British colonists long after they abandoned Botany Bay and settled at Sydney Cove. There was ‘hardly one acre of ground’ within forty miles of the camp that was ‘free from wood or rocks,’ one officer complained. ‘I wish I could say something in favour of this place’ confessed another bitterly. ‘What could have induced Government to form a settlement here?’ still another wondered, despite having lived in the colony for nearly three years. Johnson readily agreed with these early colonial writers that the country had ‘no one thing to recommend it’ and would ‘never answer’ whatever the intentions of Government may have been. In mid 1788 he pronounced the soil ‘in general very indifferent – in some parts nothing but hard, solid rock, in others a black sand full of ant hills.’ He told none other than Joseph Banks that first winter that ‘I have not any very sanguine expectations that [the country] will ever turn to any very great account. What is to us hereafter is only known to God, but at present I think appearances are against us.’ Whether convict or free, Protestant or otherwise, on this the first colonists tended to agree: they had arrived in a ‘solitary waste of the creation,’ in a country that seemed the very ‘outcast of God’s works.’ The colonists’ disappointment with the land confirmed their sense of having been exiled from home to an apparently barren and hostile shore.

47 Johnson to Fricker, 10 February 1788, in Mackaness, Some Letters, pp. 14-16.
48 See David Collins, An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, Brian Fletcher (ed.), A. H. & A. W. Reed, Sydney, vol.1 p. 2; Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, p. 36.
49 Warrane is one of several similar names recorded by various British colonists, which Aborigines gave to the place now known as Sydney Cove. See Val Attenbrow, Sydney’s Aboriginal Past: investigating the archaeological and historical records, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2002, p. 11.
50 ‘Letter from an Officer at Sydney’, 12 July 1788, HRNSW vol.2 p. 743.
51 ‘Forgotten by Government’, Extract of a letter from Botany Bay, 7 August 1790, HRNSW vol.2 pp. 768-9
53 Johnson to Stonard, 8 May 1788, in Mackaness, Some Letters, p. 16.
54 Johnson to Banks, 8 July 1788, in Mackaness, Some Letters, p. 20.
LABOUR AND EXILE

As the first colonists set about establishing a British settlement at Sydney Cove, the particular characteristics of their exile experience began to emerge more clearly. In the first place, it became apparent that their exile was of a settling rather than a wandering sort. The convicts’ transportation was inextricably tied up with the imperial government’s plan to establish a colony in New South Wales, and it followed that the convicts had not simply been banished from their country with the freedom of many ancient exiles to go wherever they chose.\(^{56}\) They had been conveyed to a specific place that Britain claimed for itself, by a government that did not intend for them to return so much as to found a new community and create a new home.\(^{57}\) Like the Israelites exiled to Babylon, they were to build houses, plant crops and put down roots in the land to which they had been expelled.\(^{58}\)

Their exile was a settling rather than a wandering exile in another sense, too. Upon arriving in New South Wales, they were instructed to remain within particular boundaries. Even before the majority of convicts were permitted to disembark, Phillip marked out lines for the encampment and appointed a Provost Martial, a Constable and ‘a party of ye soldiers’ to prevent them ‘straggling’ into the bush.\(^{59}\) Wanderers and idlers found beyond the designated limits of the camp would be imprisoned and deprived of their rations, the Governor later explained to them. It was utterly unacceptable for convicts to go ‘skulking in the woods’ and come into the Camp ‘only at the appointed times for the serving of their provisions to them,’ he said. It was a condition of their banishment that they remain in the camp and ‘assist in the necessary work of forming the Settlement.’\(^{60}\)


\(^{57}\) Atkinson, \textit{The Europeans in Australia}, vol.1 chapter three.

\(^{58}\) see Jeremiah 29: 5-7.


The government’s plan to establish a colony ensured that hard physical labour emerged as another characteristic of many early colonists’ exile. Hard labour was not an official part of the punishment the male convicts had to endure, but it nevertheless became central to their experience of banishment.61 One reason for this was that European law and philosophy tended to associate the investment of labour into the land with possession of a territory.62 Labour was by no means the colonists’ only strategy for asserting their ownership of the land. On the evening his ship cast anchor in Sydney Cove, Phillip and a number of his officers assembled on the shore, displayed the British Flag and, each heart ‘glowing with Loyalty,’ toasted ‘his Majesty’s Health and Success to the Colony.’63 Just two weeks later on 7 February the whole company gathered together to hear Judge Advocate David Collins read the Royal Commission and formally install Phillip as ‘Captain General and Governor in Chief in and over all the territory called New South Wales.’64 The instruments establishing trials by law and civil and criminal courts were also read and the office of Lieutenant Governor conferred on Major Ross. It is probable that several commissions of lower rank, including Johnson’s as chaplain, were also proclaimed.65 Concluding with a triple discharge of the guns and a speech from the Governor, the colonisers thus took ‘possession of the colony in form.’66 These legal announcements and ceremonies were important expressions of Britain’s imperial intentions, but according to the Lockean principle, possession was secured by mixing their labour with the land they claimed.

The practical necessity of physical labour for the foundation of a British settlement was the immediate reason why it became one of the colonists’ defining experiences at Sydney Cove. They had to work to create a place they could inhabit and to raise the food they

64 Phillip, The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay, pp. 64-67.
66 Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, pp.41-43; Collins, An Account of the English Colony, vol.1 pp. 6-7; Phillip, The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay, pp. 64-67; White, Journal of a Voyage, p.114
needed to survive. And because numerous convicts had developed scurvy during the voyage, the cultivation of vegetables was a pressing need from the moment they arrived. Within days of disembarking a government farm was marked out at the head of Farm Cove and some of the healthier convicts put to work clearing and cultivating it. In March, two-acre lots for private farming and grazing were laid out at the head of Long Cove. As Watkin Tench noted, ‘almost the whole of the officers,’ including Johnson, accepted of these small tracts of ground and planted them with the various grains and fruit tree they had purchased at the Cape of Good Hope. Over subsequent months all remained ‘hurry and exertion,’ as Phillip put it, as the convicts engaged in ‘cutting, grubbing and burning down trees, sawing up timber and plank for building, making bricks, hewing stone, erecting temporary store-houses, a building for an hospital, another for an observatory, enclosing farms & gardens, making temporary huts and many other conveniences towards the establishing of a colony.’ ‘Those who would not work should not eat,’ he lectured them with words borrowed from the New Testament.

There were, of course, less laborious ways in which a community could successfully occupy and subsist in that place, as the Aboriginal population of the area had demonstrated over thousands of years. But the cultural assumptions the new arrivals brought with them from Britain gave shape to their behaviour and defined the ends to which they directed their labour. They had with them a number of tents and, in Phillip’s case, a prefabricated house, that signalled their intention to live rather differently to the indigenous people who generally found shelter in the bush. They also carried seeds ashore that, once planted and harvested, would provide familiar foods for their tables and assist them to survive. They led livestock out to graze that would provide manure for the soil and hopefully begin multiplying into flocks and herds. Such items embodied the colonists’ hopes for the satisfaction of their physical needs and at the same time expressed their assumptions about the necessity of agriculture and animal husbandry to the development of a civilised way of life. It was an assumption with deep roots in both classical and biblical thought. ‘Multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it’, God had

68 Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, p. 135; Fletcher, *Landed Enterprise*, p. 42.
enjoined Adam and Eve in Eden and reminded Noah and his family when they disembarked from the Ark.\textsuperscript{71} By unloading their animals, erecting their buildings and sowing their seeds in Australia, the British colonists expressed their particular ideas about civilisation and the proper use of the land, as well as their immediate desire to survive.

As both the convicts and the officers soon found, however, raising food from the ground was neither an easy nor immediately rewarding task. To Banks, Johnson expressed his sincere wish that the efforts and endeavours of ‘Government and our Governor’ for the ‘Cultivation and improvement’ of the land would ‘succeed by the blessing of God.’\textsuperscript{72} But his own rather bleak impression was that the soil was ‘in general very indifferent’ and unlikely to ‘ever turn to any very great account.’\textsuperscript{73} The poor quality of the land around Sydney Cove was a recurring theme of the letters he wrote after arrival and his initial judgment was soon justified. In May 1788, the failure of the first crop combined with the dwindling level of the government stores prompted Phillip to write home about ‘the necessity of a regular supply of provisions for four or five years’.\textsuperscript{74} In subsequent months, the Governor reported that only twenty acres of the government farm had been cleared and the harvests had been severely compromised by the poor quality of the seed and a destructive plague of mice.\textsuperscript{75} The officers’ private efforts produced similarly poor results. ‘Experience proved to us that the soil would produce neither [grain nor vegetables] without manure,’ Tench explained. And as most of the animals had by then either died or run away, ‘this was not to be procured, our vigour soon slackened and most of the farms ... were successively abandoned.’\textsuperscript{76} In the circumstances, the officers’ rations were reduced to those of the convicts, excepting in the quantity of spirits.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{72} Johnson to Banks, 8 July 1788, in Mackaness, Some Letters, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{73} Johnson to Banks, 8 July 1788 and Johnson to Stonnard, 8 May 1788, in Mackaness, Some Letters, pp. 19, 22.
\textsuperscript{74} Phillip to Lord Sydney, 15 May 1788, HRNSW vol.1 pt.2 p. 127.
\textsuperscript{75} Fletcher, Landed Enterprise and Penal Society, pp. 26-7.
\textsuperscript{76} Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, p. 135.
\textsuperscript{77} Major Ross to Secretary Stephens, 10 July 1788, HRNSW vol.1 pt.2 pp. 173-4.
The early colonists who laboured to establish the camp met with disappointments and difficulties that resonated with the biblical narrative of exile. They worked to produce food as Adam ate bread by the sweat of his brow. More particularly they toiled in a poor and unproductive place as Adam had tilled cursed and thorny earth. And like their very negative impressions of the land, their frustrating experiences of cultivation may have evoked an idea of banishment from Eden to an apparently barren and unpromising place. Johnson’s struggle to cultivate the ground and secure the means of survival certainly became a source of frustration and even alienation to him. Unlike most other officers, who did not have a wife to provide for, he persisted with his agricultural endeavours beyond the first few months. By the spring of 1788 he could report that his ‘little garden begins to flourish and supplies us daily with either one kind of vegetable or another.’ This was fortunate, because Mary was by then in an advanced stage of pregnancy. Notwithstanding these modest successes, though, Johnson remained thoroughly pessimistic in his estimation of the soil. ‘I have no very great opinion of nor expectation from it,’ he wrote to Fricker in November that year. ‘The greatest part of it is poor and barren and rocky and requires a great deal of labour to clear it of tree roots etc and to cultivate it - and after all, the corn … that has been sown hitherto looks very poor and unpromising.’ His labours in cultivating the soil provoked doubts about the future and were an immediate a source of disappointment to him. ‘[I] have been working in my little farm for a day together, burning word, digging, sowing etc, but do not expect to reap anything nearly adequate to my labour,’ he confessed tiredly.78

For some exiles, the frustrations of agricultural toil in an apparently barren and hostile land complicated the relationship between labour and colonial possession by undermining their desire to establish a permanent settlement. In the same November 1788 letter that he described at length his own struggles in the field, Johnson remarked that ‘others seem to be in the same predicament & all almost, at least with but few exceptions, are heartily sick of the expedition & wish themselves back safe in Old England.’79 To another friend he explained that ‘most have wrote to request they might be called home.’80 These comments suggest that an acute sense of suffering in relation to

78 Johnson to Fricker, 15 November 1788, in Mackaness, Some Letters, pp. 23-4.
the land could cause some colonists’ serious doubt about the wisdom of pursuing the colonisation of New South Wales at all. For his own part, Johnson was so utterly unimpressed with the colony’s state of affairs that he longed for the end of his exile and a safe return home. If the government had any sense, he wrote, it would ‘send out another fleet to take us all Back to England or some other place more likely to answer than this poor wretched Country where scarcely anything is to be seen but Rocks or eaten but Rats.’ The barrenness of the soil meant the only wise course of action was to evacuate the settlement entirely.  

His experience of cultivating the ground prompted him to dissociate himself from the Government’s imperial intentions and disavow any sense that it was desirable for the British to remain camped on the land. His physical sufferings did not give rise to a sense of moral entitlement to the land. They stirred up an anti-settlement outlook and led him to the conclusion that the land could not be properly made his own. To him, the entire colonial enterprise in Australia appeared a colossal mistake.

No rescue party arrived, though, and the colony struggled on. In early May 1789, the Sirius returned from its seven month voyage to the Cape with seed wheat and barley and four months’ provision of flour. This brought brief respite to the colonists, but in general their fortunes continued to decline. In September the butter ran out, the first of the provisions brought from England to wholly fail. David Collins was not concerned, observing drily that ‘it had never been very good and was not, strictly speaking, a necessary of life.’ But in early November the state of the general stores and the uncertainty about when more might arrive prompted the Governor to reduce the men’s entire ration by one third. By the beginning of 1790, said Tench dramatically, ‘famine ... was approaching with gigantic strides.’ They had departed old England thirty two months previously and not a single communication had been had with home since. Every day the officers looked out to sea from South Head ‘in the hope of seeing a sail.’ But no sign of relief appeared on the horizon, no signal of new supplies, no prospect of letters.

82 Phillip to Lord Sydney, 12 February 1790, HRNSW vol.1 pt.2 p. 295.
84 Collins, An Account of the English Colony, vol.1 p. 68.
85 Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, p. 162.
from home. Perhaps the government had forgotten them? The colonists felt completely
cut off at the end of the earth.  

In the prolonged absence of even a single scrap of news let alone material support from
home, the tension between the new arrivals’ condition as exiles and their objectives as
colonists became more pronounced. In March 1790, the increasingly desperate situation
prompted Phillip to dispatch the *Sirius* a second time to buy food from the Cape and to
lower the ration to the meagre amount of four pounds of flour, two and a half pounds of
pork and one and half pounds of rice per week. Since public labour ‘must naturally be
affected’ by such a reduction, the hours of work were correspondingly curtailed to those
between sunrise and one o’clock. The afternoons, as Collins explained, were ‘allowed
to the people to receive their ration and work in their gardens.’ But even these measures
did not prove enough. In early April, the news reached Sydney that the *Sirius* had been
wrecked on the rocks at Norfolk Island. This ‘cast a further damp upon every
countenance,’ as Johnson put it, and placed the colonists in a very serious situation
indeed. With no certain prospect of receiving supplies soon, Phillip reduced the flour
and pork rations again, this time to a level so low that ‘both soldiers and convicts pleaded
such loss of strength as to find themselves unable to perform their accustomed tasks.’
With the advice of the civil and military officers, the Governor also resolved that ‘the
greatest part of public work is to be stopped.’ The activities of clearing land, erecting
buildings and otherwise establishing a settlement ceased. The terrible prospect of
starvation radically reoriented the new arrivals’ labour towards the sole object of
procuring food. It forced a halt to their practical appropriation of the land and their
physical assertion of imperial possession of the territory.

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88 Collins, *An Account of the English Colony*, vol.1 p. 82.
89 Johnson to Fricker, 9 April 1790, in Mackaness, *Some Letters*, p. 28.
90 Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, p. 166.
91 Johnson to Fricker, 9 April 1790, in Mackaness, *Some Letters*, p. 28; Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*,
p. 166.
Significantly, the new arrivals’ activities as colonists were disrupted by circumstances that arose directly from their condition of exile. They found themselves desperately short of food and unable to work because they had been cut off from home and banished to a barren and uncultivated place. Their initial failure to raise a sufficient crop was a consequence of the character of the land and directly effected their capacity for labour, as several individuals observed. In such ‘starving condition’ the men were unable to work at anything for more than three hours a day, one convict woman wrote in mid 1790. ‘They had no heart, and the ground won’t grow anything, only in spots here and there.’

Another writer explicitly blamed their difficulties on ‘the badness of the country we are placed in, which of itself affords less resources than any in the known world.’ Had it not been for the first trip of the *Sirius*, ‘we should have ... been food for the crows.’ The difficulties of cultivating the soil were exacerbated by their distance from home. It seemed they had not only been expelled from their country but utterly cut off from the world they knew. And during the autumn of 1790, the result of this dual exile was to undercut their efforts to appropriate it in Britain’s name and threaten their very survival too. It was not until their exile was somewhat relieved by the arrival of the second fleet in June 1790 that their labour to colonise the territory resumed. Only as the warehouses were refilled and proper rations restored were the old hours of work re-established and ‘the most vigorous measures adopted to give prosperity to the settlement.’ The frustrations and struggles of raising food from the ground continued, but new buildings were immediately planned, large tracts of ground ordered to be cleared and prepared for cultivation, and the appropriation of the territory thus resumed.

At its most pronounced, the first colonists’ condition of exile was opposed to their colonial project and undercut their efforts to appropriate the land.

According to the biblical narrative of exile from Eden, Adam’s labour was to raise food from cursed ground and Eve’s to bear children in grief. ‘I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children,’ God said.

Approximately nine and a half months after their arrival at Sydney Cove, Mary Johnson row when she gave birth to a stillborn boy. Her husband’s

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92 ‘Voyage of the Lady Juliana’ by a female convict transported by her, 24 July 1790, *HRNSW* vol.2 p. 767.
94 *Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years*, p. 174.
95 *Genesis 3:16 (King James Version).*
grief is barely concealed in his sparse report to Stonnard: ‘my little Babe is no more.’

Johnson consoled himself with the knowledge that his ‘dear partner’, though ‘for some time in the utmost danger’, was ‘through Mercy ... at length safely delivered & continues to recover though but very slowly.’ Mary, weak with illness, left no extant account of her feelings during this time. There can be little doubt, however, that the birth was an event she had anticipated with some trepidation and that she experienced as a very great trial. She survived her ordeal but was likely distraught that her little son did not. Other colonial wives, similarly isolated and deprived of female help and companionship, found the loss of a child deeply distressing. Georgiana Molloy, an early settler in the Swan River colony, was profoundly grieved by the death of her first little girl. And when Eliza Marsden lost her three year old son Charles to an accident, she fell into a despondency so deep that it was more than a year before she found the ability to write about it. Mary and other similarly placed women brought forth children in sorrow and, at least in the Johnsons’ case, the experience complicated their relationship to their place of banishment.

Mary and Richard probably buried their little boy either in the vicinity of their hut or in the camp’s rather informal burial grounds. The grave of their son tied them, though sadly, to a small strip of colonial land. When the time came for them to sail back to England, they had to leave the remains of their boy behind. At the same time, though, the loss of their son almost certainly deepened their awareness of their social and emotional isolation from friends and heightened their desire for home. They had not yet received any word from Henry and Mrs Fricker, those dear friends to whom, had they been at home in England, they would have turned for comfort and support. ‘I most sincerely and anxiously wish and desire to hear from you, to hear how you do,’ Johnson wrote with

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97 Johnson to Fricker, 15 November 1788, in Mackaness, *Some Letters*, p. 25.
feeling during that difficult time. Without a word from their friends or from home in any sense at all, Richard and Mary essentially suffered their son’s death alone.

The Johnsons’ sense of emotional and social exile only grew stronger over the following months, as the continued absence of mail heightened their anguished sense of separation from home. ‘Tis now about two years and three months since we first arrived at this distant country,’ the chaplain wrote in April 1790. ‘All this while we have been as if buried alive, never having an opportunity of hearing from our friends’. ‘Should we be so fortunate as to set our feet upon English ground again ... it would not be a little that should induce us to venture a second time upon the deep and mighty ocean.’ The chaplain was by no means the only colonist hungry for communications from home. Tench longed for a newspaper while Worgan asked his brother to send ‘a Packet of News’ so he might know ‘who is the King? the Queen? the Ministers? what’s the Whim?’ He then added cheekily, ‘our whim will soon be to go Naked, for You Know, ‘When we are at Rome’ &c.’ But the absence of news and letters was no joking matter for the lonely chaplain. Johnson’s consciousness of both his physical remoteness in ‘this distant country’ and his emotional isolation having been cut off from his friends rendered his sensation of exile all the more acute. His descriptions of his situation suggest he understood himself and Mary to have been cast out from Eden, like Adam and Eve, only to suffer and sorrow at Sydney Cove. His sense of having been ‘buried alive’ indicates that he considered exile a fate only marginally better than death. His confession that he would not readily venture ‘upon the deep and mighty ocean’ hints at the great distance he perceived between himself and his home.

101 Johnson to Fricker, 15 November 1788, in Mackaness, Some Letters, p. 25.
102 Johnson to Fricker, 9 April 1790, in Mackaness, Some Letters, p. 27. The Johnsons did not actually hear from Fricker until the second half of 1791, when they received a letter dated the preceding February. Until receipt of this letter, Johnson seems to have become increasingly distressed at the lack of replies from Fricker – see his complaints of 21 August 1790 and 18 March 1791 in Mackaness, Some Letters, pp. 34, 37.
103 Worgan, Journal of a First Fleet Surgeon, p. 46.
SPIRITUAL EXILE

The experience of having been cut off from home to struggle in a barren and hostile place that was physically laborious to cultivate was an experience of exile that Johnson shared with other early British colonists. There was also a profoundly spiritual dimension to his exile that distinguished his experience from the vast majority of his companions’, though. His feelings of exile and isolation were deeply informed by an impression of the colonial population’s thorough sinfulness. The convicts’ apparent unresponsiveness to his exhortations and exertions caused him particular grief. His experiences as the colonial chaplain exacerbated his sense of having been cut off from communion with the faithful and perhaps also, in his darkest moments, from fellowship with God himself. Significantly, his estimation of sin and his response to it in the colony reveal the evangelical Anglican character of his Protestant faith. And this, along with the biblical narrative of expulsion from Eden, shaped his experience of exile in New South Wales.

The convicts’ need for redemption was the primary reason why Johnson had first set his face towards the colony. They had been expelled from Britain precisely because of their ‘former wicked course,’ and their particular need for reformation and salvation was largely what had prompted him to enter an exile of his own at Sydney Cove. They were ‘poor and abandoned people,’ as he put it in 1787, with a deep and immediate need to repent. ‘Convicts, as well as others, are possessed of souls that are immortal and ... must ere long appear before the solemn tribunal of God,’ he reflected another time. ‘All possible means [must] be made use of to reclaim them from their former wicked course of life.’

Perhaps their exiled condition gave an urgency, even a desperation, to his calls for them to be reconciled to Christ. To Johnson’s bitter disappointment, though, the convicts’ conduct in the colony only added to their original iniquity and proved their moral depravity. ‘They neither see nor will be persuaded to seek the Lord of mercy and compassion of God,’ he wrote with horror in November 1788. ‘They prefer their Lust before their souls, yea, most of them will sell their souls for a Glass of Grogg, so blind, so foolish, so hardened are they.’ Within a few short years he was convinced that the

104 Richard Johnson, 16 April 1794, Johnson papers, pp. 1-3.
vast majority had no concern for religion at all. ‘The Great God, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, death, judgement, eternity, heaven and hell – these are subjects which seldom, if at all, engage your attention,’ he wrote reprovingly in 1792.106 Most did not even attend Divine Service, preferring to amuse themselves by ‘smoking, laughing, and talking in the most profane & obscene manner … drinking, fighting [and] gaming’ he despaired.107 They were ‘lost to all sense of virtue, religion and even common morality’ he wrote in 1793.108

A few other fervent Protestants in the early colony shared Johnson’s estimation of the convicts’ gross impiety and rampant immorality. When Samuel Marsden arrived in 1794, for example, he thought its ‘abandoned’ population cast contempt ‘on God and Religion’ with enmity in their hearts towards Christ.109 According to the pious John Hunter in 1798, ‘a more wicked, abandoned, and irreligious set of people have never been brought together in any part of the world.’110 Historian Allan Grocott has argued that the convicts were indeed as irreligious as they seemed to these zealous men. ‘The prevailing attitude of convicts and ex-convicts was one of godlessness, irreligion and anticlericalism,’ he wrote, in what remains the most extensive historical study of the subject to date.111 He measured the convicts’ religious beliefs and behaviour against the colonial clergy’s mark, which enabled him to illuminate why Johnson and his successors were so discouraged by those whom they served. As more recent writers have emphasised, however, the churches did not have a monopoly on faith and its expression. Religious belief and practice in early colonial Australia was far more diverse than the structures and traditions of the Church of England recognised or allowed.112 In light of this, it is clear Grocott’s approach afforded little insight into the convicts’ ethical codes and beliefs other than that

106 Johnson, An Address, p. 2.
107 Richard Johnson, 16 April 1794, Johnson papers, p. 6
108 Richard Johnson to John Moore, 8 May 1793, Johnson papers.
109 Samuel Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 24 August 1794 and 26 October 1795 in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 7, 12.
they generally did not conform to those of the clergy. Johnson’s keen sense of their immorality and irreligion is probably best explained in terms of his own evangelical views of right living and true belief, rather than the convicts’ attitudes. His impression of their sinfulness reflects his typically Protestant convictions of the iniquity of blood sports and swearing and the virtue of Sabbath observance and sobriety. His impression of their godlessness was underpinned by the importance he attached to attendance at church, serious reflection on the need for salvation and the future of the individual soul.

The convicts’ moral and religious condition aroused Johnson’s deep compassion and concern. It motivated him to exert himself in ways as characteristic of late eighteenth century British evangelicalism as his estimation of their immorality and godlessness. In the first place, he took care to develop good personal relationships with the transportees. He often visited convicts in their huts, in which he found some pleasure, and paid special attention to the ill even at the expense of his own health. One prisoner testified that ‘few of the sick would recover if it was not for the kindness of the Rev. Mr. Johnson, whose assistance out of his own stores makes him the physician both of soul and body.’ As the flamboyant pickpocket George Barrington put it sweepingly, the ‘solicitous attention he individually bestowed on the whole community’ ‘endeared’ Johnson to the convicts. Such faithful attention was typical of English evangelical clergymen at that time, whose activity in their parishes extended far beyond the performance of divine worship and the administration of the sacraments. Disappointingly for Johnson, though, his efforts did not appear to dispose the convicts to embrace the gospel he preached.

Preaching the gospel, and particularly urging his hearers to consider their eternal future and repent, was Johnson’s primary response to the convicts’ apparent sinfulness. Like other evangelicals, who characteristically stressed individual salvation won by Jesus’ work on the cross, the colonial chaplain was personally convinced of the need to

113 Johnson to Fricker, 21 August 1790 and 4 October 1791, in Mackaness, Some Letters, pp. 36, 42.
115 George Barrington, A Voyage to Botany Bay by George Barrington, together with his life and trial and the sequel to his voyage, Brummell Press, London, 1969, p. 18
‘solemnly and devoutly commit my precious and immortal soul into the hands of a merciful and covenant keeping God’ and trust in ‘the atonement made by his dear and only-begotten Son the Lord Jesus Christ.’\footnote{Richard Johnson’s will, 1 September 1826, reprinted in Macintosh, \textit{Richard Johnson}, appendix 2E, pp. 110-111.} And as he explained to the convicts in 1792, it followed that, ‘next to the salvation of my own soul, nothing in this world lies so near my heart as the conversion and salvation of my fellow creatures, and especially of you.’\footnote{Johnson, \textit{An Address}, pp. 4-5.} In seeking their salvation, more particularly, he often preached to them, as he put it to his Baptist friend Fricker, ‘upon the awful strain.’\footnote{Johnson to Fricker, 4 October 1791, in Mackaness, \textit{Some Letters}, p. 41.} ‘Consider what is contained in these two words, \textit{salvation} and \textit{damnation}!’ he beseeched the colonists in his published sermon of October 1792. ‘Ere long, either endless conceivable happiness or unutterable misery will be your portion, or your doom, and mine.’\footnote{Johnson, \textit{An Address}, pp. 3-4. His emphasis.} ‘His fan is in his hand,’ he warned them on another occasion, ‘he will thoroughly purge his floor and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.’\footnote{Matthew 3:12 (\textit{King James Version}). Johnson preached on this text on Sunday 6 December, 1789. See the extracts from Johnson’s journal in Macintosh, \textit{Richard Johnson}, p. 107.} Johnson recognised that this was ‘not the only way of working conviction upon the Conscience’ and sometimes preached instead on ‘the great & inestimable Love of Jesus in dying for sinners & in inviting them to come to him, to believe in & to rest upon him for life & Salvation.’\footnote{Johnson to Fricker, 4 October 1791, in Mackaness, \textit{Some Letters}, p. 41.} But he always desired his hearers to consider the prospect of damnation or redemption both personally and seriously. These matters weighed heavily on the chaplain’s own mind and were frequently upon his lips.

Johnson’s manner of ministry not only marked him out as an evangelical but expressed his ideas about the religious dimensions of the colonists’ exile. They had been cut off from their home and the religious places and communities of their youth, but he was nevertheless convinced that the same God was still relevant and accessible to them. Be reconciled to Christ, he urged his hearers one Sunday, who ‘came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.’\footnote{Ephesians 2:17 (\textit{King James Version}). Johnson preached on this text on Sunday 28 December, 1788, at his first service at Parramatta. See Macintosh, \textit{Richard Johnson}, p. 106.} He earnestly encouraged them to reflect on God, death and eternity because he considered these to be matters of
fundamental importance for every person – even those banished from Britain to New South Wales. In Johnson’s eyes, the exiles’ voyage to the other side of the world had not carried them beyond the limits of God’s Kingdom or relieved them of the obligation to live by his commands. Sin is no less odious ‘if committed in Port Jackson than in England,’ he earnestly reminded them in 1792. ‘The declaration of God is equally binding upon persons of all ranks, to whom it is known, at all times and in all places,’ he announced.\(^{123}\) Even in their struggling camp at Sydney, they were obliged to deal with the Christian God as their potential saviour or judge.

The colonists’ condition of banishment was no barrier to the God Johnson believed in or to the salvation offered in Christ. But the colonists’ response to Johnson’s declarations of the gospel tended to exacerbate his own sense of frustration and exile. On a small number of occasions he had the great pleasure to report that some of his hearers made what he considered an appropriate response to the message he preached. One Sunday in late 1791, he wrote gladly, at least one person left the service ‘sorrowful and heavy-hearted’ and ‘some others [were] rejoicing in the Son of God manifested towards them.’\(^{124}\) In general, though, the chaplain feared his exhortations fell upon deaf ears. ‘Happy would I be to live upon bread and water [and] endure severe hardship, did I but see some of those poor souls begin to think about their latter end,’ he wrote with anguish before even his first year was out. But for all his best efforts they remained lax in attending church and showed little interest in either settling their eternal future or living morally. ‘Every sermon is treated with Contempt,’ as Mary Johnson put it in her only extant letter, written to Fricker in late 1795. ‘They neither regard the joyes of heaven nor the torments of Heal it is all a Like to them.’\(^{125}\) Surrounding by such people, the chaplain and his wife longed for the fellowship of their evangelical friends at home. ‘I often think of and Long to Be with you,’ as Mary told Fricker. ‘It would be a Great pleasure to see you a gain in this world ... But if not I hope we shall meet in a Better to part no more for ever.’\(^{126}\) At his most despondent, Johnson not only felt cut off from the fellowship of the faithful but as if he laboured under a curse. ‘I have great need of faith and patience, and am convinced at times that I have not so much as ... I have been ready to imagine,’ he confessed to Fricker

\(^{123}\) Johnson, *An Address*, pp. 57-58

\(^{124}\) Johnson to Fricker, 4 October 1791, in Mackaness, *Some Letters*, p. 41.

\(^{125}\) Mary Johnson to Henry Fricker, 21 December 1795, MLMSS 6722, Mitchell Library, Sydney

\(^{126}\) Mary Johnson to Fricker, 21 December 1795, MLMSS 6722.
In early 1791. ‘I at times am ready to sink under my many and great discouragements.’\textsuperscript{127} It was the convicts who had been banished for their sin, but their persistent immorality and faithlessness exacerbated Johnson’s sense of exile in the colony.

In the very summer that Johnson feared sinking under his discouragements, the whole Sydney region suffered a ‘most severe drought.’\textsuperscript{128} All but one of the streams by which the camp had been supplied entirely dried up. What water remained was very bad and the harvest was at best indifferent. The situation prompted Johnson to reflect theologically on the colonists’ physical difficulties. ‘Justly does God thus in his judgments visit us,’ he wrote to Fricker with reference to the drought. ‘We are truly a wicked people, sin abounds of all kinds and amongst all ranks too much.’\textsuperscript{129} It was an idea he also expounded in the sermon he wrote for publication during 1792. ‘Sin has often brought heavy judgments upon individuals, families and kingdoms’ he observed, and ‘because of swearing the land mourneth.’ It was a telling phrase that evoked Jeremiah’s announcement of divine judgment upon the Israelites before they were exiled to Babylon: ‘the land is full of adulterers; because of swearing the land mourneth; the pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up.’\textsuperscript{130} In such a spiritually and physically challenging place as the early colony, it was obvious to Johnson that the barrenness of the land was not merely an unfortunate circumstance. The infertility of the soil and their consequent difficulties in raising food from the ground were their punishment for sin. Johnson made a direct connection between the moral and religious condition of the community and the character of the land to which they had been exiled.

To a very considerable extent, Johnson’s difficulties as chaplain and attendant sense of exile were exacerbated by the politically and physically fragile position of the church he represented in the colony. This was another dimension of spiritual exile which he did not share with other colonists. In its defining English context, the Anglican church was closely identified with the state and played a prominent role in public and community life. Uprooted in the course of transmission to New South Wales, it confronted the

\textsuperscript{127} Johnson to Fricker, 18 March 1791, in Mackaness, \textit{Some Letters}, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{128} Johnson to Fricker, 18 March 1791, in Mackaness, \textit{Some Letters}, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{129} Johnson to Fricker, 18 March 1791, in Mackaness, \textit{Some Letters}, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{130} Johnson, \textit{An Address}, p. 55; Jeremiah 23:10 (\textit{King James Version}).
challenge of putting down new roots in a very different environment. The English Church had negotiated a similar challenge as the empire expanded across the Atlantic during the century before. But in Johnson’s view, the dire moral and religious state of the convict population made its successful transplantation all the more necessary. To his frustration, though, it apparently lacked both the material resources to flourish immediately and the authority to instruct them effectively.

Johnson was aware even before Phillip’s fleet departed England that his message was not always pleasing to the Governor’s ears. On one occasion after he preached to a group of convicts in the hulks, Phillip had taken him aside and suggested he offer less doctrinal exhortation and begin with ‘more moral subjects’ instead.\(^{131}\) In the colony, too, he found the military authorities less than enthusiastic in their support of his efforts in the name of God and his church. The population was disinclined to attend Divine Service and although there were regulations in place requiring them to go, both Phillip and his immediate successor Major Grose generally refrained in practice from strictly enforcing them. He found that neither the convicts nor the free people took religion sufficiently seriously. Although it ‘ought to govern every man’s actions, be his station or calling what it may, [religion] seems to be treated with too much neglect and derision,’ he complained.\(^{132}\) Grose caused him particular frustration, including by ordering him to hold the Sunday service at the ungodly hour of 6am, by marching the regiment out in the middle of the sermon, and by preventing him from attending to men who had requested to see him before they were sent to hang.\(^{133}\) It was a situation that exposed the great gulf between the position of the church in the colony and at home. And in Johnson’s eyes, it severely damaged the likelihood of his ministry’s success.

The lack of a place for public worship highlighted that, in a very physical sense, the church was displaced in the course of initial transmission to Australia and assigned a marginal position in the early colony. Upon arrival Phillip prioritised the construction of

\(^{132}\) Richard Johnson, 16 April 1794, Johnson papers, pp. 3-5
public buildings but he did not direct convict labour towards the construction of a church. In July 1788, he laid land aside for such a building on the slope to the west of Sydney Cove. But no church was erected and Johnson continued to perform divine service under the trees. Soon the progress of land clearing around the camp deprived his congregation of that shelter too.\(^{134}\) Not knowing ‘which way to turn or where I was to preach’ caused him to ‘perfectly dread’ the approach of the Sabbath, he later wrote.\(^{135}\) In practice he persevered with outdoor services and occasionally held meetings in unfinished buildings, in the shed at the saw pit, or on the verandah of his own home.\(^{136}\) He found the situation deeply frustrating and thought it discouraged the colonists’ attendance and thus compromised their moral and spiritual well being. He wondered aloud to Phillip whether places for public worship ‘should not be thought of and built,’ but when the first Governor returned to England in late 1792 the five year old colony still lacked a single church.\(^{137}\) Johnson took matters into his own hands as the winter of 1793 approached. He undertook to design and build a place of worship himself. The physical result of Johnson’s exertions was a simple T-shaped building that could accommodate five to six hundred people for Divine Service and on weekdays serve as a school.\(^{138}\) The political result was to inflame his dispute with Grose and worsen the political position of the colonial church.

Johnson detailed his many disagreements with the Lieutenant Governor in written defences of his own conduct to his English superiors during 1794.\(^{139}\) Prominent among them were Grose’s failure to make more materials available for the church’s construction, his refusal to allow a Sexton to clean the building and ring the bell, and his

\(^{134}\) See Johnson to Arthur Phillip, 29 February 1792, *HRNSW* vol.1 pt.2 p. 594; Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, p. 39; Macintosh, *Richard Johnson*, p. 58.
\(^{135}\) Richard Johnson, 16 April 1794, Johnson papers, p. 9.
\(^{136}\) See Macintosh, *Richard Johnson*, p. 58.
\(^{137}\) Johnson to Phillip, 29 February 1792, *HRNSW* vol.1 pt. 2 pp. 594-5. For discussion of the possible reasons for Phillip’s failure to erect a church, see Border, *Church and State in Australia*, pp. 16-18; Macintosh, *Richard Johnson*, p. 58; Atkinson, *The Europeans* vol.1 p. 179.
\(^{139}\) See Richard Johnson, 16 April and 6 August 1794, in Johnson papers. Note also Johnson to Dundas, 3 September 1793, 8 April 1794 and 7 August 1794, in Mackaness, *Some Letters*, pt.1, pp. 47-53, 55-56; Johnson to Dundas ,24 November 1794, in Mackaness, *Some Letters*, pt 2, pp. 8-9; Macintosh, *Richard Johnson*, chapter 5.
decision not to endorse Johnson’s request for reimbursement of the modest costs incurred. Johnson was well aware that his commission required him to follow the orders and directions of the superior officers ‘according to the rules and discipline of war.’

Anglicanism had been introduced to the colony through the creation of a military chaplaincy, not by the ecclesiastical extension of the English church, and the chaplains were dependant upon the goodwill of the Governor even in the management of internal church affairs. Under Grose the chaplaincy deteriorated to the point that constables punished several convicts who went to hear Johnson preach rather than attend the short-lived Barrack church. Johnson lamented Grose’s failure to either treat him as a gentleman or recognise ‘those mutual duties’ that ‘ought to subsist between a Governor and a Clergyman.’ He objected to be called ‘a very troublesome, discontented character,’ though less so to the epithet ‘Methodist.’ He felt himself severely and oppressively treated, and his ‘status, office and standing in the colony’ unjustly undermined. In such circumstances, Johnson found his clerical task an especially difficult one.

In important respects Johnson’s church occupied a marginal position in early colonial life and perhaps can be usefully considered an institution in exile at Sydney Cove. But neither the difficulties Johnson encountered as its clerical representative, nor its political and physical weakness relative to the church in England, should obscure its contribution to the foundation of the colony. The Church of England was peripheral to the claiming ceremonies the British performed upon arriving in New South Wales, and the chaplain struggled to exert a transformative influence on the Britons banished there. But

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143 Johnson to Dundas, 8 April 1794 in Mackaness, *Some Letters*, pt.1 p. 52; Johnson to Grose, 19 November 1793, in Johnson papers, p. 23.
144 See Grose to Dundas, 4 September 1793, *Historical Records of Australia* [hereafter *HRA*], series 1 vol. 1, pp. 451-3; Richard Johnson, 16 April 1794, Johnson papers, p. 16.
145 Johnson to Dundas, 8 April 1794 and 7 August 1794 in Mackaness, *Some Letters*, pt.1 pp. 52, 56.
146 See n63 and n66 above.
Johnson’s ministrations nevertheless had some importance, including for the colonists’ idea of themselves in relation to the land. He led them in the observance of Divine Worship, one of the new arrivals’ first communal activities. The regular celebration of Divine Service according to Anglican forms generally asserted the colonists’ spiritual links with Britain and belief in the Christian God. A substantial proportion of the convicts identified themselves as Catholics and an even greater number came from those sections of British society least influenced by the established church, but the English Church was on some level a familiar to many of them. Its presence in the colony in the person of Johnson, as well as the public observance of its services, ordinances and rites, enabled some early British exiles to maintain a link with home.

In his capacity as the official representative of the Anglican church and indeed of Protestantism more broadly, Johnson led the new arrivals in several activities by which they implicitly distinguished themselves from Aboriginal people. The Sunday services he conducted probably helped to highlight the difference between the at least notionally Christian colonists and the apparently irreligious people who already inhabited the land. He also solemnised convict unions before both God and humankind. In doing so, he joined the Governor in encouraging social order among the colonists and adherence to Christian standards of morality. His performance of the rite may have had further significance among the better educated members of Phillip’s fleet, who considered the relationship between the sexes a subject upon which peoples and civilisations might be instructively compared.\(^{147}\) It may have buttressed the colonists’ assumption of cultural superiority and enabled them to distinguish themselves as generally civilised. The moralising and civilising role of the English Church did not go uncontested or even guarantee moral order among the colonists. Its influence among the convicts, especially, was by no means as great as Johnson would have liked. But through its embodiment and proclamation of Christian standards of civilisation and morality, the Church probably provided its most effective support to the initial foundation of colonial society. These aspect of Anglicanism perhaps survived dislocation from England to Sydney best.

As the period of Johnson’s colonial residence lengthened, his personal circumstances and those of the settlement gradually improved and afforded his struggling spirit some relief. Another evangelical Anglican chaplain, Samuel Marsden, arrived to assist him in 1794. Johnson greeted this development as ‘very providential,’ not least because it provided him a colleague of like mind who could stand in for him during periods of illness and relieve him of having to travel to Parramatta and back every week. In the same blessed month Lieutenant Governor Grose tendered his resignation, unable to bear any longer the pain of his old war wounds. The arrival of the pious John Hunter as Governor of the colony in September 1795 brought the ungodly interregnum formally to an end. ‘My situation has been much more comfortable than for some time before,’ as Johnson later described the change. ‘His Excellency sets a becoming example in regularly attending public worship and wishes, as much as he can, to promote and establish the Principles of Morality and Religion.’ He admitted that most colonists persisted in their immorality and ‘few seem to be influenced’ by the Governor’s example, but at least during Hunter’s administration he could rely on the support and encouragement of the state.

These changes eased Johnson’s sense of personal and spiritual isolation in the colony, though they did not secure the position of his church. He appears from his extant writings to have been considerably happier: his relatively few extant letters from the period of Hunter’s governorship are more buoyant in tone and contain such cautiously optimistic statements – ‘I hope in a little time things will be brought into better order’ – as are entirely absent from his earlier correspondence. That he apparently wrote home far

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148 Richard Johnson, 6 August 1794, Johnson papers, p. 3
151 Johnson to Stonnard, 27 November 1795 and 16 September 1796, in Mackaness, *Some Letters*, pt.2 pp. 11, 16.
less frequently after 1795 may itself suggest he was less often disconsolate and upset. Perhaps the arrivals of Marsden and Hunter, followed in May 1798 by that of several South Sea missionaries, meant he eventually enjoyed in the colony a faint approximation of the evangelical fellowship he had treasured in London more than a decade previously.

Beyond his slowly widening circle of fervently evangelical colleagues and friends, the colonists appeared to him as prone to immorality and sin as they had before. During the late 1790s he thought his congregation larger than previously, but nevertheless felt compelled to continue preaching from that prophet of judgement, Jeremiah, and pronounce solemn warnings ‘to those guilty of drunkenness, Sabbath-breaking etc, the reigning vices committed in the Colony.’ Although his own sense of spiritual exile may have softened somewhat, he still lived in the midst of a people whose hearts seemed hard towards God and resentful of his Church. It appears the convicts were particularly indignant at Hunter’s attempts, in August 1798, to compel their attendance at divine service and the ‘more sober and orderly’ observance of the Sabbath Day. On the dark and windy evening of Monday 2 October, 1798, ‘some wicked and disaffected person or persons’ set fire to Johnson’s church and burned it to the ground. Despite the offer of a generous reward, neither Johnson nor the Governor ever learned who the arsonist was. Both the attack and the concealment of its perpetrator confirmed the enduring vulnerability of the Anglican church in the infant colony of New South Wales. Johnson’s clerical task remained a very difficult one and his church remained a marginal influence on the colonial community.

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152 Macintosh’s catalogue of Johnson’s known letters listed 42 letters written in the seven years between his arrival in the colony in 1788 and the end of 1794 and just 15 written in the six years from early 1795 to his departure from the colony in October 1800. See Macintosh, *Richard Johnson*, Appendix 3, p. 112.

153 Johnson to Fricker, 15 August 1797 and Johnson to Joseph Hardcastle, 26 August 1799, in which he notes preaching on Jeremiah 6:10 – ‘To whom shall I speak and give warning and exhortation, that they may here?’ – in Mackaness, *Some Letters*, pt.2 pp. 19, 39.


In relation to the land itself, Johnson’s acute sense of exile gradually eased. He enjoyed some modest success in his endeavours to cultivate the soil and found a kind of consolation in tilling the ground. By late 1791 he and Mary had moved to a ‘comfortable and convenient house’ and found a certain pleasure in their garden’s ‘flourishing state.’ By the mid 1790s, Johnson had received further grants of land and expanded the scale of his agricultural work. He reported to his uncle in 1794 that, despite bouts of poor health, he and his family were generally rather well. Their stock was increasing ‘though slowly’ and they now had ‘fourteen sheep, eleven goats, a Mare, some hogs, fowles &c.’ He had already cleared forty acres of his recent one hundred acre grant, and ‘had from it about six hundred bushels of Indian Corn.’ By the end of the following year these gains had given rise to hope: ‘Our wheat harvest is now coming on apace’ he wrote with a confidence entirely absent from his earlier correspondence. ‘The crops [are] in general very promising and the season throughout has been very favourable. It is thought that what is about to be gathered in, will be nearly, if not wholly, sufficient to supply the colony for the next year.’

Johnson’s experiences of cultivation eventually provoked a cautious optimism for the future and soothed his sense of exile in the colony. The feelings of frustration and suffering that had accompanied his earlier exertions appear to have diminished as the yield from his farm and garden gradually increased and he delegated the physical work to others in consequence of his deteriorating health. He did not repeat his suggestion that the colony be abandoned and the exiles conveyed back home. Indeed, in July 1798 he even suggested to Hunter that, if his health should improve, he ‘should be happy ... to remain some time longer in the colony’ and continue his ‘endeavours for the public weal.’ It was comment made, tellingly, in the knowledge that he was actually very unlikely to stay in New South Wales. Later in the same month, he informed the Colonial Secretary that his health had declined to the point that he could no longer discharge the duties of his office and that doctors in the colony had ‘frequently given it as their

156 Johnson to Fricker, 4 October 1791, in Mackaness, Some Letters, pt.1 p. 42.
157 Johnson to Thomas Gill, 29 July 1794, in Mackaness, Some Letters, pt.1 p. 54.
158 Johnson to Stonard, 27 November 1795, in Mackaness, Some Letters, pt.2 p. 11
159 In his extant letters, he does not mention his personal harvest or the progress of his garden after November 1795. In 1796, though, he does note the success of the colony’s general harvest. See Johnson to Stonard, 27 November 1795 and 16 September 1796, in Mackaness, Some Letters, pt.2 pp. 12, 17.
160 Johnson to Hunter, 5 July 1798, in Mackaness, Some Letters, pt.2 p. 27.
opinion’ that he should return home.\footnote{161} But his remark to Hunter nevertheless indicates that, after a decade of exile, he no longer considered the prospect of living and ministering in Sydney entirely unbearable.

The improvement in his social and material circumstances relieved Johnson’s sense of exile over time, though it did not overcome it entirely or engender an attachment to the colony as home. He had been reluctant in the first place to leave his evangelical community, his family and his familiar English home. He had also been among those first colonists who bore the brunt of the Europeans’ initial disappointment with the land and confronted the very real possibility that they might starve. And he had lived in the midst of people who appeared to indulge in every kind of sin and ministered to them in the face of humiliation at the hands of the governor and the razing of his church. Such experiences were imprinted on the chaplain’s mind and body like permanent scars. Even in 1797, more than a decade after his departure from England, he was still expressing the hope that God ‘in his Providence’ would open a way for him to return home. ‘Ten years ... [is] a long time to be banished from my friends and what is still more painful from the enjoyment of the means of grace,’ Johnson reflected to his dear friend Henry Fricker late that year. ‘Should God spare my life I still hope once more to enjoy with you those inestimable privileges.’ ‘The Path I have these many years had to tread has been rough and thorny’ he added, with a telling reference to a biblical symbol of God’s curse on the exiles from Eden.\footnote{162} His sense of emotional and spiritual exile persisted to the end of his colonial days, until he was permitted to return to his native land in October 1800 on account of the collapse of his health. His long exile ended with return to Britain and not, as it did for some emancipists, with the transformation of his place of banishment into a new and genuine home.\footnote{163}

Richard Johnson’s colonial experiences call into question the conventional image of the confident male missionary going forth from Europe as an agent of both the British

empire and the Gospel of the Lord. His initial disinclination to accompany Phillip’s fleet to Botany Bay and his glad return to England suggest that at best he had an ambivalent relationship to the British settlement in New South Wales. This is confirmed by his persistent sense of physical, emotional and spiritual exile during his residence at Sydney Cove. During his twelve years there, he felt isolated from godly society, distressed by the convicts’ unrepentant godlessness and burdened by the difficulty of raising food from the ground. His experiences also call into question the conclusions reached by recent commentators on settler suffering and its implications for their connections to the land.\textsuperscript{164} Johnson’s contribution to the initial British colonisation of New South Wales was complicated by the condition of exile. His struggle to cultivate the ground tended not to give rise to a sense of moral entitlement to the land. At his lowest point, his sense that the colonists had been cast out in judgment to a barren and hostile place prompted him to advocate that the government evacuate the camp and depart entirely from that shore. His sense of exile tended to alienate him from the specific site of settlement, from the colonising penal state and at times from the colonial enterprise as a whole. As both a reluctant farmer and a reluctant representative of a disrupted and dislocated church, Johnson generally made a reluctant colonist too.

The anti-colonial position that Johnson occasionally reached can be explained in part with reference to the exile narrative itself. Biblical accounts of exile tend to position the site of banishment – whether Egypt, Babylon or the whole fallen world – as a non-ideal place of residence that provides at best a temporary home. They are easily interpreted as basically circular rather than linear narratives that, even if they did not explicitly promise it, anticipate resolution in the form of return. As such, they have the potential to undercut imperial ideologies that assume the expansion of the empire and the outward spread of Christianity to be the future of the world. Johnson, quite certainly, would not have explained the meaning of exile nor disavowed missionary work in this way. But his persistent desire to leave Sydney and especially his 1791 suggestion that Government evacuate the camp points to the ways in which a sense of exile could lead to the rejection rather than the possession of the land by the colonists. His experience hints at an anti-colonial aspect of exile that the literature on settler suffering has overlooked.

\textsuperscript{164} Curthoys, ‘Expulsion, Exodus and Exile,’ p. 4; Curthoys, ‘Mythologies,’ pp. 11-41; McKenna, \textit{Looking for Blackfellas’ Point}, chapter 7
There were, nevertheless, important connections between Johnson’s experiences and activities as a minister in exile and the foundation of a British colony at Sydney Cove. First, just as expulsion from Eden condemned Adam to hard labour in raising food from the ground, the colonists exiled to Australia had great difficulty in tilling the soil. Although for Johnson that difficulty heightened his sense of alienation from the land and obstructed any attachment to it as a home, his persistent investment of labour into clearing and cultivating it implicated him in the colonists’ physical transformation of their landing place into a site more easily occupied by Europeans. In this way, his personal exertions supported the activities of the colonising state.

Johnson’s sense of exile was enhanced and his contribution to colonisation further complicated by his clerical experiences too. The failure of the first governors to erect a place of worship and Johnson’s bitter conflict with Grose when he undertook to construct one himself, highlight the church’s marginal physical and political position in the young colony. Johnson did not represent an institution that partnered equally with the government in New South Wales’ initial colonisation. He did, however, convey to the colony that institution’s rituals, ceremonies and ideas. By regularly conducting divine worship and solemnising marriages before God, he affirmed notions of civilisation and morality upon which the colonists’ sense of superiority to the Aborigines was partly based. In general, though, the position of the church and the influence of its representatives was rather uncertain during Johnson’s years. The initial history of the church in Sydney, and especially of the first chaplain, indicates that the relationship between Protestant religion and colonisation was substantially mediated by experiences of dislocation and exile often at odds with the colonial project.
 CHAPTER THREE

Salvation and Conciliation

First missionary encounters at Sydney Cove

In April 1789, the British colonists of Sydney Cove were confronted by the discovery of a ‘great number of dead nativ es ... in every part of the Harbour.’ A smallpox epidemic had broken out and, as Lieutenant William Bradley put it, ‘made dreadful havock’ among the indigenous people of the greater Sydney region.¹ Indeed, in less than three months the disease afflicted so many people that more than half the area’s Aboriginal population probably died of it.² An Aboriginal man later reported that the Gadigal tribe was reduced to just three people by the disease, and that these few survivors were in turn forced to join with other near-by tribes.³ The colonists, themselves remarkably unaffected, could not avoid the signs of the Aborigines’ great distress. They found whole families lying ill with the disease, frequently near the bodies of those it had already claimed.⁴ Though the officers appear to have been genuinely perplexed as to the possible cause of such a sudden, catastrophic outbreak, they were somewhat opportunistic in their response.⁵ They considered it an occasion to gain a deeper understanding of the unfamiliar peoples around them. Surgeon White first had a number of bodies collected and brought into the hospital ‘for the purpose of examination and anatomy.’⁶ Soon afterwards, he and Governor Phillip sought out the living and brought in an old man and a boy of about nine years of age. The man was in such an advanced state of illness that he did not live beyond

² Phillip to Lord Sydney, 13 February 1790, Historical Records of New South Wales [hereafter HRNSW], vol.1 pt.2, p. 308.
⁴ Watkin Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, being a reprint of The Expedition to Botany Bay and A Complete Account of the settlement at Port Jackson by Captain Watkin Tench, L. F. Fitzhardinge (ed.), Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1979, pp. 146-9; Bradley, A Voyage to New South Wales, pp. 161-163.
⁶ Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, p. 146.
a few hours. The boy, however, survived. Nanbaree, as he became known to the colonists, was taken into White’s home ‘and henceforth became one of his family.’

Also among the Aboriginal people found ill that April was a girl between about twelve and fifteen years of age, whose name the colonists variously recorded as Abaroo, Araboo, Aboren, Aborough and – more correctly – Booron or Booroong. She and a man who appeared to be her father were rushed in to the British camp for treatment, but a few days later the man died. Booron, like Nanbaree, was among the few of her people to survive the disease. The colonists, devoid of any understanding of the nature of Aboriginal society or of the complex kin relationships that informed Aboriginal family life, assumed that she had been orphaned. She was thus received ‘with great kindness in the family of Mrs Johnson, the clergyman’s wife.’ She lived with Mary and Richard for approximately eighteen months before returning to the bush.

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7 Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, p. 148.
8 It is possible that she had more than one name: Johnson once observed ‘they in general have many.’ But Tench explained that ‘Her name was Bòo-ron; but from our mistake of pronunciation she acquired that of Ab-ar-òo, by which she was generally known.’ See Johnson to Fricker, 9 April 1790, in George Mackaness (ed.), *Some Letters of the Reverend Richard Johnson, B.A., First Chaplain of New South Wales*, Sydney, 1954, pt. 1 p. 29; Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, p. 148. She was called Abaroo by John Hunter in *An Historical Journal of Events at Sydney and at Sea 1787-1792 with further accounts by Governor Arthur Phillip, Lieutenant P.G. King and Lieutenant H.L. Ball*, John Bach (ed.), Royal Australian Historical Society with Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1968, p. 115, and also by David Blackburn in his letters to his sister Margaret, 12 August 1790, in Margaret Blackburn – letters received from her brother David Blackburn, 1787-1791, MLMSS 6937/1/1, Mitchell Library, Sydney. She was also called by variants of this name. Henry Waterhouse called her Aborough in his letter to James Luttrel, 14 April 1790, MSS 6544/7, Mitchell Library, Sydney; Lieutenant Fowell called her Aboren in a letter to his father, 31 July 1790, *HRNSW* vol.1 pt. 2, pp. 376-7; Bradley referred to her as Abooroo in *A Voyage to New South Wales*, p. 183; George Barrington called her Araboo throughout *A Voyage to Botany Bay by George Barrington, together with his life and trial and the sequel to his voyage*, facsimile edn., Brummell Press, London, 1969. A few of the officers used what appears to be more like her correct name: Phillip called her Boorong in Hunter, *An Historical Journal of Events at Sydney*, p. 318; Collins calls her Boo-roong in his *Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, and William Dawes, who probably listened best, called her Booroong in his ‘Notebooks concerning languages spoken in the Sydney area, c.1790’, FM4/3431 frames 771-817, Mitchell Library, Sydney.
9 Fowell and Hunter both described the man as her father: see Fowell to his father, 31 July 1790, *HRNSW* vol.1 pt. 2, pp. 376-7; Hunter, *An Historical Journal*, p. 115. Tench reported that Booron was found with her brother: Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, p. 148.
11 Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, p. 148.
Booron’s residence with the Johnsons had several important implications for both their respective relationships with the land and the chaplain’s contribution to the British colonisation of Sydney Cove. It ensured that Johnson’s significance to the initial foundation of the settlement was not limited to his contribution as a religious minister to the process and culture of colonisation, or even to effects of the labour that he, like the male convicts and other colonists, invested into the ground in the attempt to survive his exile. Booron’s presence in his house required him to extend his religious role beyond ministering to the convicts and cross an even greater cultural divide. It afforded him an opportunity to express his value for mission, including a desire for conversion and an enthusiasm for God’s Word. In the particular circumstances of the infant colony, Johnson’s interaction with Booron had deeply political implications and results. And like his pervasive sense of exile, it reveals the significance of evangelical Protestantism to Johnson’s experience and identity as a colonist.

As Norman Etherington has explained, recent scholarship has moved away from simplistic presentations of missionary activity as the enthusiastic handmaiden of imperial expansion and control and presented a far more complex picture of the relationship between the two. Inga Clendinnen’s ethno-historical enquiry into the interaction between Britons and Aboriginal people in early Sydney has similarly privileged issues of culture contact over those of colonial power. But as the British pushed into the South Pacific and established a colony on New Holland’s shores, evangelicals did not simply ‘hitch a ride for the Gospel’ as the foremost historian of evangelicalism in Australia, Stuart Piggin, once said. Individual missionaries could be important agents of colonialism, even though their intentions were often strictly religious and they conceived of their own actions as benign. This chapter explores the importance of colonialism to Johnson’s missionary contact with Booron during Sydney’s first few years. It considers the relative importance of his desire to acquaint her with the gospel of Christ, the

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colonists’ general intention to bestow civilisation upon ‘the natives’ and their immediate political objective to reconcile the Aborigines to their presence on the land. Its aim is to evaluate the extent to which his personal intentions, actual exertions and their consequences can be explained in terms of the imposition of British imperial power over the Sydney tribes.

Although historians of the period have generally overlooked it in favour of Phillip’s more famous interactions with Bennelong, and to a lesser extent Colby and Arabanoo, the Johnsons’ relationship with Booron was significant in the context of the British appropriation of the land around Sydney Cove.\textsuperscript{15} Reconstructing that relationship is made difficult, though, by the nature of the sources that remain. The chaplain’s colonial journal has unfortunately been lost and very few of his letters from the period of Booron’s residence with him survive. Furthermore, he wrote more readily of his agricultural and clerical activities than his interactions with the girl. Fortunately several of Phillip’s officers mentioned Booron in their journals and usefully described their numerous encounters with Aboriginal people, including some in which Johnson was involved. However these authors were generally unconcerned with the details of Booron’s experience and the chaplain’s relationship with her. Their ideas about the colony and its inhabitants were shaped more by their military experiences and values – and, in the case of the better educated men like Tench, the ideas of European enlightenment – than by the concerns of evangelical Protestantism.\textsuperscript{16} Short passages in Johnson’s extant letters and scattered references in other officers’ letters and journals nevertheless yield the few known details of Booron’s life and her interaction with Johnson in the British camp. When examined in light of the colonists’ attempts to ‘conciliate the natives,’ these admittedly limited sources suggest that the clergyman’s missionary exertions with Booron facilitated his involvement in the officers’ political negotiations with the Aborigines over the British occupation of the land.

\textsuperscript{15} Booron is discussed at numerous points in Keith Vincent Smith’s \textit{Bennelong: the coming in of the Eora, Sydney Cove 1788 - 1792}, Kangaroo Press, Sydney, 2001. However she remains a marginal figure in otherwise far better books on early British-Indigenous Australian contact including Clendinnen, \textit{Dancing With Strangers}, and Willey, \textit{When the Sky Fell Down}.

Reverend Johnson had arrived in the colony with boatloads of convict exiles who had been banished from their British homes. He had also arrived in the company of Governor Arthur Phillip, who had been officially instructed by the King ‘to open an intercourse with the natives, and to conciliate their affections, enjoining all our subjects to live in amity and kindness with them.’ This second circumstance, perhaps to an even greater extent than the first, came to define his relationship with his new surrounds and his contribution to the British colonisation of eastern Australia. Aware from his initial interaction with Aboriginal people on the shores of Botany Bay that he and the other colonists had arrived in another people’s home, Johnson became involved in efforts to conciliate the original inhabitants to the presence of the British on the land. Just as his exile in Australia had been contingent upon the imperial plan for the penal colonisation of New South Wales, his contact with its original inhabitants was framed by the imperial plan to establish a permanent British settlement, preferably while maintaining friendly relations with the people they encountered there.

With open arms and a humane attitude of mind, Governor Phillip set about trying to establish contact with the Port Jackson Aborigines as soon as the fleet arrived. Apart from a few brief encounters during January and February 1788, though, he at first found ‘the natives’ so extraordinarily shy that he discovered little of their customs, learned nothing of their language and generally failed to open an effective channel of communication. His officers had no better success. Prior to meeting Booron in April 1789, Johnson’s contact with them appears to have been similarly limited. He mentions having been amongst them on a few early occasions at Sydney and Botany Bay, and recounts casually that they seemed ‘wonderfully pleased’ when he ‘tied buttons about their arms’ and made them presents of combs. He apparently shared the invaders’ initially warm but thoroughly patronising attitude towards the Aborigines, but had no more success than the Governor in his early attempts to befriend and conciliate them. In July 1788, the colonists remained so thoroughly ignorant of their language and culture

that Phillip could only console himself with the thought that there could not be much to learn: ‘The whole, indeed, that can be known of a people, among whom civilisation and the arts of life have made so small a progress, must amount to very little.’

The colonists’ initial sense of the Aborigines’ savagery was based in part upon the impression that they did not have a religion: ‘We have not been able yet to discover that they have anything like an object of adoration,’ wrote the captain of the Sirius, John Hunter. ‘Neither the sun, moon, nor stars seem to take up or occupy more of their attention than they do that of any other of the animals which inhabit this immense country.’ The first colonists found this mystifying – though heathen, the other Pacific peoples whom Europeans had encountered at least possessed objects of worship. Perhaps the chaplain also found it motivating. The Christian missionary might instruct the Aborigines ‘respecting a Supreme Being’ for the very first time.

Certainly Johnson, like Hunter, was typical of the first colonists in his failure to recognise Aboriginal spirituality. That failure strengthened the invaders’ initial impression of their savagery and thus contributed to the process by which the colonists disappropriated the Aborigines of their land.

During mid 1788, the colonists’ intrusions onto Aboriginal land and food resources brought them into rather undesirable contact with members of the surrounding tribes. The colonists had been hauling in substantial catches of fish from the harbour since the time they arrived. Following the failure of the first harvest in May, they had expanded the scale of their fishing activities further still. They had also taken over the well-watered and swampy area around the Tank Stream and present day Hyde Park, one of the

20 Hunter, An Historical Journal, p. 45
Aborigines’ most valuable hunting grounds. In the very stressful conditions of first settlement, the colonists’ exertions to provide for their own material needs and gather sufficient food to survive had grave consequences for the Aboriginal people who traditionally derived sustenance from that place. A convict man, Corbett, who returned to the British camp in late June after several weeks at large in the bush, testified that the natives he met were ‘greatly distressed for food, and that he saw several dying with hunger.’ Around the same time, Lieutenant Bradley encountered several women fishing near South Head, who ate all the food he gave them ‘with an eagerness that convinced us they must have been very hungry.’ On several occasions during the hard winter months, the Aborigines responded to the colonists’ great disruption to their traditional sources of food with both threats and actual physical violence. Between May and September, several convicts were speared or beaten to death while gathering herbs or other plants away from the camp. In July, a group of about twenty Aboriginal men forcibly attempted to take back the colonists’ catch of fish by force. By October, Bradley was convinced that they would attack almost everyone they met with who did not have a gun, and would even endeavour to surprise some who did. As Tench summarised the situation, ‘unabated animosity’ prevailed ‘between the natives and us.’ It was by no means the kind of communication with the Aborigines that Phillip desired.

By December 1788, Phillip still had not identified the perpetrators of the winter attacks or made any progress in his task of conciliating the surrounding tribes to the presence of the British on the land. As the naval officer David Blackburn confessed to his sister, ‘we have been here now above nine months without being able to persuade any of the natives to live or associate amongst us, or without being able to learn even a sentence of their language.’ The Judge Advocate of the colony, David Collins, similarly regretted ‘that none of them would place a confidence in and reside among us; as in such case, by an exchange of languages, they would have found that we had the most friendly intentions.

23 Willey, When the Sky Fell Down, p. 70.
26 Phillip to Nepean, 10 July 1788, HRNSW, vol.1 pt.2 p. 178.
27 Bradley, A Voyage to New South Wales, p. 126
28 Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, p. 137.
29 David Blackburn to Margaret Blackburn, 15 November 1788, MLMSS 6937/1/1, Mitchell Library.
towards them.'\textsuperscript{30} At the height of frustration, Phillip ordered the forcible abduction of a Cammeragal man, Arabanoo, on the grounds that it was absolutely necessary to ‘attain their language or teach them ours ... and to reconcile them by showing them the many advantages they would enjoy by mixing with us.’\textsuperscript{31} In Inga Clendinnen’s view, desperation had prompted the Governor to adopt a strategy with a long history in the annals of imperialism: ‘kidnapping to make friends.’\textsuperscript{32}

Arthur Phillip’s intentions were neither as innocent as ‘making friends’ nor as limited as treating his captive kindly, teaching him English and communicating the benevolence of his intentions towards the surrounding tribes. As Stephen Greenblatt has pointed out, European kidnappings of indigenous peoples during the long imperial period were generally informed not only by the inability of the two groups to communicate, but by the radical unevenness of the distribution of power between them.\textsuperscript{33} Phillip’s resort to the violent act of kidnapping was indeed an attempt to establish effective communication, but it is best understood in light of his plan to establish a permanent British settlement at Sydney and his desire to conciliate the Aborigines to the colonists’ ambitions including with respect to the land. The unfortunate Arabanoo was made to live at Government house in Sydney and ‘prevented from joining his Countrymen & Old Companions.’\textsuperscript{34}

Within six months, Phillip’s plans for his detainee were defeated. In May 1789, Arabanoo fell sick with smallpox and died. His death was ‘regretted by everyone’, wrote Lieutenant Fowell, ‘as it was Supposed he w ould be of great Service in Reconciling the Natives to Us.’\textsuperscript{35} It summed up the political failure of the colonists’ initial interaction with the Sydney tribes. Historians have often remarked upon Arabanoo’s death in

\textsuperscript{30} Collins, An Account of the English Colony, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{32} Clendinnen, \textit{Dancing with Strangers}, pp. 96-7
\textsuperscript{34} Bradley, \textit{A Voyage to New South Wales}, p. 161.
\textsuperscript{35} Newton Fowell to his father, 31 July 1790, \textit{HRNSW} vol.1 pt. 2 pp. 376-7.
connection with Phillip’s decision the following November to capture two more Aboriginal men, Bennelong and Colbee, in the hope that they would fill his place and mediate between the colonists and their own kind. What has not been adequately acknowledged, however, is that the political failure of Arabanoo’s kidnapping provided the immediate context for the colonists’ interaction with Nanbareae and Booron. Johnson had taken Booron into his home a few weeks’ prior to Arabanoo’s death, but it was probably in the aftermath of that event, when Governor Phillip’s attempts to communicate with ‘the natives’ were at their most frustrated, that he ventured to educate her. The desperation which prompted Phillip to order the abduction of Aboriginal men also prompted him and his officers to turn to the newly recovered children to act as their informants and translators in their interactions with the Port Jackson tribes. Indeed political desperation drove them, for various periods between May 1789 and November 1790, into a kind of reluctant reliance on the Aboriginal girl in the chaplain’s care.

Arabanoo’s death also informed the children’s situation in the camp in another rarely acknowledged but important way. His experience exposed the basic difference in the power which indigenous captives and their captors respectively possessed. In his case, that imbalance proved fatal: whereas the colonists were merely inconvenienced by the failure of his abduction to facilitate communication with the surrounding tribes, Arabanoo suffered physical detention, isolation from his people and, ultimately, an early death. This tragic discrepancy in the consequences of his kidnapping for the colonisers and the colonised highlights the grave imbalance in power between the two, and points to a connection between the Sydney colonists’ inability to understand or communicate effectively with the local Aborigines, and the power they exerted over those Aborigines who lived with them and learned English in the camp. This inequality of power, which for the British went hand in hand with an assumption of cultural and linguistic superiority, underpinned the colonists interactions with Arabanoo, Nanbareae, Bennelong and Booron. And although Booron was not kidnapped or physically detained like Arabanoo, the colonists similarly exercised their power over her to retain her in the camp, instruct her in English and ultimately to involve her in their negotiations over Aboriginal land. The education of individual indigenes, including Johnson’s of Booron, was directly shaped by the power politics of colonisation at Sydney Cove.
Booron’s residence in the Johnsons’ house and more generally her presence in the British camp raises important issues concerning the relationship between the colonisers and the colonised. From Richard and Mary Johnson’s few extant accounts, it seems that they rather unconsciously assumed themselves to be her adoptive parents, her carers, her educators and her hosts. In April 1790, the chaplain introduced her in a letter to his English correspondents as ‘a native girl under my care’ and noted his efforts to ‘instruct’ and ‘teach’ her. He also presented her and Nanbaree as smallpox survivors whose adult companions had died. In the context of late eighteenth century English ideas about family and parenthood, this probably would have suggested to Johnson and his readers that she was effectively without someone to raise her. And by contrasting these young orphans with the three Aboriginal men who had been ‘brought in by force’ – meaning Arabanoo, Bennelong and Colby – the chaplain also suggested the benevolent nature of his adoption of her, and the paternal, rather than the coercive, intentions of the British in keeping her in ‘the Camp’.

Johnson’s account of his relationship with Booron, however, tells us far more about his and Mary’s intentions towards her and their understanding of themselves in relation to the natives of New South Wales, than they do about how Booron may have experienced her residence with them.

The British officers also considered Booron their guest in the camp. They repeatedly described her as ‘the native girl who lived with the clergyman’ and noted her presence among them in a manner that assumed the Johnsons were her hosts. Nanbaree was similarly associated with ‘the surgeon, with whom he lived.’ Such descriptions implied a contrast between the specifically located establishments within the camp – the houses of the religious minister and the medical surgeon – and the undifferentiated space beyond its limits in which the Aborigines appeared to wander about rather than fix an abode. The colonists’ description of their own settlement as a ‘Camp’, as in Johnson’s account, may suggest a certain impermanence and even vulnerability. But particularly when used in connection with the children’s presence within it, the term also implied that the settlement was a contained and civilised space in contrast to the savage bush without.

36 Johnson to Fricker, 9 April 1790, in Mackaness, Some Letters, pt.1 p. 29.
37 See for example Collins, An Account of the English Colony, p. 112; Phillip in Hunter, An Historical Journal, p. 310, 311, 313.
38 Phillip in Hunter, An Historical Journal, p. 314
The colonists’ ideas were ill-founded, though. It is now clear that their sense of their role as Booron and Nanbaree’s hosts was fundamentally misplaced. Both children were probably members of the Gadigal clan that belonged to the country between the Cooks River and Port Jackson, Darling Harbour and the Pacific coast.  

It is highly likely that they knew the place the colonists called Sydney Cove by a name like War-war, Weerong, Warrane or Warrang. As Gadigal, they and not the colonists would have been truly at home in that place. In this sense, then, Booron was not the guest of the Johnsons and they were not her ‘hosts’. Although the colonists did not appreciate or acknowledge it, she may have been living in her traditional lands throughout her time in the British camp, even if the colonists’ presence had interrupted her normal use and occupation of it.

The colonists also made incorrect assumptions about the children’s need of their parental care. The chaplain explicitly considered Booron to be ‘under his care,’ apparently in the sense that he provided for her daily needs and took responsibility for instructing her in the English language and the principles of Christianity. Surgeon White similarly took it upon himself to ‘adopt’ Nanbaree as a member of his household and raise him in an English way. But some scholars who have considered these first instances of cross-cultural ‘adoption’ have been quick to declare Booron a stolen child, who, with Nanbaree, is best understood as an early victim in the white invaders’ long history of removing Aboriginal children from their families. Penny van Toorn advanced that view on the basis that Booron was not, in fact, an orphan. Like other Aboriginal children, she would have been part of a complex kinship network, and raised and educated by a ‘galaxy of relatives’ rather than one or two parents. The death of one or even several of these significant adults would not have left Booron on her own. Even with British

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40 Attenbrow, *Sydney’s Aboriginal Past,* p. 11
definitions of family in mind, though, the idea that Booron was an orphan is difficult to sustain. Several of Phillip’s officers recorded occasions on which Booron identified her father and brothers to them. As early as July 1789, Bradley wrote, ‘the girl pointed out one of the natives who she said was her father’ – a man whom the colonists knew as Maugoran. In September 1790, she publicly owned two men as ‘her brothers, for whom she procured two hatchets.’\(^{43}\) And Lieutenant William Dawes, at least, was conscious that several of Booron’s relatives had not only survived the smallpox, but were concerned for her welfare in the camp. Sometime during the second half of 1790, a young Aboriginal man came to him and asked ‘Naabangoon Booroong?’ – we will see, or shall we see, Booroong? ‘These words were spoken to me by Yerinibi, Booron’s brother,’ Dawes recorded in his notebook. ‘He was evidently anxious in enquiring after Boorong.’\(^{44}\) Even by their own standards and accounts, then, the officers wrongly considered Booron an orphan in need of adoption and English care.

It is certainly possible that Johnson and the other officers were sincerely unaware of her surviving kin at the time of her initial ‘adoption,’ and at that time genuine in their efforts to nurse and care for her. When they became aware of her surviving relatives, though, they neither encouraged nor permitted her to rejoin Aboriginal society. When, in September 1790, Booron expressed a strong desire to live again with her countrymen, ‘several reasons were urged that were likely to induce her to remain in her present situation a few months longer.’\(^{45}\) On another outing around the same time, Booron proved manifestly reluctant to return to the British camp and did so only after the colonists repeatedly enjoined her to.\(^{46}\) There is no evidence to suggest that the colonists ever used physical force to restrain her. Indeed, they explicitly recognized that ‘it would be difficult to prevent her getting away, if she was determined to go.’\(^{47}\) But the officers certainly placed significant emotional and psychological pressure on her in the attempt to retain her in the camp for as long as possible. Booron was not their captive in a physical sense but the camp nevertheless became a site of detention.

\(^{44}\) Dawes, ‘Notebooks concerning languages spoken in the Sydney area, c.1790’, FM4/3431, frame 773, Mitchell Library.
\(^{46}\) Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, p. 184.
Living with the Johnsons complicated Booron’s relationship to the land around Sydney Cove: although she continued to inhabit what was most probably her ancestral country, she was not completely free in her enjoyment of her home. In very different ways, Booron’s living arrangements also impacted Richard and Mary Johnson’s sense of place and their experience of colonial life. Between Mary and Booron, there appears to have been a genuinely friendly relationship. It is likely that they spent considerable amounts of time in each other’s company, doing domestic tasks about the cottage and perhaps working together in the yard. The colonists who knew them often mentioned them in connection with each other. Tench, Collins, Bradley and King all described Booron as ‘the girl who lived with the clergyman’s wife.’

David Blackburn remarked to his sister that Booron was ‘very fond of Mrs Johnstone’ [sic]. These fleeting suggestions of intimacy between the two women are intriguing. Perhaps Booron was grieving the loss of some of her kinswomen to smallpox, and became more attached to Mary than Richard in their place. Or perhaps the general lack of female companionship for Mary inclined her to treat Booron as something like a friend. More probably, Mary was comforted by the presence of a young person in the house as she recovered from the death of her little son. The modestly consoling presence of Booron at this time may have been why, when Mary’s second child was born in early March the following year, she named her Milbah Maria – ‘Milbah [being] a name amongst the Natives,’ as Richard explained.

Although the scant evidence available means that the precise character or significance of their relationship cannot be defined, it is probable that Booron’s residence with Mary helped relieve the latter’s sense of friendlessness and exile.

For the clergyman, Booron’s presence in the house had the effect of sharpening his missionary vision of the entire world being brought to Christ. Johnson wrote of his desire to see the ‘heathen’ brought to the knowledge of God after reporting his efforts to teach Booron the Lord’s Prayer. It was a vision which he evidently shared with his Baptist friend Henry Fricker, to whom he was writing, and many others of his English

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49 David Blackburn to Margaret Blackburn, 12 August 1790, MLMSS 6937/1/1, Mitchell Library.
50 Johnson to Fricker, 9 April 1790, in Mackaness, *Some Letters*, pt.1 p. 29.
51 Johnson to Fricker, 9 April 1790, in Mackaness, *Some Letters*, pt.1 p. 29.
supporters. It is significant, though, that he articulated it for the first time in response to his contact with Booron in New South Wales. Though as an English evangelical he would have valued mission to ‘poor heathens’ even before he left his home, it is most likely that his close interaction with Booron gave a personal focus to this belief and informed both his understanding of the Aborigines and his conception of his ministry in general. It was probably the experience of teaching her English that prompted him to propose the sending of missionaries for the specific task of preaching to the Aborigines; her able memory of the Lord’s Prayer may have given him direct encouragement for his ministry in the camp. After all, she appeared more responsive to his endeavours than the convicts, among whom there was ‘little apparent fruit yet.’

Booron’s residence with the Johnsons also impacted the chaplain’s place in and contribution to the wider life of the British camp. In general he and Mary were something like outsiders, free civilians in a penal and military town. Johnson did not enjoy a particularly close relationship with the other officers, whom he at times felt moved to criticise for immoral behaviour, insufficient regard for religion and nonattendance at church. The clergyman was not naturally one of their brotherhood, but his ‘host’ relationship with Booron meant he spent more time in their company and worked alongside them to conciliate the Port Jackson tribes. Such interaction with the other officers did not replace the godly fellowship he had lost by sailing to New South Wales and settling in the company of convicts and military men. But it appears to have positively influenced his friendships, particularly with Lieutenants Dawes and Tench, and eased his sense of social isolation and exile.

The quick-witted and well-read Watkin Tench did not treat the Johnsons with the contempt of which the clergyman sometimes complained, but praised Mary for her kindness and Richard for everything from preaching to fishing and farming. While this might indicate simply that Tench was generous, it may also hint that he knew Johnson better than most other officers. The two apparently spent a considerable amount of time

52 Johnson to Fricker, 9 April 1790, in Mackaness, Some Letters, pt.1 p. 29.
together as they interacted with Bennelong and other Aborigines during 1789 and 1790. More certainly, Johnson’s friendship with the curious and culturally sensitive William Dawes was based on a shared evangelical faith as well as the shared experience of interacting with Booron and other Aboriginal people around Sydney cove.\(^{54}\) Although Dawes advantageously appeared to his peers to lack ‘any appearance of formal sanctity,’ both he and Johnson were acquainted with leading evangelical Anglicans William Wilberforce, John Newton and other members of the influential Clapham sect.\(^{55}\) In his later life Dawes helped train missionaries for the Church Missionary Society, which Johnson also supported personally and financially.\(^{56}\) It is quite possible, given their shared religious world, that the two men began their acquaintance prior to departing England in 1787. It very probably continued after Dawes returned there from the colony in 1792.\(^{57}\)

The initial fellowship between Johnson and Dawes developed into a friendship as they interacted with Booron and other indigenous people during their four years together in New South Wales. Both made efforts to teach Aboriginal people about the Christian faith. ‘Gatu gara gia gi,’ Dawes recorded his friend Patyegarang having said to him, ‘Stop stop, hear me pray.’\(^{58}\) Both sought to discuss religious subjects with Booron, though Dawes’ attempts were defeated by ‘her levity and love of play.’\(^{59}\) They shared an interest in and concern for Booron that was informed by an evangelical, even ‘methodistical’ humanitarianism.\(^{60}\) And from the very fragmentary surviving evidence, it appears likely that for a time Booron went back and forth between them, perhaps several

\(^{54}\) George Arnold Wood appears to be the only previous historian to have recognized the significance of the friendship between Dawes and Johnson. Dawes is only mentioned briefly in Macintosh’s biography and Inga Clendinnen seems to have considered the two men opposed. See Wood, ‘Lieutenant William Dawes and Captain Watkin Tench,’ pp. 1-24; Macintosh, Richard Johnson, p. 89; Clendinnen, Dancing with Strangers, pp. 155-6.


\(^{57}\) See Johnson to Fricker 15 August 1797, in Mackaness, Some Letters, pt.2 p. 20.

\(^{58}\) Dawes, ‘Notebooks concerning languages spoken in the Sydney area, c.1790’, FM4/3431 frame 806, Mitchell Library. Emphasis in original.

\(^{59}\) Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, p. 280.

\(^{60}\) Wood, ‘Lieutenant William Dawes and Captain Watkin Tench’, p. 5.
times a day. Johnson’s brief account of her residence at his house suggests she spent considerable time with him and Mary, and she also appears as one of Dawes’ main informants in his Sydney Language notebooks. Both Johnson and Dawes were fond of Booron and, of all the colonists in Sydney, undoubtedly knew her best.

Their common faith and shared experiences of interacting with Booron gave rise to a friendship between Johnson and Dawes that probably helped the former endure his first very difficult years as an exile in New South Wales. That Johnson came to count the Lieutenant among his few friends suggests that he should not be dismissed, as he was by Clendinnen, as a one-dimensional evangelical who had little in common with Dawes and was at best irrelevant to the colonists’ relationship with the Port Jackson tribes. The evident friendship between the chaplain and the colonist who made most progress in learning the Sydney language suggests the need to explore the former’s attitudes towards Aborigines more thoroughly. The relationship that developed between Johnson and Dawes also indicates that life in early Sydney was not entirely of the colonists’ making. The Johnsons never acknowledged Booron’s significance in shaping their experience of colonial life – that she had sharpened Richard’s missionary vision, reshaped his relationship with the other officers, and softened Mary’s sense of loneliness – and thus diminished their sense of exile and subtly redefined their place in the British camp. But Booron’s particular influence on them, although subtle, was significant. The original inhabitants of the land continued to shape the culture of the place, not only within their own communities but also, to some extent, amongst the British.

MISSIONARY EXERTIONS

Both the physical character of the land and the culture of the people who originally occupied it helped shape the camp and the community the colonists established on the shores of Sydney Cove. But the values and assumptions that the colonists brought with

61 See Johnson to Fricker, 9 April 1790, in Mackaness, Some Letters, pt.1 p. 29; Dawes, ‘Notebooks concerning languages spoken in the Sydney area, c.1790’, FM4/3431 frames 774-6, 780, 811, Mitchell Library.

62 Clendinnen, Dancing with Strangers, pp. 155-6.
them from Britain had perhaps an even greater impact. Richard Johnson’s interactions with Booron certainly suggest as much. The Protestant tradition he embodied as chaplain to the colonists of New South Wales had profound consequences not only for his sense of the colony as a site of exile, but for his engagement with the indigenous people he encountered there. Particularly important was its value for mission: spreading throughout the nations the good news of the atonement achieved by Christ’s cross and the salvation consequently available to every individual who heeded the call to repent and humbly placed their faith in Almighty God. As Johnson himself put it in the period of Booron’s residence with him, ‘[I] wish to see these poor heathen brought to the knowledge of Christianity and hope in time to see or hear of the dawning of that time when these shall be given for our Lord’s heritage, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his Possession.’

Reverend Johnson’s idea of his specific missionary task first emerges from a letter he addressed to the Portsmouth evangelical Henry Fricker in April 1790, eleven months after Booron first began living with him:

‘Have taken some pains with Abaroo (about 15 years old) to instruct her in reading, & have no reason to complain of her improvement. She can likewise speak a little English and is useful in several things about our little Hutt [sic]. Have taught her the Lords Prayer &c, and as she comes better to understand me, endeavour to instruct her respecting a Supreme Being &c.’

This is the first and fullest of Johnson’s surviving references to Booron and it highlights many important aspects of their interaction. It confirms that he saw her as a heathen and assumed her to be entirely ignorant of spiritual things. It also exposes his desire for her improvement – though in some contrast to later colonists including Samuel Marsden, Johnson appears far more interested in the young Aborigine’s spiritual development than the acquisition of industrious inclinations and domestic skills. Most strikingly of all, the

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63 Johnson to Fricker, 9 April 1790, in Mackaness, Some Letters, pt.1 p. 29. The last sentence alludes to Psalm two.
64 Johnson to Fricker, 9 April 1790, in Mackaness, Some Letters, pt.1 p. 29.
65 On European ideas about Aborigines and work, see Henry Reynolds, Dispossession: Black Australians and white invaders, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989, pp. 127-133; Richard White, On Holidays: a history
Johnson’s account of his intentions towards Booron provides an important glimpse into his efforts to influence and indeed transform her, but he does not appear from his correspondence to have ever reflected deeply on his interaction with her. He did not explicitly theorise the relationship between missionary activity and the civilisation of indigenes, as his successor Marsden and many other early nineteenth century evangelicals did. Perhaps this was because he commenced his colonial ministry slightly prior to the institutionalisation of the modern missionary movement and was in consequence neither accountable to a formal missionary body nor exposed to their policy debates. Nevertheless he longed to see a transformation in Booron that involved casting off savagery and superstition and putting on civilisation and Protestant truth instead. As the influential English cleric Henry Venn had written with joyous expectation just four days after Johnson’s appointment as chaplain to Botany Bay: ‘all the savageness of the Heathen shall be put off, and all the grace of the Spirit shall be put on … All heaven will break forth in that song of praise ‘Allelujah! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!’ Johnson himself was not as effusively enthusiastic about his missionary task as many of his English supporters and mentors, but he was, because of his background and through his letters, connected to a particular English Protestant world in which the evangelisation of the heathen and the civilising of the savage were understood as inseparable, gloriously God-pleasing pursuits.

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Conversionism was a hallmark of evangelical Protestantism in Britain throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Johnson’s own lifetime, it found expression in the Methodists’ exertions to persuade the English working classes to repent, in evangelical crusades aimed at Catholics in Ireland, and in the missionary societies’ despatching men and women throughout the South Seas. The importance of conversion to Johnson’s own missionary vision is most apparent in his efforts to teach Booron the Lord’s Prayer and his intention to instruct her regarding ‘a Supreme Being etc’. It is also likely that he sought to cultivate her Christian understanding by encouraging her attendance at church. The effort Johnson made to acquaint Booron with Christianity is unsurprising, and can be understood primarily in terms of his own priorities as an evangelical clergyman whose ministry in the colony was motivated by a deep conviction that there is one God for all people and that salvation is found only in ‘his dear and only-begotten Son the Lord Jesus Christ.’

As he explained to the convicts, this meant that, ‘next to the salvation of my own soul, nothing in this world lies so near my heart as the conversion and salvation of my fellow creatures.’ Like his ministry to the prisoners, his religious instruction of Booron was motivated by a deep-seated and thoroughly evangelical concern for the salvation of her soul.

In evangelical formulations, conversion to Christianity involved not only doctrinal assent but the transformation of a person’s life. Johnson’s religious instruction of Booron thus involved a moral component too. He does not mention it himself, but the journals of other officers suggest that he attempted to impress upon Booron the importance of female modesty in terms of wearing a petticoat. The significance of this injunction is suggested by the association – common in Europe and among its representatives in the Pacific – that nakedness was both unchristian and uncivilised. The French (Catholic) explorers who called at Sydney between 1802 and 1831, for example, linked their observations of nakedness to their conclusions about the Aborigines’ savagery. Among the British

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68 Richard Johnson’s will, 1 September 1826, in Macintosh, Richard Johnson, pp. 110-111.
69 Richard Johnson, An Address to the Inhabitants of the Colonies established in New South Wales and Norfolk Island ... written in the year 1792, Libraries Board of South Australia, Adelaide, 1963, pp. 4-5; Macintosh, Richard Johnson, pp. 32-3.
70 Phillip in Hunter, An Historical Journal, p. 315; Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, p. 184.
officers there was some variety of opinion on the subject, but Johnson was so adamant that Booron wear clothes that she continued to don a petticoat in his presence for a time after she actually ceased residing in the British camp.

Significantly for the relationship between Johnson’s missionary activity and the British colonisation of Sydney cove, the officers took it for granted that the kind of civilised salvation that the chaplain envisaged for Booron would be attractive to the people they displaced. Little more than a month after her recovery from smallpox, ‘the Parson and the Native Girl … met with a party of [natives]’ down at the harbour, Lieutenant Bradley recorded, ‘some of whom the Girl said were her relations. She told them how well she was treated, that she had recovered by the care taken of her and that she was very happy, and used every persuasion to get one or more of them to return with her, but to no purpose.’ Since it is highly unlikely that Johnson or any of the other officers present understood what Booron actually said to her own relations and friends, this passage is better read as a record of what they assumed she said or perhaps requested her to convey. It almost certainly does not provide any insight into Booron’s own feelings and experiences, but it indicates that the officers understood the Johnsons’ care of her as a potentially positive model for the Aborigines’ integration into the colonial community. Such care was held out to Booron’s people as an incentive to relinquish their present way of life and used to recommend that they submit to the colonisation of their land by taking up residence in the British camp. Johnson’s relationship with Booron was largely defined by his missionary efforts to convert and civilise her. But it was also used, unsuccessfully on this occasion, to serve the colonists’ goal of conciliating the Aborigines to their presence on the land.

Richard Johnson’s missionary exertions with Booron were defined by his desire that she would not only convert to Protestantism but become proficient in speaking and reading his mother tongue. In keeping with both his national culture and his religious beliefs, he

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74 Bradley, A Voyage to New South Wales, p. 171.
placed immense value on English literacy. He came from a country in which the *King James Bible*, Bunyan’s *Pilgrims Progress* and Foxe’s recently serialised and cheaply available *Book of Martyrs* were among the most commonly owned books. These readily available and widely familiar religious titles could be found even in the households of the semi-literate working class. Along with Shakespeare’s plays, they gave shape to literate civilisation in Britain during the eighteenth century and helped cement both the written English language and the convictions and culture of Protestantism as core features of British civilisation and identity.\(^{75}\) Johnson also came from a religious tradition in which reading had an especially important place. As David Bebbington established, a ‘particular regard’ for the Christian scriptures was one of evangelicalism’s distinctive characteristics from the time of its emergence in Britain.\(^{76}\) Reading the bible has also had an important place the Protestant tradition more broadly, because it enabled the individual believer unmediated access to God in his Word. Johnson’s fervent evangelical Protestantism meant that, perhaps more than any other colonist who arrived with Phillip’s fleet, he valued English as the language of both civilisation and true religion.

The colonial chaplain’s missionary exertions with Booron and particularly his pains ‘to instruct her in reading’ expressed his Protestant ideals with politically significant effects for the initial British colonisation of Sydney cove. This was in part because he gave lessons in literacy at a time when the English language, especially in its written forms, was crucial to the expansion and administration of the British Empire. At that empire’s southern extremity, in the infant colony of New South Wales, language was an important site of cultural contact between Britons and indigenes.\(^{77}\) The strangeness of the Aborigines’ speech and the skill with which they mimicked English sounds were often remarked upon by the Sydney colonists. Mutual curiosity and a practical need to communicate encouraged several of Phillip’s officers and a number of Aboriginal people to attempt to learn the other’s tongue. Linguist Jakelin Troy has suggested that, as a result


of this linguistic interaction, a Sydney pidgin began to develop during the colony’s earliest years.\textsuperscript{78}

The aims and effects of language learning were not always or entirely benign. Within ten or twenty years of the British invasion, linguistic contact had become more decidedly one sided. A report in the \textit{Sydney Gazette} during 1804 may illustrate a trend towards greater English hegemony. James Bath, a recently deceased Aborigine who had been raised by convicts and emancipists, had been so thoroughly redeemed from his former savagery that he felt ‘a rooted and unconquerable aversion to all of his own colour’ and ‘spoke none but our language,’ the paper proudly declared.\textsuperscript{79} During the late 1780s and early 1790s, the colony’s administrators did not encourage the extinction of Aboriginal tongues in the name of civilisation – some of the most senior men including Governor Phillip, Captain Hunter and Judge Advocate David Collins assiduously studied indigenous languages themselves.\textsuperscript{80} But they nevertheless used coercion. Phillip ordered the capture and physical detention of Arabanoo, Bennelong and Colby in order to facilitate cultural contact and communication. Even Dawes, the most culturally sensitive of the colonists, taught his indigenous friend Patyegarang to read and insisted that she demonstrate her skills against her will before a group of Europeans she did not know.\textsuperscript{81} There were non-imperial dimensions to some of the language contact that took place, but language-learning in early Sydney was often intimately tied up with the exertion of imperial power.

Richard Johnson’s efforts to instruct Booron in speaking and reading indicate that he considered English fluency, like conversion to Christianity, an important aid to her salvation. Indeed, he schooled Booron in Christian doctrine and English literacy at one and the same time. His letter to Fricker implied that it was an English language version of the Lord’s Prayer that he taught her to recite and it was likely the \textit{King James Bible} or another religious text from his library that he encouraged her to read. There is no

\textsuperscript{78} Troy, ‘Language contact,’ pp. 47-49.

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Sydney Gazette}, 2 December 1804.


\textsuperscript{81} Dawes, ‘Notebooks concerning languages spoken in the Sydney area, c.1790’, FM4/3431, frame 808.
evidence that he ever attempted to translate the key texts of his religion into Booron’s language, while he explicitly welcomed her improvement in his own. Perhaps this aspect of his behaviour can be explained by his lack of the linguistic interest and anthropological imagination possessed by his friend Lieutenant Dawes. Perhaps it was because he did not conceive of his task primarily in terms of evangelising ‘the natives’ as later missionaries like Threlkeld at Port Macquarie and William Colenso in northern New Zealand did. More positively, though, his efforts to instruct Booron in English can be understood in terms of both the importance of reading and speaking the Word to Johnson’s own English Protestant views and the colonists’ immediate political need to communicate effectively with the Sydney tribes.

The importance of reading to the Protestantism Johnson promoted is apparent in his own religious life as well as his public ministry. Like other evangelicals of his day, he considered the bible a ‘sacred book ... given by the inspiration of God’. He recommended it to the convicts as the ‘only sure and infallible guide’ to the truth about God and humanity and was thoroughly familiar with its content and themes. He made reading and studying it a personal priority, and complained bitterly to his mentor John Newton when the demands of farming to provide for his family kept him away from his studies and books. He also brought out with him from England hundreds of bibles, Testaments, Psalters and Books of Common Prayer, numerous moral tracts and multiple copies of the Sermon on the Mount – and urged the convicts to take and regularly read them. It was as if he and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, who supplied these texts, expected reading them to bring about the convicts’ spiritual and moral redemption. To Johnson, though, the convict’s utter disregard for these books (they tore out the pages to make cigarettes or curl hair) seemed ample proof of their rebellion against God.

83 Johnson, An Address, pp. 8, 37.
85 The full list of titles and the number of each is given in Macintosh, Richard Johnson, pp. 105-6.
Johnson also attempted to share God’s Word by means of public speaking. He placed priority on the preaching and hearing of sermons as part of each Sunday service. This typically evangelical emphasis on the sermon aroused the ire of the first Anglican Archdeacon of New South Wales, Thomas Hobbes Scott, when he arrived in 1825. ‘I found the Services administered much more after the manner of a Methodist Chapel than of the Church,’ he complained.

‘Their sermons are delivered extempore, or at least unwritten with a Bible in their hand full of bookstrings, placed in the texts they intend to use by way of illustration ... and they usually continue an hour & sometimes more delivering the most unconnected sentences ... to the little edification of their audience who in this hot climate are often asleep more than half the time.’  

This description seems unduly severe: the colony’s senior evangelical minister at the time, Samuel Marsden, almost always wrote his sermons out. But the Archdeacon was right to identify the evangelical clergy with extended preaching from the book.

To the Aboriginal observers of Richard Johnson’s ministry in early Sydney, the same thing stood out. Some time in late 1791, Patyegarang went to Dawes and asked ‘warunga piaba warunga domine buk – when will domine (that is Mr Johnson) read in the book?’ Her question is interesting on several grounds: that she called Johnson by what appears to be an Aboriginal name – domine – suggests that the clergyman was well known to Aboriginal people around Sydney, and perhaps also that he, like Phillip and Collins (whom Bennelong called beanga, father, and babunna, brother), was among the few colonists whom indigenous people attempted to incorporate into their existing system of relationships. Further, her explicit identification of the chaplain with the activity of ‘reading in the book’ suggests her awareness of the significance of reading, and perhaps

88 Yarwood, Samuel Marsden, p. 262; Samuel Marsden, ‘Sermon papers and notes, ca. 1812 - 1833’, Moore Theological College Library, Sydney.
89 Dawes, ‘Notebooks concerning languages spoken in the Sydney area, c.1790’, FM4/3431 frame 806, Mitchell Library.
90 The Aboriginal meaning of domine is not known. Although domine is Latin for ‘lord’, it is highly unlikely that Johnson had taught it to Patyegarang - there is no evidence to suggest that he encouraged her or any other person to address him with such a title in any language. On Bennelong’s names for Phillip and Collins, see King in Hunter, An Historical Journal, p. 275.
even of the bible, to his identity and his role in the camp. Patyegarang’s question may also indicate that reading was a common feature of Johnson’s interaction with indigenous people and suggests the possibility that, in addition to teaching Booron to read, he made efforts to instruct other Aborigines in English too.

Johnson’s particular emphasis on English literacy in his instruction of Booron can be explained in terms of the central importance of reading and speaking to the evangelical Protestant culture he came from and the Word-based convictions he sought to convey. But teaching her to read and speak English was necessary to far more than the fulfilment of his own missionary task. Other officers’ journals suggest that in 1789 and 1790 the colonists put Booron’s language skills, along with Nanbarée’s, to political use and kept them both busy with the tasks of translating and mediating with other Aborigines at their behest. Booron was present as a translator on several occasions when officers interacted with Aborigines around Sydney Cove. Bradley records that the officers involved her in their interaction with other Aborigines and requested that she convey their messages to them little more than a month after she was brought into the British camp.91 Phillip’s journal suggests that from that time on the colonists’ interaction with Aborigines by the harbour was often facilitated by ‘the native boy and girl’ who accompanied them in their boat. ‘Through them ... conversation was held.’92 Collins and Tench each recorded that it was Booron who translated when Johnson and Dawes learned the identity of the warrior who wounded Phillip at Manly Cove.93 The latter also observed that Booron accompanied the officers on their several visits to Bennelong during September and October 1790 and conveyed for them their repeated requests that he visit the British camp.94

On one particular occasion late that September, the officers were conversing with Bennelong and some of his friends when an Aboriginal woman ‘appeared not far off.’ The officers recognised her as none other than Bennelong’s wife, Barangaroo, and sought

91 Bradley, A Voyage to New South Wales, p. 171.
94 Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, pp. 183-188.
to coax her into their company with a distinctly political purpose in mind. ‘Supposing that by a private conversation she might be induced to visit Sydney, which would be the means of drawing her husband and others thither, Abaroo was instructed to take her aside and try if she could persuade her to comply with our wish,’ Tench wrote.\(^{95}\) The officers clearly relied on Booron not only as a translator, but to actively convey their messages and requests. They attempted to use her as a political negotiator in their effort to impress upon the Sydney Aborigines the benevolence of their intentions towards them and the advantages of accepting British civilisation in exchange for their lands.

In this instance, though, Booron proved utterly unsuccessful in that task. ‘It was soon seen,’ continued Tench, ‘that Barangaroo's arguments to induce Abaroo to rejoin their society were more powerful than those of the latter to prevail upon her to come among us.’ To the officers, it was an unwelcome reminder that Booron’s actions where informed not only by the colonists’ desires and agenda, but by hopes and longings of her own. It posed a direct threat to their political interests and they responded quickly by commanding her to return to the British camp. ‘It was not without manifest reluctance and often repeated injunctions that Abaroo would quit her countrywomen,’ concluded Tench. ‘She sat in the boat in sullen silence, evidently occupied by reflection on the scene she had left behind, and returning inclination to her former habits of life.’\(^{96}\)

The colonists generally thought Booron and Nanbaree too young to be either effective translators or sufficiently influential negotiators. In light of the encounter with Barangaroo they may have doubted Booron’s reliability as a messenger, too. But the officers nevertheless used them and even reluctantly relied on them in these very ways.\(^{97}\) Particularly in the absence of an adult alternative in the period between Arabanoo’s death and Bennelong’s capture, and in the months between Bennelong’s escape and his return to the British camp, they turned to the children as their translators and mediators with the Sydney tribes. Booron’s usefulness to the British invaders was in many respects a direct consequence of her instruction by Johnson – instruction which was defined largely by his

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\(^{95}\) Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, pp. 184.  
\(^{96}\) Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, pp. 183-4.  
\(^{97}\) See Barrington, *A Voyage to Botany Bay*, pp. 68-69; David Blackburn to Margaret Blackburn, 12 August 1790, MLMSS 6937/1/1, Mitchell Library, Sydney.
missionary vision for her Christian transformation. Like his efforts to encourage her conversion, his instruction of her in English had deeply religious motivations but politically advantageous consequences for the British as they founded their settlement and established their colonial rule.

THE CHAPLAIN IN POLITICS

The significance of Johnson’s missionary exertions for the European appropriation of the land around Sydney Cove is apparent not only in Booron’s usefulness to the colonists but in the chaplain’s own contribution to the British effort to conciliate and supplant the Port Jackson tribes. The officers’ reluctant reliance on Booron meant that Johnson, as her teacher and self-styled guardian, became involved in the cultural politics of the early settlement to a far greater degree than before. This aspect of his contribution to colonial life is not immediately obvious – and has been so far overlooked by historians perhaps because he was neither the most prominent of the officers in their interactions with Aboriginal people, nor forthcoming in his account of his involvement with them. But a careful reading of several officers’ journals indicates that between April 1789 and October 1790, the period of Booron’s residence with him, the chaplain was at the centre of the interaction between the colonists and the Aborigines. It was a pivotal period in the colonists’ relationship with the Sydney tribes, during which their earnest efforts to ‘conciliate the natives’ to their permanent presence on gradually acquired the very particular form of paying patient attention to Bennelong, their former captive, in the hope of regaining his confidence and persuading him to set an example for his companions by taking up residence in the camp at Sydney Cove.

During the months that Booron lived with him, Johnson was present and active in several key encounters between officers and Aborigines around Port Jackson, including the first meeting in the aftermath of the small pox epidemic and the colonists re-engagement with

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98 Phillip’s instructions, 25 April 1787, HRNSW vol.1 pt.2, p. 89.
Bennelong after Phillip was speared by one of his companions at Manly cove. Neither Johnson nor Booron were present when the Governor received his wound. But it was largely they who, a few days later, began the delicate process of re-establishing communication with Bennelong’s people and conveying Phillip’s response. They and Dawes and some other officers travelled across the harbour to converse with some Aborigines, who ‘inquired kindly how his Excellency did, and seemed pleased to hear that he was likely to recover.’ With Booron translating, they also learned that Wil-ee-ma-rin was the name of the person who had thrown the spear. And they presumably complied with Phillip’s desire that, through Booron, they assure the group that ‘no animosity was retained on account of the late accident, nor resentment harboured against any but the actual perpetrator of the fact.’ Although it is not possible to determine precisely why Johnson and Dawes were given this task, it is likely that the other officers considered them, in the company of Booron, men whose relationships with Aboriginal people rendered them most likely to succeed. Significantly for the relationship between the invaders and the invaded, the party was successful in re-establishing friendly communication with Bennelong and opened the way for an unprecedented level of interaction between the colonists and Aborigines around Sydney Cove.

The British officers visited Bennelong’s camp across the harbour several times over the following weeks. They always took Booron with them as their translator and mediator, and it is almost certain that Johnson was often among the group. On their first visit the officers presented Bennelong and his companions with hatchets in satisfaction of an earlier request. Phillip also sent over a substantial portion of the colonists’ most recent catch of fish. On several subsequent occasions, further presents were made, assurances of good will were given, curiosities were exchanged and ‘much civility passed.’ The officers also sought to persuade Barangaroo, through Booron, to encourage her husband to visit their camp. But their attentions failed to have the desired effect of persuading him to return with them to Sydney. Bennelong repeatedly dismissed their assurances ‘that he

99 Bradley, A Voyage to New South Wales, p. 171; Collins, An Account of the English Colony, p. 112; Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, p. 181.
100 Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, p. 181.
101 Collins, an Account of the English colony, vol.1 p.111-2; Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, p. 181.
102 Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, pp. 181-184.
103 Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, p. 183.
would be well received and kindly treated’ and refused their requests that he appoint a
day on which he would accompany them to the British settlement.\footnote{Tench, \textit{Sydney’s First Four Years}, p. 187.}

It was in this context that, on 8 October 1790, Johnson made a direct and perhaps
decisive contribution to the colonists’ campaign to conciliate the Sydney tribes. A fire
was observed across the harbour that morning – the pre-arranged signal for some officers
to visit Bennelong at his camp. Several men quickly equipped themselves with articles
which, as Tench put it, ‘we thought would prove acceptable to them’ as gifts. And with
Booron and Johnson among their number, they made their way across the harbour to the
Aborigines’ place. During the friendly interactions that followed and in response to
seeing the Governor’s boat pass by, Bennelong seemed to suddenly resolve to visit
Phillip at Government House and thus to venture himself unreservedly amongst the
British at Sydney Cove. The officers were delighted by this turn of events. They hoped
that his countrymen would follow his example, mix with the colonists at Sydney and thus
enable the conciliation of the natives to their presence on the land. But Barangaroo was
so violently opposed to his departure that the colonists felt it necessary to guarantee his
conveyance home. So, as Tench put it, ‘Mr. Johnson, attended by Abaroo, agreed to
remain as a hostage until Banelon should return.’\footnote{Tench, \textit{Sydney’s First Four Years}, p. 188.}

There is no record of how or why Johnson came to the decision to act as a hostage, of
how he felt about his captivity, or even of how he passed the time. All we know is that
when the officers returned with Bennelong several hours later that same day, they found
Booron and another woman fishing from a canoe ‘and Mr. Johnson and Barangaroo
sitting at the fire.’ At a little distance ‘sat an Indian, with his spear in his hand, as if
sentinel over the hostages for the security of his countrymen's return.’\footnote{Tench, \textit{Sydney’s First Four Years}, pp. 189-190.} We might speculative that Johnson involved himself in the officers’ negotiations with Bennelong in
order to assist the realisation of their political desire to entice the Aborigines to move in
to the British camp. However, his involvement may also have arisen unexpectedly and
circumstantially from his particular relationship with the girl. It is probable that, of all the
officers present, Johnson was most at ease in the company of Booron and Barangaroo and thus best suited to remaining behind, apparently unarmed.

It is far easier to identify the consequences of Johnson’s exertions than discern precisely what motivated him. In the absence of evidence for his personal intentions and expectations, it is unclear to what extent he felt the urgency of the colonists’ need to establish proper contact with the Aborigines or identified with their efforts to conciliate the Port Jackson tribes. While it is certainly possible that he taught Booron English with the aim of rendering her useful as the colonists’ mediator and translator, it is more likely that his exertions were basically religious in intent. There is no reason to doubt his statement of his missionary desire to see Booron and her people ‘brought to the knowledge of Christianity.’\textsuperscript{107} As an evangelical British Protestant, he very probably considered reading and speaking English an important means to that end.

Whatever Johnson’s intentions, though, his actions in instructing Booron in English and facilitating Bennelong’s visit to Phillip eventually bore the colonists’ valuable political fruit. By late October 1790, Bennelong and several of his Aboriginal companions had moved in to the British camp. ‘From this time,’ as Tench put it, ‘our intercourse with the natives, though partially interrupted, was never broken off.’ He and several other officers entertained themselves during the intervals of duty by ‘cultivating the acquaintance of our new friends.’\textsuperscript{108} By March the following year, as Johnson told Fricker, the settlers were ‘upon a pretty friendly intercourse with the natives’ just as Phillip had desired, and ‘numbers of them are coming into the Camp daily, or rather are in night & day.’\textsuperscript{109} Mary, too, cannot have failed to notice the difference. A conversation between Patyegarang and another Aboriginal woman, overheard and recorded by Dawes, indicates that by late 1791 she was on familiar terms with several of them. ‘Go go yagu titjibaou yagu Mrs Johnsonima gonyego kagagiolang jacket petticoat’ – ‘I am just going to Mrs Johnson’s

\textsuperscript{107} Johnson to Fricker, 9 April 1790, in Mackaness, \emph{Some Letters}, pt.1 p. 29.
\textsuperscript{108} Tench, \emph{Sydney’s First Four Years}, pp. 190, 200.
\textsuperscript{109} Johnson to Fricker, 18 March 1791, in Mackaness, \emph{Some Letters}, pt.1 p. 38.
It is debatable whether Bennelong and his companions ‘came in’ because they realised the impossibility of maintaining their traditional way of life and surrendered to the colonists in the hope of at least gaining access to reliable stores of food, or whether they did so for political and strategic reasons of their own. Certainly, though, their ‘coming in’ marked a turning point in the relationship between the Sydney colonists and the Port Jackson tribes, though by no means the end of either violent contact between them or Johnson’s personal involvement in the exertion of colonial power against the Aborigines. About eight weeks after Bennelong’s return to the camp, Phillip’s convict gamekeeper, John McIntyre, was ambushed and speared by a group of Aboriginal men while hunting near Botany Bay. His companions managed to carry him the eleven miles back to the settlement, but the wound was pronounced mortal upon his arrival at the hospital. ‘The poor wretch now began to utter the most dreadful exclamations and to accuse himself of the commission of crimes of the deepest dye, accompanied with such expressions of his despair of God’s mercy as are too terrible to repeat,’ wrote Tench. ‘He was of Catholic persuasion,’ noted Phillip, but nevertheless sent for Johnson and to him ‘confessed that he had been a bad man and desired his prayers.’ After several weeks McIntyre died of his wounds.

Governor Phillip made a swift response. Within days of the attack he ordered a large party including both Tench and Dawes to go in search of the perpetrators and ‘to bring in six of those natives who reside near the head of Botany Bay, or if that should be found impracticable to put that number to death.’ Tench had already argued with Phillip to have the stipulated number of deaths reduced from ten; Dawes wrote immediately to the

110 Dawes, ‘Notebooks concerning languages spoken in the Sydney area, c.1790’, FM4/3431 frame 810.
111 Willey, When the Sky Fell Down, pp. 115-122; Clendinnen, Dancing with Strangers, pp. 133-139.
113 Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, p. 206.
115 ‘Extract from the General Orders of 13 December 1790,’ HRNSW vol.1 pt.2 p. 546.
senior officer of the detachment, Captain Campbell, refusing to participate.¹¹⁶ Both
Campbell and Phillip attempted unsuccessfully to persuade the distraught lieutenant to
obey. That evening Dawes probably talked the issue over with Patyegarang and his friend
the clergyman.¹¹⁷ Late that night he returned to Campbell to tell him that ‘Johnson [had]
thought he might obey the order, and that he was ready to go out with the party.’ Dawes
and the other members of the expedition spent three hot summer days searching for the
Aborigines of Botany Bay but they returned, their bodies and provisions exhausted,
without having caught a single man. No doubt relieved that the bags they had carried
with them to ‘contain the heads of the slain’ remained unused and empty, Dawes
informed Phillip that ‘he was sorry he had been persuaded to comply with the order’ and
declared his intention never to obey such an instruction again.¹¹⁸

Johnson’s decisive role in persuading Dawes to submit to the Governor’s orders and
participate in the punitive raid is more easily acknowledged than explained. In
Clendinnen’s view, Dawes was ‘coaxed into submission’ by a rather stern man who
cared little for the area’s indigenous inhabitants.¹¹⁹ But as Johnson’s prior interaction
with Booron indicates, he was not insensitive to Aboriginal people and by his own
account had grown partial to some of them. An interest in ‘the natives’ and even a
positive concern for their welfare was not, to most people of that time, incompatible with
obeying such an order. Watkin Tench’s journal makes his humane regard for Aboriginal
people abundantly clear, but he nevertheless submitted to the command. In light of this it
is certainly possible that Johnson agonised with Dawes over the most appropriate thing
to do, but that a sense of duty to recognised authority eventually led him to the view that

¹¹⁶ Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, pp. 207-9; ‘Comments by Governor Phillip,’ n.d., HRNSW vol.1
pt.2 pp. 545-6.
¹¹⁷ There is circumstantial evidence for the suggested conversation with Patyegarang. In the midst of
several entries dated late 1790 Dawes made an undated note of the phrase ‘Mr Dawes piata wara wura C.
Campbell’ - ‘Mr Dawes spoke just now to C. Campbell.’ Further, the party’s failure to find the tribe in
question suggested to contemporary observers that the Aborigines had been forewarned and it is certainly
possible that Dawes’ friendship and frequent interaction with Patyegarang was one means by which news
of the planned expedition reached them. See Dawes, ‘Notebooks concerning languages spoken in the
Sydney area, c.1790’, FM4/3431 frame 806.
¹¹⁸ Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, pp 207-212; Collins, An Account of the English Colony, pp. 118-9;
Phillip in Hunter, An Historical Journal, pp. 328-9; ‘Comments by Governor Phillip,’ n.d. and Dawes to
Phillip, 6 November 1791, both enclosed with Phillip to Grenville, 7 November 1791, HRNSW vol.1 pt.2
pp. 544-6.
¹¹⁹ Clendinnen, Dancing with Strangers, p. 156
his friend should submit. Just as a characteristically Protestant value for the free exercise of individual conscience may have underpinned Dawes’ repudiation of the order, a similarly typical value for submission to properly instituted authority may have moved Johnson to encourage his obedience. This seems likely in light of the loyalist attitudes the chaplain expressed on other occasions, though the experience of ministering personally to the dying McIntyre may have helped strengthen his resolve.

During late 1790, Richard Johnson was deeply involved in some important exchanges between colonists and Aborigines. As Booron’s self-styled guardian and host he made several trips with her and the other officers across the harbour to Bennelong’s camp and took the apparently decisive step of agreeing to remain a hostage while Bennelong visited Sydney Cove. Just weeks later he counselled Dawes to obey a government order and participate in a mercifully unsuccessful punitive raid. Whatever his motivations and intentions, Johnson’s actions facilitated the exertion of British colonial power over and against the people who traditionally belonged to the land. The expeditioners’ display of arms and especially the Aborigines’ ‘coming in’ ultimately benefitted the British and advanced their efforts to permanently colonise New South Wales. They did so not least by communicating to the surrounding tribes that the colonists would engage with the Aborigines on their own terms and, even more importantly, that they intended to stay. ‘Why are the black men angry?’ Dawes asked Patyegarang towards the end of 1791. ‘Because the white men are settled here,’ she simply replied.120 It was precisely the kind of ‘conciliation of the natives’ that Phillip and his officers had long hoped to achieve: one that served their imperial goals. Tellingly, Johnson thought the new dispensation had been ‘principally brought about’ by Booron, the ‘little girl’ whom he had taught.121

The British colonists were ultimately more successful in their effort to establish a settlement at Sydney than Richard Johnson was with his missionary aims. Booron was neither converted to Christianity nor convinced of the benefits of the British way of life. ‘For some time she made good improvement in her behaviour and [we] began to be very partial to her,’ the chaplain later wrote. But since a number of other Aborigines had

120 Dawes, ‘Notebooks concerning languages spoken in the Sydney area, c.1790’, FM4/3431 frame 812.
121 Johnson to Fricker, 18 March 1791, in Mackaness, Some Letters, pt.1 p. 38.
‘come in’ to the British camp and begun residing in the colonists’ midst, ‘she had not behaved so well or so complying.’ Very probably the reason for this was that she had grown ‘desirous of going away.’ Johnson and several other officers were well aware of this: they had watched as Barangaroo all but convinced her to return to the bush in September 1790, and heard her request to leave and be married. Hunter and others tried with some initial success to persuade her to remain with the Johnsons, but in mid October they gave up and permitted her to depart. When Johnson visited her by the harbour the following day, she ‘appeared pleased with having her liberty’ and refused his request to return to the settlement. Over subsequent months, she was observed residing with the Cammeragal people who inhabited the harbour’s northern shore.

There is little surviving record of Johnson’s response to Booron’s departure, but for a time she returned to visit frequently enough for him to hope that she might change her mind. In March 1791 he described their interaction in feebly optimistic terms: ‘once and again she has been off in the woods for some time, but [I] believe she finds things better in camp and with us, than among her countrymen. Hope that good will come out of this, though appearances are yet very dark.’ In early 1794, he mentioned providing food from his own stores to ‘two native girls,’ one of whom had come to live with him at Phillip’s request ‘five years since.’ Almost certainly a reference to Booron, this suggests she continued to visit them with reasonable frequency until at least that period. In her only extant letter, written in December 1795, Mary Johnson remarked that Booron still ‘pays us a visit now and then.’ But she did so ‘quite naked’ and seemed ‘as great a savage as ever.’ Mary concluded with some sadness that Booron ‘evidently preferred [her] own way of life.’

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123 Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, pp. 183-185; Phillip in Hunter, An Historical Journal, p. 310.
126 Johnson to Fricker, 18 March 1791, in Mackaness, Some Letters, pt.1 p. 38. Several of her visits to the Johnsons during this period are noted in Philip in Hunter, An Historical Journal, pp. 315, 318-319, 324, 339.
128 Mary Johnson to Henry Fricker, 21 December 1795, MLMSS 6722, Mitchell Library, Sydney.
As Booron’s name does not appear again in the colonists’ extant writings, it may be surmised that she indeed lived out the remainder of her life in the bush as she chose. Nothing is known of her particular circumstances after 1795. In more general terms, the surviving Aborigines of the area were subsequently observed to combine and form “the Botany Bay tribe.” By 1845, as a Government enquiry found, there were about fifty Aborigines living in the vicinity of the colonists’ main settlement. Most of these had moved in from other areas of New South Wales that were by then under pressure from pastoralists. Of the Botany Bay tribe itself, only four people remained alive: a Gadigal man in his forties, Mahroot, who was examined by the Committee, and three women.129 As Booron would have been in her sixties by that time, it is highly unlikely that she was among them.

Richard Johnson and his family sailed for England in October 1800, having served nearly thirteen years in the colony and by then in very poor health. In the long and often difficult period between Booron’s departure from his house and his own departure from New South Wales, he most probably did not repeat with other Aborigines the same close kind of interaction he had had with her. He and Mary apparently took at least one other Aboriginal girl into their home, but there is no evidence of any long-standing relationship.130 It was particularly during Sydney’s earliest years that the chaplain engaged with Aboriginal people in both a sustained and personal way. His interaction with Booron was motivated by his missionary desire to see people of every nation find salvation in Jesus Christ. He taught her to read and speak English and thus access the Word of God. He also instructed her in Christian behaviours and beliefs in the hope that she would understand something of his God and, by conversion, improve in civilisation and find rest for her soul. His behaviour towards her expressed values and habits characteristic of English evangelical Protestantism.

Johnson’s interaction with Booron is remarkable not only for the religious values it expressed but for the political consequences it entailed. His exertions were motivated by

130 Richard Johnson, 16 April 1794, Johnson papers, p. 28.
his missionary vision but their effects were shaped by the political exigencies of very early colonial New South Wales. The chaplain took Booron into his house around the time that Phillip’s frustration with the initial effort to establish communication with the Sydney Aborigines reached its height. Over subsequent months he taught her the language that rendered her useful as a mediator and translator in the officers’ interactions with the surrounding tribes. And as a result of his relatively familiar relationship with Booron, he also became personally involved in the officers’ efforts to ‘conciliate the natives’ to the British presence on their land. Johnson’s various encounters with Aboriginal people, especially towards the end of the colony’s third year, were crucial to the course of the colonists’ relationship with the Port Jackson tribes. These direct and indirect consequences of his missionary activities suggest that the impact of evangelical Protestantism on the initial foundation of the colony was both more significant and more complex than historians have previously assumed. Johnson did not understand his missionary endeavours in overtly colonialist terms, but their results indicate that he became an agent of British colonialism in effect.
CHAPTER FOUR

An Agricultural Imagination

Samuel Marsden’s cultivation of soils and souls

The William sailed into Sydney with Samuel Marsden and his young family on board at mid afternoon on 10 March 1794, just hours after the last of the dry rations had been issued from the government store. Fortunately there were corn crops in the field that would be ripe for harvest soon. Together with the ship’s provisions, they would protect the colonists from suffering a food shortage as serious as in years before. The newly arrived chaplain surveyed the scene and, with typical confidence, pronounced things ‘better upon the whole than I expected to find them.’ The colonists still struggled to feed themselves but ‘the land is in many places very good,’ Marsden told his mentor and supporter William Wilberforce. The main settlements at Sydney and Parramatta were developing from camps into towns and new agricultural establishments were being formed on the alluvial plains of the Hawkesbury river. The church and its clergy were no better provided for than when Johnson had arrived, but ‘as for cultivation, buildings and other improvements of this nature,’ the six year old settlement happily exceeded his expectations.

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2 Grose to Dundas, 29 April 1794, Historical Records of Australia [hereafter HRA], series 1 vol. 1 p. 468; Collins, An Account of the English Colony, vol. 1 pp. 297, 299.
6 Marsden to William Wilberforce, 4 May 1794, in Johnson papers, MAV/FM3/476, Mitchell Library.
It was soon obvious to Marsden, though, that the colonists had not made much progress in moral or religious terms. Had the Apostle Paul been sent to preach the gospel in this colony, he thundered from the pulpit one Sunday, he would have found it necessary to warn its inhabitants as he did the heathen in Corinth; against fornication, idolatry, deception, adultery, stealing, extortion and covetousness. Marsden was appalled himself by the colonists’ utter immorality and rebelliousness before God. The convicts had hearts ‘full of enmity to Christ and his Gospel,’ he despaired within months of disembarking, and ‘the higher ranks’ were completely ‘lost to God and Religion’ too. Believers in Britain could form ‘little more idea of our situation in this country than they can of the invisible regions,’ he commented in 1800, there was so much ‘ungodliness and wrong.’ It was an impression that reflected his own evangelical standards of belief and morality, and that only became more deeply entrenched with time. ‘Religion is a very tender plant,’ he sighed tiredly in 1824, his thirtieth year as chaplain to the colony. ‘A plant removed from a rich cultivated soil into a barren uncultivated spot soon droops and pines away.’

Marsden’s metaphor of a plant struggling to grow in bad soil signals the importance of agricultural images of planting and reaping, sowing and harvesting, to his clerical imagination. By his time, the association of religious endeavour with the sowing of seeds in fact had a very long history in Christian thought. According to the Gospels, Jesus had told his disciples that ‘the harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.’ In the ‘Parable of the Sower,’ he had directly compared the spreading of the Word with the scattering of seeds. And according to Mark’s Gospel, he also related the Kingdom of God to a small seed that, despite its inauspicious beginnings, eventually grew into a very

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7 Samuel Marsden, sermon on 1 Corinthians 6:11 [n.d., incomplete], item 88 in ‘Samuel Marsden, sermon papers and notes, ca. 1812 - 1833’, Moore Theological College Library, Sydney.
8 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 24 August 1794, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 7. See also Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 26 October 1795, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 12.
9 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 22 February 1800, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, pp. 21-22
large tree. Similarly the Apostle Paul, in his New Testament epistles, described his evangelistic work among the Corinthians in terms of planting seeds which his co-worker watered and to which God then gave the growth. Such ideas also found ready reinforcement within the Anglican tradition with which the early colonial chaplains and their English mentors identified. The Lenten and marriage services in the *Book of Common Prayer* associated the spread of the Gospel with the sowing of seeds. And the Anglican church as an institution was associated historically with rural village life. It derived much of its wealth from the ownership of land and generally provided its clergy a living by ensuring that glebes were made productive.

From within this textual and cultural tradition, Anglican clergy applied images of cultivation to their work in the early colonies. In August 1790, for example, Johnson wrote home about both the progress of his garden and his concern for that ‘other ground ... of greater consequence’ he tried ‘to dig and cultivate.’ On the other side of the continent, Reverend Wollaston similarly admitted that he had successfully reaped his first crop of wheat but wished he could ‘gather in as easily my *Spiritual* Harvest.’ Another time he reflected that although his vines produced ‘very choice’ grapes, it appeared to him that ‘God’s vineyard’ was ‘far, very far,’ from ‘filling the land.’ ‘Unlike the Natural Plant,’ he wrote, ‘its growth is very slow and its fruit immature and scanty.’ These clerics employed agricultural imagery to express disappointment with the moral and religious state of their surrounds and the difficulty of ministering in it. At times, though, clergy used such language more positively. William Grant Broughton rejoiced to report the recent growth of a church at Longford in Van Diemen’s Land: ‘The grain of mustard seed has literally grown into a spreading tree. The congregation has multiplied a hundred fold.’ In the ‘highly improved’ district of Norfolk Plains, he added, ‘the tillage of the soil is not carried on with greater energy or success than the spiritual cultivation is

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13 Mark 4:30-34.
14 1 Corinthians 3: 6-7.
conducted by its zealous and able pastor.’\textsuperscript{18} At other times in his career, Broughton sermonised on the importance of ‘scatter[ing] plentifully the seeds of religion’ and described the colonial clergy as people who ‘put their hands to the plough in this rugged field of labour.’\textsuperscript{19}

Alan Atkinson has suggested that the farmyard shaped the ways in which many British colonists in Australia imagined themselves, and particularly the domestic relationships between women and men.\textsuperscript{20} The Anglican clergy’s language suggests that the field, even more than the farmyard, shaped the ways in which they imagined their work in the early colonies. Importantly, as Marsden’s own reference to ‘a plant removed from a rich cultivated soil’ indicates, it was a language fundamentally concerned with the transmission of Protestantism from Britain as mediated by the clergy. It was a language that, when considered alongside their actual exertions, provides an insight into the clergy’s transplantation of religious ideas and practices from the old world into their new context in Australia. This chapter takes up the question of cultural transmission and adaptation as it examines Marsden’s chaplaincy, and particularly the significance of agriculture to his understanding and experience of labouring for the Lord.

Samuel Marsden’s colonial ministry spanned more than four decades from 1794 to his death in 1838. During that long period, agriculture was one of the main ways in which numerous colonists engaged with their environment. Farming developed from a matter of immediate necessity for ensuring the survival of the settlement into an industry that contributed to the increasing prosperity of the colony. For much of that long period, too, sowing and reaping were activities at the heart of Marsden’s labours for the Lord. He devoted himself to the cultivation of his surrounds in physical as well as a spiritual terms. In doing so, he attracted considerable criticism from his contemporaries and indeed from


\textsuperscript{19} William Grant Broughton, Religion, Essential to the Security and Happiness of Nations: A sermon preached in the Parish of St Philip at Sydney NSW, on Sunday January 26, 1834, being the 46\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the foundation of the colony, Sydney, 1834, p. 9; William Grant Broughton to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 10 January 1842, ‘Bishop Broughton’s letters 1834-49,’ FM4 560, Mitchell Library.

\textsuperscript{20} Atkinson, The Europeans in Australia, vol.1 chapter seven.
historians and others who have judged him since. But his personal letters to his English evangelical friends suggest that he recognised a relationship between the cultivation of the physical and spiritual ground that went beyond mere metaphor. It had its roots in the Old Testament idea that the blessing of material prosperity was a direct consequence of godly obedience. In the particular circumstances of the colony, Marsden developed an agricultural understanding of clerical work that elevated his actual agricultural labours to a position of profound religious significance. This understanding ensured that his experiences of clerical labour were closely related to his impressions and experiences of the land. They also meant that he forged a bodily and imaginative association with his surrounds that reflected the values of evangelical Protestantism. And importantly, the particular way in which he imagined sowing and reaping meant that agricultural toil acquired redemptive meaning not only for the individual who performed it but for the colony more broadly.

LABOURING FOR THE LORD

The twenty eight year old Samuel Marsden embarked for New South Wales with his new wife Elizabeth in mid 1793, convinced that God had given him the task of carrying ‘the Gospel of His Son to distant lands.’ In order to fulfil this divine appointment, he had left behind a familiar social and religious world in which diligent labour had great dignity and spiritual worth. As his biographer A. T. Yarwood has shown, he had grown up in the midst of the farming and weaving classes of Yorkshire’s West Riding among men employed in physically demanding trades. His father Thomas had been a butcher and farm labourer and his uncle John a blacksmith who employed him for a time as an assistant at the forge. Work as a smithy had made the teenage Marsden strong in body while his early religious influences made him strong in soul. He was very probably exposed to Methodism in his youth, with its hymn singing, its emphasis on individual

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23 Yarwood, Samuel Marsden, chapter 1.
salvation and its pronounced value for industriousness. It is also highly likely that he heard several of the itinerant evangelical preachers who frequented Yorkshire in the late eighteenth century, including John Wesley himself, who urged his hearers at Rawdon to ‘Repent ye and believe the Gospel’ during the period of Marsden’s residence with the curate there. By the time missionary-minded Yorkshire Anglicans proposed to sponsor Marsden’s education for the ministry and secure his appointment to the colony, he had developed a strong Protestant work ethic and become acutely conscious of the dignity of manual toil.

Upon his arrival in Sydney early in the autumn of 1794, Marsden’s labours for the Lord were defined in large part by his position as a chaplain to the settlement. Later colonists would accuse him of neglecting his religious responsibilities, but David Collins recounted how he ‘entered on the duties of his function’ his very first Sunday on shore, preaching to the military in the morning and to the convicts at Johnson’s church in the afternoon. Over subsequent months and years he regularly performed divine service at Parramatta where he settled and, for the considerable period between Johnson’s departure and the arrival of a second Anglican clergyman, in Sydney as well. He wrote and delivered numerous sermons, administered the sacraments of baptism and communion, officiated at weddings, conducted bible classes, catechised the young, visited the sick and buried the dead. In the course of his long career, he also made arrangements for the construction of St John’s Parramatta, contributed to an orphan school and the female factory and involved himself in many of the benevolent organisations that began in the early decades of the new century. To a far greater extent than Johnson, Marsden was also inspired by a missionary vision of the nations being taken captive for Christ and directed his energies to that end. As the Protestant missionary movement developed in

24 Yarwood, Samuel Marsden, chapter 1, citing Mark 1:15.
25 Yarwood, Samuel Marsden, chapter 1; Elder, The Letters and Journals of Samuel Marsden, pp. 17-19.
27 Marsden left several accounts of his clerical and missionary endeavours, including Marsden to Bigge, 28 December 1819 and 20 January 1831, Bonwick Transcripts (Bigge Appendix) [hereafter BT], Box 20 pp. 3410-3417, 6028-6031, Mitchell Library, Sydney.
England and became more formally organised, he agreed to act as the local agent for both the London Missionary Society and the Church Missionary Society. His own considerable missionary activity revolved around the settlement among the Maori which he established at the Bay of Islands in 1814. He found great meaning and satisfaction in his interactions with the New Zealanders and rejoiced in the apparent progress of civilisation and Christianity among them.\(^{29}\)

Among the colonists of New South Wales, Marsden’s religious endeavours seemed to produce far less encouraging results. Like Johnson, he understood religion in evangelical terms and looked only for evidence of repentance and obedience to the Protestant God. Within just eighteen months he was so discouraged by the apparently irreligious state of his fellow colonists that he wondered how ‘your Newtons and Fosters in London, men of sound piety and real godliness,’ would cope in such a place. What effect would preaching for several months in the knowledge that ‘not two’ of their hearers ever showed a concern for their eternal souls have ‘upon their great minds?’ He knew from experience that it had produced ‘a very unpleasant effect’ upon his.\(^{30}\) More than once he wrote despairingly to his friends the Stokes that ‘to do my duty here as a Minister is extremely hard.’\(^{31}\) It seemed all he could do to cling to the ideal of diligent labour and persist with his clerical work in the hope that God would ‘ere long visit New South Wales with his heavenly grace.’ In 1796 he counted it enough ‘if I am found faithful when my work comes to be done.’\(^{32}\) By the end of his seventh year, he had become so downhearted, so tired of his situation among ‘the bad parts’ of humankind, that he found ‘little pleasure’ in his religious duties during the week.\(^{33}\) He was still ‘refreshed sometimes on the Sabbath,’ when he found his soul ‘sweetly drawn after God,’ but feared that his spirit would only become more ‘dry and barren’ over time.\(^{34}\) He employed earthy images to describe the parched state of his own soul and agricultural ones to make sense of his deep

\(^{29}\) Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 16 December 1817, in Mackaness, *Some Private Correspondence*, p. 68.

\(^{30}\) Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 26 October 1795, in Mackaness, *Some Private Correspondence*, p. 12.

\(^{31}\) Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 26 October 1795 and 13 March 1804, in Mackaness, *Some Private Correspondence*, pp. 12, 34.

\(^{32}\) Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 3 December 1796 and 22 February 1800, in Mackaness, *Some Private Correspondence*, pp. 17, 22-23.

\(^{33}\) Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 22 August 1801, in Mackaness, *Some Private Correspondence*, pp. 27-28.

\(^{34}\) Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 22 February 1800 and 22 August 1801, in Mackaness, *Some Private Correspondence*, pp. 22, 27-28.
disappointment with the colony. ‘This is a very ungracious soil for the growth of piety,’ he wrote despondently.35

The colonists’ apparent immorality and unresponsiveness to the gospel were a source of distress to Johnson too. When communicated to evangelicals in England, his despair provoked a discussion of colonial ministry in terms of sowing and reaping. ‘I have not been disheartened by your apparent want of success,’ as the well known preacher John Newton wrote to the dispirited chaplain in early 1791.

‘I have been told that skilful gardeners will undertake to sow and raise a sallad for dinner in the short time while the meat is roasting. But no gardener can raise oaks with such expedition. You are sent to New Holland, not to sow sallad seeds, but to plant acorns; and your labour will not be lost, though the first appearances may be small and the progress very slow. You are, I trust, planting for the next Century. I have a good hope that your oaks will one day spring up and flourish, and produce other acorns, which, in due time, will take root and spread among the other islands and nations in the Southern Ocean.’36

With such rich imagery, Newton cast the colony as a field to be sown with the seeds of the Gospel and affirmed Puritan ideas of the virtue of faithful labour for the Lord.37 His striking references to ‘sallads,’ roast dinners and oaks may indicate nothing more than the Englishness of the correspondents’ shared cultural references, but it is certainly plausible that they also expressed a very deep, even unconscious association of the extension of Anglicanism with the spread of agriculture and a settled rural English way of life. His specific intention, though, was to encourage the first chaplain to have patience and persevere with his clerical work. He used agricultural metaphors to affirm the importance of diligent labour for the Lord. These images and ideas of the colonial clergyman’s task were circulating among evangelicals associated with New South Wales around the time Marsden arrived.

35 Samuel Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 22 August 1801, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 28.
The early colony’s material circumstances also raised the subject of sowing and reaping in relation to the first chaplains’ labours for the Lord. Whereas the difficulties of ministering to its population had raised it in a metaphoric sense, the need to ensure a supply of food raised the possibility that literal cultivation also fell within the scope of their clerical responsibilities. When Johnson arrived, clearing the ground and planting their imported seeds were essential activities if the colonists were to raise sufficient and familiar foods for their tables and establish what they considered a civilised way of life. Johnson was concerned that agricultural labour in his garden diverted his effort and attention from his other ‘much more important’ tasks, remarking with frustration that ‘I did not come here as an overseer or a farmer’ in 1792. But he nevertheless appreciated that, in the colony’s particular circumstances, his personal involvement was necessary for both the progress of settlement in general and the satisfaction of his family’s material needs. He persisted with cultivating his plot even when other officers gave up and proved so successful that, even when the colony’s food supplies were alarmingly low, he and Mary had ‘plenty of vegetables, Potatoes &c’ and were consequently ‘as well off as most.’

By the time Marsden disembarked in 1794, the colonists had begun to make modest progress in agriculture in part because of the policies of Major Francis Grose. As acting governor after Phillip’s departure, Grose sought to stimulate agriculture by encouraging private enterprise. Convinced of the officers’ particular capacity for relieving the colony from famine, he overturned Phillip’s policy of excluding civil and military officers from the acquisition of freehold land and instead made grants and assigned convict labourers to servants of the Crown. The colonial chaplains, as civil officers, were among those who thus became eligible for land. This shift in official policy as well as the colony’s continued need to raise more food from the ground meant it was by no means obvious that the clergy should try to limit themselves to cultivating their surrounds in a strictly spiritual sense. It raised the possibility of large scale sowing and reaping in a very literal

38 Unaddressed letter from Richard Johnson, 23 March 1792, extracted in Mackaness, Some Letters, vol. 1 p. 46.
39 Johnson to Fricker, 9 April 1790, in Mackaness, Some Letters, vol.1 p. 28.
40 Fletcher, Landed Enterprise and Penal Society, p. 64; Grose to Dundas, 16 February 1793, HRA series 1 vol. 1 pp. 415-7; Grose to Dundas, 29 April 1794, HRA series 1 vol. 1. pp. 468-70.
It provoked the question of what exactly it meant for the colonial chaplains to labour for the Lord. To what extent was farming an activity in which they could or should engage? How appropriate was it for colonial clergymen to invest themselves in the cultivation of the soil as well as souls?

Johnson and Marsden both expressed uncertainty about the wisdom of clerical farming. It was an unfamiliar issue which arose in the specific circumstances of the colony and to which they had to adapt their existing English ideas. From the replies Johnson received, it is clear that his evangelical friends at home appreciated the deep disquiet he felt. ‘I do not wonder, nor can I blame you, that you often felt cares and anxieties respecting your temporal concerns,’ Newton sympathised in March 1794. 41 ‘If we are in the path of duty, and in the use of proper means, such cares are indeed needless because the Lord careth for us.’ Clerical farming was not necessary in England. But he was well able to appreciate that Johnson was not ‘in the use of proper means’ in the infant colony. Newton took careful note of colonial news in the British press and had by that time received several of the chaplain’s letters and read his personal journal too. 42 In light of the settlement’s material situation, he judged that it was appropriate, even necessary, for Johnson to farm. ‘When you speak of time spent in your necessary employment as so much lost time because it kept you from your books and studies, I think you distressed yourself without just cause,’ he remarked reassuringly. 43

Newton’s conclusion that farming was an activity in which a colonial minister might productively engage was informed by values characteristic of British evangelicalism. He encouraged Johnson to continue farming because worldly work, when performed in the right spirit, was an acceptable act of worship and brought glory to God. In support of this


42 Newton mentions reading published extracts from Phillip’s despatches in Newton to Johnson, 9 May 1791, HRNSW vol.2 p. 447. For his comments on Johnson’s journal see Newton to Johnson, 29 March 1794, HRNSW vol.2 p. 195.


130
puritan notion, Newton cited the biblical example of Paul: ‘I believe the Apostle was employed no less lawfully and properly when gathering sticks for the fire – Acts 28:3 – than when preaching the Gospel.’\textsuperscript{44} It followed that Johnson could do the Lord’s work by labouring with his hands:

‘You understand the Gospel too well to confine religion to devotional exercises. The secret of the Lord teaches us, whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, to do it all to His glory. I judge that when you dig in your garden, or plant potatoes or cabbages, you serve the Lord as truly as when you are upon your knees, or in the pulpit, provided you do these things in a right spirit, in dependence upon Him and in submission to His will.’\textsuperscript{45}

According to Newton, godly labour was properly defined in terms of the attitude of the person who performed it rather than its nature or results. The specific character of one’s employment was not particularly important: if done in a spirit of worship, faith and obedience, then faithful labour of any kind would prove acceptable to the Lord. Such a formulation gave religious significance to the task of cultivating the ground and justified Johnson’s agricultural labour as both a proper part of his total mission and an opportunity to offer worship to God.

Evangelical values concerning the family also influenced Newton’s conclusion that agricultural labour constituted an appropriate response to the circumstances. He told Johnson that physical labour in the field ‘to procure necessary sustenance for your family’ was as much a ‘part of your calling’ as preaching, reading and studying God’s Word.\textsuperscript{46} It was an idea Marsden restated dramatically in later years: he was ‘obliged to plant and sow’ or his family would ‘starve.’\textsuperscript{47} Their particular conception of the domestic responsibilities of husbands and fathers meant that, in whatever circumstances the chaplains were placed, meeting the material needs of their household was considered

\textsuperscript{44} Newton also alludes here to Paul’s canonical text, 1 Corinthians 10:31 – ‘Whether therefore ye eat or drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God’ (\textit{King James Version}).

\textsuperscript{45} Newton to Johnson, 29 March 1794, \textit{HRNSW} vol.2 pp. 195-6.

\textsuperscript{46} Newton to Johnson, 29 March 1794, \textit{HRNSW} vol.2 pp. 195-6.

\textsuperscript{47} Samuel Marsden, \textit{An Answer to Certain Calumnies in the late Governor Macquarie’s Pamphlet and the third edition of Mr Wentworth’s Account of Australasia}, J. Hatchard & Son, London, 1826, p. 9; Samuel Marsden to J. T. Bigge, 20 January 1831, BT Box 26 p. 6029, Mitchell Library.
central to their basic task. As Alan Atkinson observed, both Johnson and Marsden married just prior to embarking for the colony and had young children during the early period of their colonial ministries. He suggested that their identities as new fathers helped shape their sense of public responsibility and informed their performance of a paternalistic public role.\textsuperscript{48} Importantly, though, the chaplains’ understanding of themselves as husbands and fathers also underlined their sense of the legitimacy, even the necessity, of their agricultural exertions in early New South Wales. Along with the pragmatic spirit and puritan inheritance that characterised English evangelicalism at that time, it led to the affirmation of clerical agriculture in the early colony.

Newton’s published works were known to Marsden but his 1794 letter to Johnson was probably still at sea when the new chaplain first faced the decision of whether or not to accept land to farm.\textsuperscript{49} The younger chaplain had imbibed a strong work ethic in his youth and was to become notorious for the extent of his landholdings in later life, but he initially shared Johnson’s doubts about the wisdom of involving himself in agriculture. When Grose offered him a grant of 100 acres at Field of Mars he wrote to Miles Atkinson, the Yorkshire evangelical with whom he had lived for a time while receiving his education, asking for advice. Should he accept the land and cultivate the ground, he wondered, when God had excluded the Levite priests of Israel from possessing any land?\textsuperscript{50} Marsden suspected that God’s instructions to the Levites did not apply to him, because if he did not accept ‘a grant of ground’, nor take ‘active steps to raise grain and stock for the support of myself and my family,’ the convicts ‘and probably Government also’ would say that ‘the clergyman is an idle, lazy fellow and will do nothing towards maintaining himself.’\textsuperscript{51} The God Marsden believed in certainly would not want that. And so, promising himself he would abandon such labours if his English mentors returned a

\textsuperscript{48} Atkinson, \textit{The Europeans in Australia}, vol.1 p. 142.
\textsuperscript{49} Marsden read some of Newton’s works, along with those of other leading evangelicals such as Charles Simeon and John Venn, during his voyage to Australia. See Yarwood, \textit{Samuel Marsden}, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{50} This particular letter of Marsden apparently has been lost, but some of its contents can be easily inferred from Atkinson’s reply. See Miles Atkinson to Samuel Marsden, 30 April 1795, Hassall Family Correspondence vol.3 pp. 17-18, A1677-3, Mitchell Library, Sydney. From the discussion of the Levites and land, it appears both Marsden and Atkinson had Joshua 14: 1-4 in mind.
\textsuperscript{51} Marsden to the Elland Society, 16 September 1796, cited in Elder, \textit{The Letters and Journals of Samuel Marsden}, p. 30.
disapproving reply, he proceeded to accept the grant, which he named Kingston Farm, and to clear and cultivate it.\textsuperscript{52}

Similarly to Newton, Atkinson judged that agricultural endeavour was a proper part of the colonial chaplains’ labour for the Lord. ‘With respect to your acceptance and cultivation of ground, in your present situation it is your duty,’ Atkinson replied. Every member of the evangelical Elland Society agreed that since ‘the colony stands in need of everyone’s help in procuring things necessary for your subsistence, everyone should lend a helping hand towards the common support.’ He explained, too, why ‘the case of the Levite has nothing to do with yours’: their landlessness ‘was of God’s especial appointment & did not interfere with the good of the people. [The Israelites’] lands were all rich and well cultivated … and consequently the Levites’ help was not wanted.’ He speculated that ‘had God placed the Israelites in a different situation he would probably have ordered the Levites’ work to have been different’ too. Since the colony seemed to him deficient in ‘rich and well cultivated’ land and insufficiently prosperous to properly support the clergy or the church, he advised Marsden to accept government grants of land and thus allow the particular circumstances in which he lived and ministered to define the scope of his labour for the Lord.\textsuperscript{53}

The advice English leaders offered on the subject of clerical farming reveals the flexible, pragmatic character of the evangelical tradition with which the chaplains and their English mentors identified. Even in England, evangelicals readily adapted their ideas about the clergy’s literal cultivation of their surrounds in response to the reported circumstances of the colony. They unhesitatingly encouraged the chaplains to do the same, with the effect of assuaging the latter’s doubts about cultivating the soil as well as souls in the colony. In subsequent years, both men expanded the scale of their agricultural activities. By 1800, when he returned to England, Johnson had developed his

\textsuperscript{52} Yarwood, \textit{Samuel Marsden}, pp. 41-2; Marsden to the Elland Society, 16 September 1796, in Elder, \textit{The Letters and Journals of Samuel Marsden}, p. 30; Marsden, \textit{An Answer to Certain Calumnies}, pp. 8-12.

\textsuperscript{53} Atkinson to Marsden, 30 April 1795, Hassall Family Correspondence, vol.3 pp. 17-18, A1677-3, Mitchell Library.
estate by grant and purchase to a total of 480 acres. It was a considerable achievement, though the proceeds from its sale proved insufficient to protect him from want in later life. Over the same period, Marsden achieved greater material success. The younger chaplain greeted Atkinson’s approval with evident pleasure and set about developing his holdings further still. By 1802 he had expanded his estate, largely by purchase, to several locations totalling more than 600 acres. A Frenchman visiting the colony that year remarked approvingly on his progress: ‘these pastures, these fields, these harvests, these orchards, these flocks are the work of eight years.’ ‘What pains, what exertions must have been taken,’ Peron exclaimed admiringly. The success of his initial endeavours similarly moved Governor King to pronounce Marsden ‘the best practical farmer in the colony.’

Marsden did not agonise over spending time in his garden when it might otherwise have been expended in the cultivation of souls, as Johnson had in earlier years. He shared his mentor’s pragmatic perspective and readily accepted the idea that a minister’s work must be wide-ranging given the material circumstances of the colony. ‘I have much to occupy my time and a great variety of duties to perform,’ he explained as early as December 1796. ‘I am a Gardener, a Farmer, a Magistrate & Minister, so that when one duty does not call me another always does.’ ‘Yesterday I was in the field assisting in getting my wheat. To-day I have been sitting in the civil court hearing the complaints of the People. To-morrow if well must ascend the pulpit and preach.’ He realised that, to his English friends, such diverse and consuming labours ‘may appear strange’ for a man of the cloth. But ‘in this infant colony there is plenty of manual labour for every body,’ he explained,

54 Johnson received one hundred acres near Petersham in 1792, which he called Canterbury Vale. He also purchased three forty acre blocks at Kissing Point in 1795 and accepted a grant of 260 acres at Petersham Hill in 1799. See Macintosh, Richard Johnson, p. 85 and p. 139 n446; in Mackaness, Some Letters vol.1 p. 59 n4.
55 On Johnson’s later financial difficulties, see Johnson to Under Secretary Chapman, 2 December 1808, in Mackaness, Some Letters vol.2 pp. 47-50.
57 Yarwood, Samuel Marsden, pp. 78, 88. In addition to 100 acres at the Field of Mars and just over 330 acres at South Creek, Marsden also owned land at Windsor, Dundas and at Parramatta itself.
58 M.F. Peron cited in Yarwood, Samuel Marsden, p. 88.
and ‘I conceive it a duty for all to take an active part.’ As the bible itself taught, ‘he who will not work must not eat.’ His own contribution as ‘a gardener and a farmer’ was entirely appropriate to his circumstances and indeed part of his duty to his fellow colonists, Marsden thought. His conduct was perfectly compatible with his stated desire ‘to be found faithful to act like a Christian Minister.’ Perhaps as proof of his godly intentions, he added immediately that ‘I do not eat the bread of idleness.’

Differences of personality and temperament also help explain why Marsden invested himself more heavily and successfully into agriculture than Johnson, despite the general similarities in their material circumstances during the 1790s. In the first place, he was younger and stronger than his senior colleague and wrote of his endeavours in a manner that revealed his relish for bodily toil. ‘I labour hard,’ he told Mrs Stokes in 1803, ‘but the toils of the day makes rest sweet at night so that the morning finds me ready for my task.’ ‘I labour hard,’ he repeated the following year, ‘enjoy my health and family [and] generally go weary to bed.’ Marsden’s early letters also reveal his active interest in the development of agriculture in the colony. ‘Cultivation goes on very rapidly,’ he reported in September 1795, and ‘we have the prospect of a very large crop of wheat which will be ready for reaping’ soon. ‘We have the greatest abundance of wheat,’ he wrote to the Stokes’ the following year, and ‘we could also make plenty of wine if we had persons who understood the operation properly. Would be very thankful if you could by any means send me out a few hop-cuttings ... hops would be a general good to this colony.’ Marsden busily evaluated the progress and potential of the British settlement and made arrangements to experiment with various agricultural productions himself. He had a self-confessed fondness for ‘the garden, the field and the fleece’ and for many years applied himself with rigour and diligence to each.

60 2 Thessalonians 3:10, cited in Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 3 December 1796, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, pp. 16-7.
61 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 3 December 1796, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, pp. 16-7.
62 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 27 April 1803, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 31.
63 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, n.d. but postmarked August 10, 1804, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, pp. 34-5.
64 Marsden to Mr Stokes, 16 September 1795, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 11.
65 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 3 December 1796, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 17.
66 Marsden to Mr Stokes, 26 November 1811 in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 45.
Marsden continued to improve and expand his estate until the very last years of his life, but it is likely that he was most directly involved in farming during his first seven or eight years of his chaplaincy. By his own later account, he was compelled to involve himself in farming during those early years by the smallness of his salary and the ‘the most extravagant prices’ at which animal feed and other agricultural goods were then sold in the colony. Only by farming himself could he provide for his young family and maintain the horse he required to conduct his ministry, he explained. After Johnson’s departure from the colony in late 1800, he acquired sole clerical responsibility for the whole colony and consequently had ‘not much time to farm.’ Even after the ranks of the clergy began to expand from 1809, he found that his duties as a magistrate kept him away from his fields and the expansion of the population meant ‘the clergyman’s duty’ was still in itself more than one man could do.67 Significantly, Marsden gave this account of his endeavours to Commissioner Bigge in 1821, when he had reason to minimise his personal involvement in agriculture. He was defending himself against the charge of attending to his private affairs when his public duty had a claim upon his time.68 But even allowing for the possibility that Marsden considerably downplayed his agricultural activities, it is likely that he was busier with religious matters and assumed a more managerial role after about 1800. In early 1804 he told the Stokes privately that his clerical duty was ‘very hard’ because ‘the colony is become very extensive now, and a great number of people in it, with only myself as a minister.’69 And as remuneration for the extra clerical work he performed in Johnson’s absence, he was assigned ten further convicts who presumably performed the physical work on his estates.70

Even though Marsden was not directly involved in the improvement of his estates for the entirety of his career, his early farming helped him to feel at home in the colony and to forge a close relationship with his colonial environment. His initially pragmatic evangelical response to the material situation of the settlement prompted him to make a very physical response to his surrounds. When he reflected back on his initial agricultural endeavours from the vantage point of 1821, he gave an intimately physical account: ‘If I wanted a bushel of wheat I must grow it.’ ‘If I wanted a cabbage or a potatoe I must plant

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67 Marsden to Bigge, 20 January 1821, BT Box 26 pp. 6029-31, Mitchell Library.
68 Marsden to Bigge, 20 January 1821, BT Box 26 p. 6020, Mitchell Library.
69 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 13 March 1804, in Mackaness, *Some Private Correspondence*, p. 34.
70 King to Portland, 10 March 1801, *HRA* series 1 vol.3 p. 53.
them with my own hands.’ As he cultivated his estate he established a bodily connection with the soil into which he planted his seeds and from which he harvested his food. He found great pleasure in the performance of such physical work and wrote enthusiastically about both ‘labouring hard’ and the progress of agriculture. Such passages present a stark contrast with his depressed accounts of the colony’s religious state. ‘My soul is pained within me I cannot but mourn for the abominations that are committed in this land,’ as he put it to the Stokes in early 1804. ‘[But] with respect to temporal things we have an abundance in the colony. Our present crops are very promising... I have no complaint to prefer on temporal accounts.’ His positive experiences of farming enabled a sense of security and satisfaction that counterbalanced his sense of alienation from his spiritual harvest field.

Marsden’s experience of labour in the field tied him to the land in a manner as contingent upon his gender as his position as chaplain or his Protestant faith, as the contrast between his experience of faithful labour and those of his wife indicates. Like the chaplain, Eliza Marsden was distressed by the colony’s low moral and religious tone. The people’s manners were ‘corrupt’ and she felt ‘almost totally cut off from all connection with the world, especially the virtuous part of it,’ as she told her friend Mrs Stokes during the 1790s. Religion was ‘seldom the subject’ of conversation, she observed, ‘excepting to ridicule its doctrines or professions.’ Even as respectable society gradually increased, she could not discern a corresponding improvement in ‘divine things.’ ‘We still continue in the same depraved state as ever,’ she wrote in late 1802. ‘You who live in the midst of Gospel blaze know not what it is to live among a people entirely ignorant of God and his ways.’ Even though, as Alan Atkinson emphasised, Eliza’s island of exile had ‘a familiar solidity’ while Old England soon seemed ‘to have no existence but in my own

71 Marsden to Bigge, 31 January 1821, in BT Box 26 p. 6071, Mitchell Library. Note also Marsden, An Answer to Certain Calumnies, p. 9.
72 Samuel Marsden to Mrs Stokes, n.d. but postmarked 10 August 1804, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 35.
73 Eliza Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 13 December 1794, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 8.
74 Eliza Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 13 November 1802, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 29.
75 Eliza Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 15 January 1805, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 37.
imagination,’ ‘like a pleasing dream,’ she did not become attached to it easily or readily abandon her desire for the society of the godly back home.\textsuperscript{76}

Though discouraged by how difficult it was to encourage moral behaviour and cultivate souls, Samuel found pleasure in the cultivation of the soil. Eliza, however, did not have like opportunity to find peace and enjoyment in the field. She was a skilled horsewoman and the activity allowed her an escape from Parramatta. It may have facilitated a physical connection with her new surrounds and provided her some relief from her sense of spiritual exile too. Riding, as a form of bodily exertion, was probably her nearest equivalent to her husband’s labours on their farm. It is unlikely, though, that it assuaged her sense of alienation in the way agricultural exertion did for him. After all, riding was a more recreational than productive pursuit and did not have a widely recognised moral purpose or virtue that would give it special meaning. And as a free and pious woman in a colony dominated by ungodly men, she often felt isolated in a way that Samuel did not. She wrote of regretting Mary Johnson’s loss ‘so much that I have not visited Sydney but once since she left.’\textsuperscript{77} She begged more letters from her beloved friend Mrs Stokes because, as she explained, they brought great happiness ‘not only for the moment’ but on many subsequent days. ‘When I am alone and dull I amuse myself with reading my friends’ letters and find myself refreshed,’ she confessed.\textsuperscript{78} Her sense of social and spiritual isolation was in important respects different to her husband’s and required a different balm.

Motherhood, so many of Eliza’s evangelical contemporaries thought, was the kind of ‘productive labour’ in which a woman should rightly engage, and it appears from her surviving letters that she indeed found joy and meaning primarily in that role. She wrote often of her eldest daughter Ann, who had been born on the outward voyage and was considered by her ‘fond mother’ an ‘entertaining companion’ from at least the age of

\textsuperscript{76} Eliza Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 1 May 1796, in Mackaness, \textit{Some Private Correspondence}, p. 14; Atkinson, \textit{Europeans in Australia}, vol.1 p. 343.
\textsuperscript{77} Eliza Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 13 November 1802, in Mackaness, \textit{Some Private Correspondence}, p.29. Samuel missed the Johnsons too: see Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 22 August 1801 and 27 Aug 1803, in Mackaness, \textit{Some Private Correspondence}, pp. 26-7, 30-1.
\textsuperscript{78} Eliza Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 22 August 1801, in Mackaness, \textit{Some Private Correspondence}, p. 25
two.\textsuperscript{79} Eliza’s second child, Charles, was similarly entertaining but rather mischievous at a similar age.\textsuperscript{80} By the end of their eighth winter in the colony, Mrs Marsden delighted also in her third, Elizabeth Mary, who was ‘just beginning to prattle,’ and anticipated the birth of her fourth, a son John.\textsuperscript{81} She bore another son and three daughters after him, but from around that time the joy she found in her children was tainted by great tragedy and loss. First her husband insisted that Ann receive her education in England, and accordingly dispatched the six year old there to the great sorrow of her tender-hearted mother. Then in September 1801 the three year old Charles was thrown from a chaise when it collided with a cart. The child died of his injuries in his distraught mother’s arms. Less than two years later Eliza was bereaved again, when little John was accidentally killed by a scalding sustained in the family kitchen. Numb with the pain of overwhelming grief, Eliza was unable to pen a single letter for more than a year. When she did eventually write of her feelings, she confessed herself ‘as miserable as it is possible to be.’ ‘Indeed, happiness and me seem long since to have parted and I have a presentiment that peace will never more be an inhabitant of my bosom.’\textsuperscript{82}

Sadly, her prediction of perpetual suffering was soon proved true. In May 1811, while giving birth to Martha, her eighth child, Eliza Marsden was struck down by a stroke. It paralysed her whole right side and rendered her an invalid at just thirty eight years of age.\textsuperscript{83} She eventually regained sufficient speech to make herself understood, as well as the ability ‘to walk about a little’ and to make short trips in a special chaise.\textsuperscript{84} But the physical exertion of riding, the writing of letters to friends and the active engagement with her children that had diverted her in former years were all impossible now. This last family tragedy made the particularly gendered difficulties of colonial life and labour painfully clear. Eliza’s performance of godly labour in childbearing and motherhood

\textsuperscript{80}Eliza Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 6 September 1799, in Mackaness, \textit{Some Private Correspondence}, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{81} Eliza Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 22 August 1801, in Mackaness, \textit{Some Private Correspondence}, p. 26.
\textsuperscript{82} See Eliza Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 13 November 1802, in Mackaness, \textit{Some Private Correspondence}, p.29; Eliza Marsden to Captain John Piper, 15 August 1804, cited in Yarwood, \textit{Samuel Marsden}, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{83} For details see Yarwood, \textit{Samuel Marsden}, pp. 137, 169, 189-90, 265; Ann Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 18 June 1813, in Mackaness, \textit{Some Private Correspondence}, pp. 48-9.
were forms of work contingent upon her gender, and had particular consequences for her engagement with her surrounds. At the very least it ensured a domestic scale for her immediate sense of place. More dramatically, though, the stroke she suffered during childbirth meant that her womanly labours entrenched her isolation from those English friends to whom she could no longer write, and prevented her from forming a strong attachment to the places through which she might otherwise have continued to ride. Her toil as a woman in childbirth ultimately put an end to her health, her pleasure and her capacity for diligent work. As the teenage Ann put it in 1813, ‘my Mama ... is deprived of every means of employing herself.’

For his part, Samuel felt his dear wife’s affliction as ‘a very heavy trial and loss,’ but found comfort in the knowledge that his beloved had been spared. He entrusted his family to the goodness and mercy of God and threw himself into his work. For him, diligent labour not only provided comfort in the face of the religious indifference of the convicts but an outlet for his grief. This suggests that virtuous physical toil was more readily a source of comfort and meaning for colonial men than women, as they sought to establish themselves in a new place.

THE DIVINE WAY OF THINGS

Sowing and reaping were central to Marsden’s labours as chaplain and to his imagination of the early colony. His clerical interactions with other colonists quickly led him to the conclusion that it was ‘ungracious soil for the growth of piety,’ while the particular material circumstances in which he found himself and the settlement led him to sow and reap colonial soil quite literally. In response to his new surrounds and in keeping with his pragmatic outlook and personality, he expanded the scope of his labours and gave gardening and farming a prominent place among his activities. He found a personal, even bodily pleasure in his agricultural exertions that helped him feel more at home and dulled

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86 Ann Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 18 June 1813, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 48.
87 See Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 7 November 1812, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, pp. 46-47.
88 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 22 August 1801, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 28.
his disappointment with the moral and religious condition of the colony. His labours acquired more complex religious meaning and significance as the colony’s material circumstances improved and his expanding estates began to generate considerable wealth. Not unusually for a Calvinist he read the success of his endeavours in terms of his own standing before God and as a sign of the spiritual harvest he hoped would occur. He was influenced by the enlightenment ethos of improvement, which he encouraged in both the agricultural and pastoral spheres. But for essentially religious reasons he imagined an agricultural future for the colony and indeed for all humanity.

Calvinism was a significant influence on Marsden’s understanding of his work and the religious meanings he ascribed to his labours and their fruits in the colony. The Methodist movement, which tended towards Arminianism, had been an important influence upon him during his youth and throughout his adulthood he remained sympathetic to evangelical Protestantism of that hue. But as Methodist missionaries in the colony recognised during the early 1820s, he was ‘of Calvinism principles.’

His life and writings bore the clear imprint of Calvinistic theology, particularly in relation to the doctrine of predestination and the idea of there being only a small group of people elected for salvation, as his biographer observed. Significantly for his understanding of himself and the colonial environment, Calvinist ideas also found expression in his statements concerning his calling, in the interpretation he placed on the material rewards of his labours and in his ideas about the spiritual meaning of agriculture.

A Calvinist idea of calling was central to Marsden’s understanding of his place in the colony. On numerous occasions during his chaplaincy, he affirmed that God had specifically appointed him to his task. In 1801, he commented to an English friend that ‘the Lord knows where best to place me. In the midst of every difficulty I see cause to rejoice that he has appointed me to such a Post of Honor.’

In 1819, he described the Great Captain of Salvation assigned me for the good of

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89 Extract from John Hosking and Thomas Bowden to the [Wesleyan] Missionary Society [n.d], BT Box 20 p. 3508. Note also Benjamin Carvosso to General Secretary [of the Wesleyan Missionary Society], 20 November 1823, BT Box 52 p. 1331, Mitchell Library.
90 Yarwood, Samuel Marsden, pp. 5-6, 24.
91 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 22 August 1801, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 28.
the Heathen.’ ‘Do I believe God sent me here. The answer of my mind has always been Yes.’ And in February 1838, mere months before he died, he reflected on the whole course of his life in terms of God’s particular care for him through various trials that evoked those of the Apostle Paul:

‘[I] have gone through many Toils and Hardships and have often to contend with unreasonable and wicked men in Power. I have gone through many dangers by Land and by water, and amongst the Heathens and amongst my own countrymen in New South Wales; and have both suffered Shipwreck and Robbery; but the Lord in his mercy at all times delivered me.’

There were periods, though, in which Marsden doubted his capacity to keep the faith and struggled to properly discharge his responsibilities as a minister of the Lord. Even during the voyage out, the sailors’ non-attendance at divine service made him anxious that the fault was his: ‘Oh! that my soul was more alive to [the] Lord, that I were more earnest to obtain the Land of Canaan,’ he wrote in his diary. After recounting the initial difficulties and discouragements of his colonial clerical work in 1795, he confessed that ‘I am often lead to doubt that I was wrong in England and much more so now. The Lord search and try my heart and make me sincere and unblameable before him in Love.’

The poor religious condition of the colony in 1800 moved him to express self-doubt again: ‘In the midst of all, my only consolation is the Lord knows how I am situated and foreknew it. I sometimes hope I am doing his will ever under a dark & thick cloud.’ And in a remarkable passage penned in 1808, he admitted that despite the material blessings he enjoyed, ‘much evil still remains within unsubdued – and much unbelief. I want more of the pure spirit of religion, that heavenly love, that meekness of wisdom. I

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92 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 14 June 1819 and 14 July 1819, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, pp. 71, 73.
93 Marsden to Coates, 18 February 1838, cited in Yarwood, Samuel Marsden, p. 281. Note similar comments in Marsden to Coates, 23 February 1836, BT Box 54 p. 1878 and compare 2 Corinthians 11:23-27.
95 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 26 October 1795, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 13.
96 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 22 February 1800, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 22.
do not feel that esteem for the Saviour of the world my soul wishes and longs for. He has not that place in my affections which his love demands. “

Such candid expressions of uncertainty occur only in Marsden’s private writings and letters to his closest friends. They did little to shape or soften his public image, but they clearly reveal that his inner spiritual life, insofar as he described it to his evangelical confidants, was characterised by a deep feeling of unworthiness. He doubted the strength of his religious faith and admitted a lack of devotion to the Lord. Tellingly, though, his awareness of his private failings was not accompanied by agonising doubt over his election by God. He was not like the earlier puritans who generally struggled for assurance of their salvation. He was a more optimistic evangelical whose confidence in his calling appears to have remained constant throughout his career. One important consequence of his confidence in God’s attitude toward him, if not his attitude toward God, was that he tended to interpret his worldly work and its material rewards less as desperately desired proof of election than as reassurance that he was favoured by God.

Within the intellectual and cultural tradition of Calvinistic Protestantism, there was no moral barrier to the careful accumulation of wealth by means of faithful labour according to one’s calling from the Lord. Humble, diligent labour was generally considered a pleasing act of worship to God and the prudent re-investment of its material rewards vastly more virtuous than their expense in the gratification of the flesh. These ideas suited Marsden perfectly. He was a skilled farmer and his exertions prospered with the passage of years. He also had a strong acquisitive impulse and extensive opportunities to develop his estates. Between 1800 and 1806, sizeable grants helped him extend his personal holdings from 600 to nearly 3000 acres and established him as one of the leading landowners in the colony. As his interests in sheep and cattle developed and the colony’s pastoral expansion beyond the Cumberland Plain began, Marsden extended his holdings further still. By the early 1830s he owned more than 11,600 acres of land on

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97 Samuel Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 7 December 1808, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 38.
99 See David Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s, Unwin Hyman, London, 1989, p. 43.
100 Yarwood, Samuel Marsden, pp. 104-5
which he ran approximately 5,000 cattle and 9,000 sheep. At the time of his death in 1838, his holdings were scattered from Parramatta to the Wellington Valley in central western New South Wales.

Marsden ascribed considerable religious significance to agriculture and the wealth his estates produced. His earliest letters from the colony indicate that, when confronted by the apparently incorrigible irreligion of the colonists, his comfortable material circumstances reassured him that he enjoyed God’s providential care. As he told Mrs Stokes in late 1795, his clerical duty had already become ‘painful and difficult,’ but ‘with regard to temporals our situation is much better than would be expected.’

A year later he rejoiced that ‘our land brings forth plentifully’ and ‘the bounties of Providence are bestowed on us with a liberal hand.’ The improving circumstances of the colony had meaning for him personally: ‘It is an unspeakable happiness to see the kind hand of Providence superintending all our ways... His goodness and mercy hath followed me all the days of my life.’

Even in the period he toiled alone as chaplain to the whole colony, he told Mrs Stokes there was ‘no cause to complain.’ ‘I am making great progress in my Orchard and Garden’ and ‘have got many hundred different trees and a great abundance of some kinds of fruit,’ he explained. ‘God had blessed me in my Basket [and] in my Store... he has given me all things richly to enjoy.’

Sometimes he was overwhelmed by the goodness of God towards him: ‘I have had a great share of human happiness and temporal comforts, much more than falls to the lot of mankind in general,’ he acknowledged in 1808. And although he doubted whether he loved God enough in return, he could ‘in some measure say with Jacob of old, ‘If God will be with me and will keep me in the way that I go & give me meat to eat and raiment to put on then the Lord

102 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 26 October 1795, in Mackaness, *Some Private Correspondence*, p. 13. Note that Eliza Marsden similarly bemoaned their ‘great loss of Religious Society’ and at the same time expressed her satisfaction that ‘we have been very well provided with all the common necessities of life.’ Eliza Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 13 December 1794, in Mackaness, *Some Private Correspondence*, p. 8.
103 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 3 December 1796, in Mackaness, *Some Private Correspondence*, p. 16, alluding to Psalm 23.
104 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 27 April 1803, in Mackaness, *Some Private Correspondence*, p. 31.
shall be my God.’” The success of his labours reassured him that he was divinely blessed and gave him reason, as it had the biblical patriarch, to continue striving after God.

In the chaplain’s mind, the success of his labours also had religious significance in broader terms. His accumulation of material wealth not only reinforced his sense of divine appointment but encouraged him to hope that he did not toil spiritually in vain. ‘I hope our present dark night is the womb of a bright morning,’ he wrote in 1794 with an initial optimism that gradually faded with the passage of time. ‘Not that I expect to see so many turned from the Darkness to Light, yet I have no doubt but He will own and bless his word to the eternal salvation of some of these unhappy people.’ In subsequent years Marsden made an explicit connection between the spiritual transformations he desired and the material blessings he and other colonists enjoyed. ‘Happy should I be to see God reviving his work of grace in New South Wales,’ he wrote in 1796. ‘Our land brings forth plentifully, neither does he suffer our cattle to decrease – the bounties of providence are bestowed on us with a liberal hand.’ He worried, though, that the colonists seemed so ‘very ungrateful’ for their increasing material security. ‘We are unmindful of the God who gives us all these things richly to enjoy ... He both can and does make the barren wilderness smile.’ Although disappointed that the colonists failed to express appropriate thankfulness to God, he continued to trust that the God who could make a barren land produce an abundant crop could also produce a harvest of repentant souls.

As his own temporal affairs progressed, Marsden attributed further significance to their success. ‘I, more than most men, have cause to be thankful for many striking interpositions of Divine Providence in my favour,’ he confided to Wilberforce in 1810. ‘God has blessed me in my basket and my store,’ he reflected with a biblical phrase from Moses’ speech to the Israelis, just prior to their entry to the Promised Land:

105 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 7 December 1808, in Mackaness, *Some Private Correspondence*, p. 38, alluding to Genesis 28: 20-22.
106 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 24 August 1794, in Mackaness, *Some Private Correspondence*, p. 6.
107 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 3 December 1976, in Mackaness, *Some Private Correspondence*, p. 16.
‘And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandment, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high ... Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store.’¹⁰⁸

This passage occurs in the context of Moses’ explanation of God’s covenant to bless the Israelites for their faithfulness or to curse them for their wickedness. It asserts a direct relationship between godly obedience and material prosperity, which Marsden applied to his own situation and that of his fellow colonists. As he continued to Wilberforce: ‘I trust I shall see that I have not laboured in vain, and that in the great day of account some, even from this foreign land, will be found meet for the Kingdom of Heaven.’¹⁰⁹ The chaplain’s experiences cultivating his garden and reaping its fruit informed his sense of the colony as a spiritual harvest field to which he had been appointed by God. He moved easily from a description of the rewards of his physical labours to those of a more spiritual kind, and assumed that Wilberforce would too. He interpreted his material prosperity in Old Testament covenantal terms. It signified his own righteousness and promised the future redemption of at least some of the colonists to whom he ministered. The yield of his fields fuelled his hope of a similarly abundant spiritual reward.

There may have been deeper connections still between Marsden’s agricultural exertions and his expectations of redemption in New South Wales, at least in the early period of his colonial ministry. His decision during the 1790s to name his main establishment ‘Mamre’ suggests the possibility that his agricultural endeavours had a profoundly important place in his religious outlook for the colony. A. T. Yarwood rightly observed that Marsden’s ‘Mamre,’ which encompassed just over 330 acres at South Creek, took its name from the place near Hebron which, according to the book of Genesis, God gave to Abraham after he separated from Lot.¹¹⁰ But Yarwood declined to reflect upon the religious allusions Marsden may have intended in giving his main farm that name. Perhaps the chaplain was identifying himself with the biblical patriarch whom God singled out as His friend?

¹⁰⁸ Deuteronomy 28:1, 4-5 (King James Version).
¹⁰⁹ Marsden to Wilberforce, 27 July 1810, in Elder, The Letters and Journals of Samuel Marsden, p. 56.
¹¹⁰ Yarwood, Samuel Marsden, p. 78; Genesis 13:14-18.
Perhaps he was asserting his divine right to the land? Perhaps he recalled that Mamre was known as the place where Abraham entertained angels and pleaded with God to spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of their few righteous inhabitants.\footnote{See Genesis chapter 18; F. F. Bruce, ‘Mamre’ in J. D. Douglas (ed.), \textit{New Bible Dictionary}, 2nd edn, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1982, p. 730.} According to the bible, it was from Mamre that Abraham looked down towards Sodom and saw ‘dense smoke rising from the land like a furnace’ when God, though sparing Lot, judged and destroyed the cities of the plain.\footnote{See Genesis 19: 27-29.} By naming his main agricultural establishment after such a place Marsden may have intended to position himself as an Abrahamic intercessor for the colonists and his farming as a recommendation for them despite their great wickedness and immorality. Or he may have considered his farm a place of blessing from which to observe the destruction of the faithless colonists.

Marsden’s contemporaries tended not to interpret his worldly success as a sign of future salvation by God, or to consider his conduct of his estates part of his calling from the Lord. Rather, the chaplain’s accumulation of wealth provoked numerous critical remarks. ‘No one would take Mr Marsden for a clergyman on a week day,’ claimed one of his detractors. ‘He rides about from town to town, makes bargains, executes his agencies, looks after his farms, and occasionally gives a ball with as much apparent glee as any other merchant in the Colony. On Sunday he reads the Liturgy like a man half asleep, and then uniformly serves up one of Simeon’s skeletons with very little lean flesh about it.’\footnote{Rev Walter Lawry cited in Wannan, \textit{Early Colonial Scandals}, p. 176.} The Methodists Hosking and Bowden thought that beyond establishing schools, Marsden gave ‘but little attention’ to the spiritual improvement of the population. ‘He is much more concerned in increasing the great fortune he has accumulated,’ they alleged in the early 1820s.\footnote{Extract from Hosking and Bowden to the [Wesleyan] Missionary Society [n.d], BT Box 20 p. 3508, Mitchell Library.} By that time, even the Governor, Thomas Brisbane, was of the opinion that Marsden ‘daily neglect[s] the Spiritual concerns of his Parish for the sake of attending to his multitudinous temporal affairs.’\footnote{Brisbane to Bathurst, 31 August 1822, \textit{HRA} series 1 vol.10 pp. 725.} And in 1831, the Presbyterian John Dunmore Lang rubbed salt into the wound by declaring that Marsden and the other Anglican clergy had been corrupted by the ownership of land and distracted from

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112 See Genesis 19: 27-29.
114 Extract from Hosking and Bowden to the [Wesleyan] Missionary Society [n.d], BT Box 20 p. 3508, Mitchell Library.
115 Brisbane to Bathurst, 31 August 1822, \textit{HRA} series 1 vol.10 pp. 725.
shepherding their spiritual flock. Marsden’s steady accumulation of worldly things led some of his contemporaries to suspect him of labouring for himself rather than the Lord. It is nevertheless telling that even his critics considered him an active and busy man. For all their other objections, they never accused him of idleness.

Such accusations can be interpreted as proof of Marsden’s character flaws and failings as chaplain to the colony, or as misguided or even malicious attacks on a generally well intentioned man of God. The chaplain himself responded to them with a discussion of the nature of work. ‘St Paul’s own hands ministered to his wants in a cultivated nation, ours in an uncultivated one,’ he reminded Commissioner Bigge in 1821. ‘It was not from inclination that my colleague and I took the axe, the spade and the hoe,’ he explained again in 1826. But ‘we could not, from our situation, help ourselves by any other means and we thought it no disgrace to labour.’ He claimed the moral high ground by arguing that manual labour was both an inherently noble activity and a biblically sanctioned pursuit even for Apostles of the Lord. In his own case, such explanations were disingenuous at best and deceitful at worst. His letters testify that he indeed had an ‘inclination’ for farming and by the 1820s, when he was writing, his temporal labours had not only satisfied his family’s wants but generated considerable wealth. Marsden’s account is a valuable confirmation, though, of his enduring sense of the dignity and godliness of physical toil.

Marsden also defended himself by drawing a sharp, confident contrast between his situation in the colony and that of his English counterparts, despite having departed his homeland before acquiring any first hand experience of ministry there. ‘A clergyman in England lives in the bosom of his friends,’ as he explained to Commissioner Bigge. ‘He is the father and shepherd of his flock ... they esteem him and administer to his wants.

117 Marsden to Bigge, 31 January 1821, BT Box 26, pp. 6070-6072, Mitchell Library.
118 Marsden, An Answer to Certain Calumnies, p. 9.
119 In 1827, the year after his pamphlet was published, his land holdings totalled 5231 acres and he requested, unsuccessfully, that Governor Darling grant him permission to purchase 5000 more. See A. T. Yarwood, ‘Marsden, Samuel (1765 - 1838)’, Australian Dictionary of Biography, Online Edition, 2006, published by the Australian National University, http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A020176b.htm; Yarwood, Samuel Marsden, p. 43.
His houses are built, his vineyards are planted ... his comforts and conveniences are all within his reach and he has nothing to do but to feed his flock.’ The chaplain switched to an agricultural image to describe the very different situation of clergy in the colony. ‘I enter[ed] a country in a state of nature where the ground has never been subdued by the mattock or the hoe... the clergy [there] have often the first fruits of the earth – here they have none.’

Marsden accounted for himself as someone who inhabited a physically uncultivated country and served a church that had not yet sunk deep roots into the community. He argued that the particular material circumstances in which he ministered required him to adapt his labours for the Lord to include raising food from the ground. ‘If it is a reproach it ought not to fall upon us,’ he said defensively. ‘Our country ought either to have made a suitable provision for us or not to blame us if we laboured to supply our real necessities when exiled from our mother country and friends.’

Like both Atkinson and Newton in earlier years, he insisted on the practical and peculiar necessity of clerical agriculture in New South Wales. His defence indicates the persistent importance of his colonial circumstances to his notion of what labouring for the Lord entailed.

By the time Marsden offered these defences to Bigge and the general public, subduing the land with ‘the mattock or the hoe’ was not the primary task performed on his estates. Agriculture had been overshadowed by pastoralism; the cultivation of crops by the production of wool. Colonial farmers had raised sheep for meat from very early in the settlement’s history. But by 1803 Marsden was convinced of the economic potential of fine wool. And like John Macarthur, he began to breed sheep for that purpose alone.

He was encouraged in this by his English mentor Miles Atkinson, who took an early interest in his experiments. ‘I think your wool is likely to make in time a great increase of wealth to your country and this,’ the Yorkshire minister wrote to him in 1805. ‘Spanish wool is so much sought after here that it is not in their power to supply us. Two of my

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120 Marsden to Bigge, 31 January 1821, BT Box 26 pp. 6070-6072; Marsden, An Answer to Certain Calumnies, p. 9.
121 Marsden to Bigge, 31 January 1821, BT Box 26, pp. 6070-6072.
sons are in the wool trade... send a specimen,’ he urged. In 1807, Marsden sent a weavable quantity to the mill that had been established at Rawdon in Yorkshire during his early adulthood. Conscious of the success of that sample, as well as the effects of the Napoleonic war on the English market and the colony’s economic need for an export trade, in 1811 Marsden made the first commercial shipment of fine wool from New South Wales. ‘This will be the beginning of the commerce of this new world,’ he wrote confidently to Mrs Stokes. ‘Many think nothing of these things now... but I anticipate immense National wealth to spring from this source.’ Fine wool indeed became the colony’s primary export commodity and Marsden remained actively involved in the development of the industry throughout the 1810s and 1820s. Tellingly, he was noticed in Commissioner Bigge’s 1823 report not as a leading cultivator but as one of the colony’s ‘principal proprietors of sheep and cattle’ who had greatly improved his flocks and herds. This shift in his interests from the primarily agricultural to the pastoral raises the question of the significance of sowing and reaping to his vision for the colony.

Material prosperity, as Marsden saw it, was not just desirable but the colony’s destiny. He had been enthusiastic about the colony’s material potential at the time his family first settled in. ‘I think it one of the finest countries in the known world,’ he had declared in September 1795. ‘No people I believe will be more happy than the people of this island in a short time.’ His subsequent experience as a landowner had further strengthened his expectation of future wealth. ‘Our flocks and herds increase and multiply very much – beef & mutton will soon be very plentiful,’ he wrote happily to Mr Stokes in 1804. ‘This country will at some future period become great from the richness of its soil and the healthiness of its climate.’ By the end of that decade, he was thoroughly convinced that the improvement and export of colonial wool would begin ‘the commerce of this

124 Yarwood, Samuel Marsden, p. 4.
125 Marsden to Mr Stokes, 26 November 1811, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 44.
127 Marsden to John Stokes, 16 Sept 1795, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 11
128 Marsden to Mrs Stokes, n.d. but watermarked 10 August 1804, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 35.
new world.’ ‘We have not much less than 50,000 sheep in the settlement,’ he estimated in 1811, and ‘while I sleep or wake’ these ‘will produce ... as many fleeces of wool.’ He was emphatic that ‘it is a National object to attend to them.’ His involvement in the development of pastoralism can be explained in part by his expectation that wool would lay the commercial foundation of the colony.

Although he stood to gain materially from the improvement of his fleeces, Marsden was also motivated by civic concerns. This had been true of his early agricultural endeavours too. Just two years after his arrival, he and Surgeon Arndell had enquired into the state of colonial agriculture. During King’s administration, he made several suggestions to the government concerning the improvement of colonial farming and the development of sheep-breeding and wool-growing techniques. He also helped improve efficiency in cultivation by using cattle and ploughs. In 1822, perhaps most importantly of all, the senior chaplain joined with other leading farmers and pastoralists to found the Agricultural Society of New South Wales. He served as its vice president and won several of its awards in subsequent years. These various efforts to develop agriculture in the colony suggest that, as Yarwood wrote, ‘a sense of public spirit’ continued to inform Marsden’s agricultural and pastoral exertions long after the threat of famine had subsided and it became unnecessary for him to contribute to the colony’s welfare by personally raising food from the ground.

Importantly, though, the chaplain’s general civic desire to develop the colony was accompanied by a more specific commitment to the improvement of its agricultural and pastoral productions as a means of enhancing prosperity. Reporting the recent progress of his flocks in 1814, he remarked that ‘I have for years been convinced that the wool would be the Gold mines of this country.’ He dearly hoped that ‘a spirit of improvement will be excited through the farmers of this colony to grow fine wool. We must have an export or the settlement will never prosper and this promises to be the first.’ The Agricultural Society in which he played a prominent part was similarly concerned to promote ‘the

129 Marsden to Mr Stokes, 26 November 1811, in Mackaness, *Some Private Correspondence*, p. 44.
131 Marsden to Mr Stokes, 8 October 1814, in Mackaness, *Some Private Correspondence*, p. 521.
improvement and interests of Agricultural pursuits generally in this new and promising Country.'  

The idea of improvement, as John Gascoigne has shown, was the most influential legacy of the English-speaking enlightenment in early colonial Australia. The importance Marsden attached to it and the confidence he placed in the possibilities of progress suggest the general influence of the enlightenment on his thought. He certainly lived and ministered at a time when Anglican clergymen contributed significantly to the creation of new knowledge and many English evangelicals displayed considerable openness to enlightenment ideas, including the capacity of rational people to improve their surrounds and society.

The enlightenment helped define the cultural and intellectual context in which the chaplain articulated his value for improvement and in which he expressed his ideas about agriculture and pastoralism and their importance to the future of the colony. Significantly, the relative value of agriculture and pastoralism was a subject of particular interest among enlightenment leaders in Marsden’s time. According to various Scottish thinkers, societies generally progressed through four developmental stages from nomadic hunter-gathering, to semi-nomadic pastoralism, then to settled agriculture and finally to urban commercial civilisation. It was theory that, at least among the educated, enjoyed considerable currency in the early colony. Marsden was certainly aware of these ideas, and even donated a copy of Lord Kaimes’s Works to the library of the Agricultural Society.

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The increasingly pastoral focus of his own interests may suggest that Marsden disregarded stadial theory and instead considered pastoralism rather than agriculture the ideal for the colony, but the chaplain’s language suggests that he did not disregard stadial theory so much as take a pragmatic approach to the development of commerce and the creation of prosperity. He often discussed the improvement of colonial wool in terms of the development of commerce rather than the pastoral use of the land. Fine wool was a ‘gold mine’ and its export would begin ‘the commerce of this new world,’ as he explained in terms associated by stadial theorists with the highest, commercial stage of civilised society. In keeping with the pragmatic temper that had characterised his early labours in the colony and indeed the English evangelical tradition more generally, he took opportunities to improve the colony’s productions and develop its commerce as they arose. As he put it to the Agricultural Society in his vice presidential address of 1824, ‘In situations similar to our own, a single practical fact, confirmed by experience, is often of more value than a long systematical volume of theory.’

Marsden’s thoroughly pragmatic approach to the material development of New South Wales suggests that his emphasis on wool growing did not necessarily involve a denial of the importance of agriculture to the future of the colony. Indeed, his language suggests that sowing and reaping remained centrally important to the way he imagined the colony. ‘It is our duty to leave future events to the wisdom of Him who knows all things,’ wrote Marsden in 1811 in acknowledgement of the sovereignty of God. But as his own experiments in wool growing progressed and he realised the opportunities for the sale of colonial fleeces occasioned by the continental war and its implications for rival wool from Spain, he was nevertheless emboldened to articulate a grand vision indeed. ‘My views ... anticipate the greatness and wealth of this country in future, the civilisation of the surrounding savage Nations and the cultivation of their Islands.’

It was a vision as expansive as Newton’s of oak trees springing up and flourishing in the colony and producing acorns that would take root and spread among the other nations of the South


137 Marsden to Mr Stokes, 26 November 1811, in Mackaness, *Some Private Correspondence*, p. 44.
It was a vision of colonial development that proceeded on a pastoral basis but ultimately assisted the progress of civilisation in a distinctively agricultural form.

Agriculture retained a special place in Marsden’s vision for the colony for reasons that arose directly from his religious beliefs. In the very same letter that he announced his expectation that ‘immense national wealth’ would spring from the improved wool of colonial sheep, he described cultivation in strikingly eschatological terms:

‘Divine goodness has intimated that a time shall come when men shall beat their swords into plough shares and their spears into pruning hooks. Then agriculture will be the principle occupation of mankind.’

It was an idea of the Kingdom of God Marsden shared with the biblical prophets Isaiah and Micah, and which he considered to have clear implications for human societies in his own time. ‘I think we should enjoy as much of this promise now as the world will allow us,’ he went on. ‘Men who can, should all beat their swords into plough shares and follow the simple life found only in the field and garden.’

He saw cultivation and the development of agriculture as more than a means to establish the colony in material terms. It was God’s plan for his creation, the kind of work closest to the heart of the Lord. Heaven, in his vision, was a place where agricultural work was peacefully and productively performed. Even in the present, for these reasons, farming was nothing less than a divinely-sanctioned occupation that anticipated the truly righteous society of the Kingdom of God. Pastoralism would pave the way to the colony’s immediate prosperity and he pragmatically invested heavily in its improvement on that account. But in his understanding it was agricultural endeavour that had religious meaning and even redemptive significance.

Agriculture was central to Marsden’s experience and imagination as chaplain to the colony of New South Wales. As an evangelical Protestant who loved working with his hands, he understood diligent physical labour as a virtuous pursuit that brought honour to

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139 Marsden to Mr Stokes, 26 November 1811, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 45. The biblical allusion is to Isaiah chapter 2 and Micah 4: 1-7.
140 Marsden to Mr Stokes, 26 November 1811, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 45.
his God. He reached the colony at a time when agricultural ideas of planting and harvesting directly informed the discussion among evangelical Anglicans about the nature of colonial ministry. Soon afterwards Marsden concluded that the literal cultivation was also necessary in the particular circumstances of the infant colony. His initial uncertainty about the wisdom of accepting land to farm indicates that he recognised a difference between his efforts to cultivate eternal souls and his exertions to cultivate the soil. But the two spheres of labour were not as separate in his outlook and subsequent experience as, to his critics, they may have seemed. Although his biographer did not explore them, there were deep connections between Marsden’s ideas about farming and his religious vision for colonial society. His ideas about agricultural labour and the importance of cultivation extended from the everyday to the eternal and back to the everyday. Specifically, he saw in his environment and especially the condition of the land a sign of the colony’s spiritual standing before God. At some times, agricultural images of clerical labour reinforced his sense that he toiled in a barren, irreligious environment where an abundant harvest was unlikely and it was all a minister could do to work faithfully for the Lord, as in his comment that ‘this is a very ungracious soil for the growth of piety.’ But when he saw how his temporal affairs prospered and his physical labours produced an abundance of fruit, he was encouraged to believe that his religious exertions would similarly produce a harvest of souls. He believed Moses’ words that material success was God’s blessing upon faithfulness, and thus viewed the fruitfulness of his fields as a sign of his future spiritual harvest.

Marsden’s physical and spiritual labours were also linked in other ways. His experience of ministry among people who seemed utterly godless and the frustration he felt in his failure to effect moral improvement deeply unsettled him. At times throughout his career he privately expressed uncertainty about his standing before God and doubt about the character of his own faith. But like other Protestants in the Calvinist tradition, he found affirmation of his calling and reassurance that he was divinely blessed in the material rewards of his worldly toil. On a very personal level, his labours in the field and the prosperity he enjoyed were not opposed to or separate from his religious identity. They reminded him of his clerical appointment and acquired a redemptive meaning that informed his understanding of himself and his hope for the colonial community more broadly. In the midst of ungodly people for whom he felt some responsibility before God,
he established his farm ‘Mamre’ and set about improving the productions of the colony. He not only considered agricultural labour necessary to provide for his family and to improve the material position of the colony. He declared it the occupation of the righteous and with the Old Testament prophets looked forward to the day when the agricultural society of the godly he imagined became a reality.
CHAPTER FIVE

Inducing Industrious Habits
Samuel Marsden’s attitudes to convicts and Aborigines

Industry and idleness were issues close to Samuel Marsden’s heart. They were also among the most hotly contested in colonial life during his chaplaincy. The infant settlement was an offshoot of a gradually industrialising society in which the boundary between labour and leisure was being more sharply defined, and in which work and time discipline were increasingly promoted as positive virtues.\(^1\) Its own penal character ensured that labour was central to most colonists’ experiences and to the relationships between society’s main component groups.\(^2\) Physical work, after all, was what the male convicts were made to perform. To penologists and others in authority, the acquisition of industrious habits was a desirable result of transportation and a sure proof of prisoners’ moral reform. Doing nothing, on the other hand, was a means of subversion and escape for convicts supposed to be doing time. To improvers and moralisers, their idleness seemed a threat to the settlement’s initial survival and eventual prosperity. Work was an issue intimately tied up with questions about the character and future of the colony. It was especially pronounced from the mid 1810s, when the dramatic increase in transportation to the colony invigorated debate over the nature of the prisoners’ punishment. What kind of labour most effectually encouraged the convicts’ reform and contributed to the development of the colony?\(^3\) Balancing a humanitarian concern for the


\(^2\) White, *On Holidays*, chapter 2; Graeme Davison, *The Unforgiving Minute: how Australia learned to tell the time*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1993, chapter one.

rehabilitation of felons with the creation of a viable, even prosperous, British possession was a challenge throughout much of Marsden’s colonial career.

The British colonists’ interaction with indigenous Australians was also crucial in shaping the public discussion of industry and idleness. Labour had been a key issue in the legal and philosophical discussion of the ownership of territory since at least the time Europeans began extending their empires across the seas. Attitudes to work and leisure had also been identified as a specific point of cultural difference between Britons and Aborigines as early as the seventeenth century, when the English voyager William Dampier complained that the natives of New Holland would not cart water for him. Throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Aborigines’ disinclination to work, along with their wandering habits and apparent lack of any desire to accumulate and consume material goods, continued to intrigue the European colonists of New South Wales. Some found their leisure ethic an attractive, even commendable thing, as indeed James Cook and no doubt a number of convicts had done. But to others it seemed terribly uncivilised. The French explorer Freycinet described the Aborigines disparagingly as ‘natural enemies of work’ when he visited Sydney in 1802. The editor of the *Sydney Gazette* similarly denounced their ‘total indolence and inactivity.’ Individual colonists, government and missionaries often sought to eradicate Aboriginal idleness and inculcate habits of industry in the course of ‘civilising the natives’ and introducing them to the comforts of civil life and Christianity.

Samuel Marsden articulated his ideas about the virtue of industry, the evil of idleness and the importance of productive agricultural labour in a colony that was divided by these

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8 *Sydney Gazette*, 2 December 1804.
issues along the fault lines of class and race. He did so, furthermore, as someone whose own exertions were largely defined by Protestant attitudes to work. He came from a tradition that associated diligent toil with both godliness and ascending respectability. A tradition that affirmed grace as a free gift but nevertheless emphasised the importance of sobriety, prudence, discipline and good works. This chapter examines his efforts to induce industrious habits among the convicts and indigenous people of New South Wales. It explores the effects of his views on his social relationships and their implications for the ownership of land. It suggests that his attitudes to idleness and industry tended to align him with the penal authorities in opposition to the prisoners he had come to serve and to identify him with British power in opposition to the Aborigines’ traditional way of life. As he advocated and applied his particular Protestant ideas about work, he contributed to the extension of colonial power in a number of ways. He not only assumed that the colonists were entitled to the land but actively encouraged the particular behaviours by which they practically asserted their ownership of it. He intervened into indigenous lives in an attempt to undermine their traditional cultures in order that they might embrace his. And largely on the basis of his personal experience and observation of Aboriginal people and their attitude to work, he eventually concluded that they were irredeemably idle savages who did not have a right to the land, or any need of it.

Marsden’s attitudes to industry and idleness must complicate our understanding of the relationship between evangelicalism and colonialism between the 1820s and the 1840s. As several historians have recognised, humanitarianism was deeply important to the British debate about the nature of colonialism during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. It energised the movement for the reform of prisons and especially the campaign against slavery, in which evangelicals were prominent. In the wake of abolition in 1833, British humanitarians redirected their concern to the empire’s indigenous inhabitants and applied Christian ideas of sin and atonement to the question of settler

colonialism and its effects. In 1835 the well connected evangelical Thomas Fowell Buxton, who had inherited the parliamentary leadership of the anti-slavery movement from Wilberforce and led it to final success, established a Select Committee on Aborigines in British Settlements. Dominated by evangelical Protestants and including several missionary society leaders among its expert witnesses, the Committee returned a report highly critical of settlers’ treatment of indigenous peoples. It recommended a form of colonialism that was more tightly controlled by the imperial government and more Christianising in effect. Humanitarianism shaped British evangelical Protestant attitudes to colonialism, especially during the 1830s and 1840s. But as this chapter argues, other strands of evangelical ethics were also significant in New South Wales. Protestant work values, as Marsden’s example suggests, could have direct implications for the colonists’ appropriation of the land and their attitudes to Aboriginal people as a race.

ENCOURAGING REFORM AND PROSPERITY

Industry and idleness were issues intimately tied up with those of moral reform and material prosperity in Marsden’s time. These prominent subjects of public discussion attracted the active interest of numerous British Protestants and helped shape the cultural and intellectual context in which the chaplain articulated his religious values and ideas. In the midst of broader philosophical questioning about the origins of human character – whether it was determined by nature or developed by nurture – evangelicals characteristically affirmed the essential wickedness of all people until rescued by Christ’s atoning grace, and thus the need for all people to undergo a fundamental, indeed miraculous, change of heart. At the same time, though, they were optimistic that moral


11 See David Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s, Unwin Hyman, London, 1989, pp.5-10; D. Bruce Hindmarsh, John Newton and the English Evangelical
improvement could be encouraged by more human means, including the regular performance of diligent work. Accordingly, Marsden like other British evangelicals busied himself not only with the propagation of the gospel but with social projects such as the foundation of orphanages and schools that would inculcate ‘principles of morality and industry’ among the young.\textsuperscript{12} As he reported to William Wilberforce with considerable pleasure in 1810, ‘many hundred children’ who had formerly been ‘running about the streets, growing up in idleness and vice’ were now ‘diligently employed in mental and moral improvement’ at his school.\textsuperscript{13} He also emphasised the importance of work to the convicts’ moral reform. The colony provided an ‘extensive field of honest and beneficial employment’ for Britain’s outcasts, as he put it in 1824, ‘which brings them by a strict observance of duties and the enjoyment of temporal comforts, to a due sense of their former folly and degradation; thus benefiting the community and saving the individual from destruction.’\textsuperscript{14} Typically for an evangelical of his time, Marsden saw honest labour as a means of moral improvement for both prisoners and the poor.

Like many other men of his class and generation, Marsden was influenced by enlightenment ideas about improvement and social progress leading to material prosperity. But the question of how prosperity was best achieved was keenly debated in the young colony. Some turned their attention to the promotion of free migration to the Australian territories. Others made prosperity a central catchcry in their campaign for greater political freedoms. ‘Free representative governments are the only foundation on which the prosperity and happiness of communities can safely repose,’ William Wentworth declared in 1819.\textsuperscript{15} For his part, Marsden did not consider the colonists ready for such responsibilities. The stain of convict lawlessness and immorality remained far too dark for that. Instead he tended to emphasise the importance of improving the colony’s rural productions, raising the moral tone of society and encouraging greater industry. In his own experience, industrious labour had led not only to sustenance but to

\textsuperscript{12} Marsden to Wilberforce, 6 February 1800, Bonwick Transcripts [hereafter BT] (Missionary) Box 49, Mitchell Library, Sydney, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{13} Marsden to Wilberforce, 7 July 1810, BT Box 49, Mitchell Library, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{14} Samuel Marsden, Second Anniversary Address of the Agricultural Society of New South Wales instituted on the 5th of July 1822 by Vice President Samuel Marsden, Robert Howe, Sydney, 1824, pp. 8-9.
considerable wealth. His personal prosperity confirmed not only his divine calling but that diligent toil and especially the investment of labour into the improvement of the land would increase the wealth of the colony at large. These ideas about prosperity shaped his attitudes to the convicts and their labours in the colony.

Marsden’s many pronouncements on the convicts’ employment indicate that he expected their diligent agricultural toil to lead to prosperity. He had extensive personal contact with prisoners in his capacity as chaplain, as a magistrate and as a master himself, and held strong views on how they should be put to work.\textsuperscript{16} The first kind of agricultural labour he recommended was clearing the land ‘completely’ of trees and preparing it for the plough. The convicts would also be ‘very useful in burning off timber, digging clay for brick makers and various other works,’ he told Commissioner Bigge in early 1820.\textsuperscript{17} He saw the prisoners’ labour as a great resource that, if duly expended, would ‘promote the general improvement of the colony.’ But if the government failed to assign convicts to assist with clearing, fencing and other such tasks, ‘the lower class of farmers will dwindle into poverty and distress as their predecessors have generally done.’ He warned that, without their labour on the land, ‘the period [will remain] very distant when this colony shall rise to any importance or be in any material degree independent of the mother country.’\textsuperscript{18}

The convicts’ employment in broadly agricultural tasks also tended to encourage their moral reform, Marsden thought. ‘Agricultural establishments’ that maintained from ten to one hundred convict men ‘as shepherds, herdsmen and farm labourers,’ were both ‘comfortable asylums, where the guilty may forget their shame,’ and ‘places of reform, where they are neither excited by temptation to commit crimes nor driven to do so from

\textsuperscript{16} The number of convicts assigned to Marsden varied considerably over the course of his career. He was very probably assigned 12 or 13 men along with his initial 100 acre grant of land. Then when he took over Johnson’s clerical responsibilities, he received ten convicts in lieu of remuneration for the performance of extra work. In December 1820, he told Bigge that ‘upon an average I think I maintain from 20 to 30 and sometimes more; these are men who are either convicts or have been convicts.’ See the evidence of Reverend Samuel Marsden, 27 December 1820, in John Ritchie (ed.), \textit{The Evidence to the Bigge Reports}, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1971, vol.2 p. 117.

\textsuperscript{17} Marsden to Bigge, 31 January 1820, BT Box 21, Mitchell Library, pp. 3885-6.

\textsuperscript{18} Marsden to Bigge, 31 January 1820, BT Box 21, Mitchell Library, p3885-8.
necessity,’ he explained in 1824.\textsuperscript{19} It was common for evangelicals of his time to associate moral temptation and degradation with the overcrowded city and virtue with the closely settled countryside. Marsden was adamant that most convicts should not be stationed in Sydney – that scene of ‘drunkenness, gaming and debaucheries’ – because ‘so many opportunities abound ... for them to indulge their evil propensities.’\textsuperscript{20} The employment of convicts in ‘the various operations of agriculture,’ on the other hand, tended to ‘correct their idle vagrant thievish habits’ and made them ‘more likely to return to the regular habits of industry and honesty.’\textsuperscript{21} Such statements express both his sense of their innate sinfulness and his confidence that by altering their environment their character might be improved. There was a redemptive quality to his expectation that by the regular performance of agricultural work, they would not only be reformed themselves but ‘gradually become good and useful members of society.’\textsuperscript{22}

The obverse of Marsden’s enthusiastic promotion of industry was his often violent denunciation of idleness. He considered it one of the greatest impediments to the colony’s progress in both moral and material terms. ‘We are at present in great want of bread,’ as he grumbled to the Stokes in 1801. ‘This is in a great measure to be attributed to the extravagance and idleness of the Farmers who take little or no care of their crops when grown.’\textsuperscript{23} ‘These men in general have not been brought up in the habits of industry,’ he complained of convicts and emancipists another time. ‘They have the greatest aversion to labour, to subordination and good government’ – and furthermore such ‘idle, licentious & ungovernable habits are fixed in many of them for life.’\textsuperscript{24} His most stinging criticisms concerned their idleness in agricultural work. ‘Experience has already clearly evinced what little Advantage to the colony is likely to derive from permitting such persons as have been prisoners to become settlers’ he scrawled with vehemence, perhaps with the emancipist farmers on the Hawkesbury in mind. The vast

\textsuperscript{19} Marsden, \textit{Second Anniversary Address of the Agricultural Society}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{20} A few general remarks respecting the convicts, [n.d.], BT Box 21, Mitchell Library, p. 3623.
\textsuperscript{21} Marsden to Bigge, 31 January 1820, BT Box 21, Mitchell Library, pp.3884-6, p. 3896; Marsden, \textit{Second Anniversary Address of the Agricultural Society}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{22} Marsden, \textit{Second Anniversary Address of the Agricultural Society of New South Wales}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{23} Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 22 August 1801, in Mackaness, \textit{Some Private Correspondence}, p. 26.
\textsuperscript{24} ‘Notes describing soil types and agricultural methods in NSW,’ n.d., item one in ‘Samuel Marsden, sermon papers and notes, ca. 1812 - 1833’, Moore Theological Library, Sydney. Note, though, that he made an exception for some of his own convicts. See Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 4 May 1810, in Mackaness, \textit{Some Private Correspondence}, p. 42.
majority had little knowledge of agriculture, he admitted, but the main issue was that most could not endure labour or soon squandered their profits away. His basic allegation was that they lacked the necessary prudence and industry to ‘become good and useful members of the community and promote the prosperity of the colony’ by raising wealth from the ground.  

The senior chaplain was by no means a lone voice in denouncing convict idleness. The early colony was administered by a succession of governors who considered idleness subversive and treated it, when indulged in during work time, as a severely punishable offence. And the general conviction of the clergy was that idleness was both sinful in itself and injurious to the soul. It was ‘the forerunner of many evils’ including ‘poverty, disease, disgrace,’ as Johnson felt compelled to warn the convicts in 1792. It was obvious to the evangelical clerics that ‘sloth and indolence’ often led to misery and an untimely death, and the colonists should ‘therefore be diligent and industrious’ in their ‘lawful callings’ from the Lord. ‘It is written in the Bible and confirmed by experience and observation [that] the idle soul shall suffer hunger but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat’ as Johnson put it dramatically. Both he and Marsden despaired of the convicts’ propensity to immoral idleness and their refusal to follow the prescribed path to happiness. The clergy were especially distressed by the prisoners’ idleness on the Sabbath, a day they considered rightly free of work for the purpose of morally and spiritually productive rest. Instead of attending church, offering prayers and reflecting upon God’s Word at home, ‘wicked companions are resorted to, wanton and impure conversation is engaged in, plots of iniquity are formed, the gambling room or the tavern are frequented – drunkenness, fornication and adultery succeed.’

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25 ‘Notes describing soil types and agricultural methods in NSW,’ n.d., item one in ‘Samuel Marsden, sermon papers and notes, ca. 1812 - 1833’, Moore Theological Library, Sydney
Wilton put it, most convicts ignored their duty to God and spent ‘the hours of sacred rest ... in sinful idleness.’\textsuperscript{28}

Among convicts with a ‘determined preference for leisure over work,’ Marsden’s attitudes to industry and idleness aggravated his already difficult social relationships.\textsuperscript{29} As other historians have noted, his activities as a magistrate, his violent opposition to the restoration of legal and civil rights to emancipists and his accumulation of considerable personal wealth isolated him from those he had come to serve. But his attitudes to work and leisure contributed significantly to that isolation too. Even as he denounced the convicts’ destructive idleness, he continued to devise schemes for their reform and urge them to adhere to evangelical standards of morality. He continued to insist upon the importance of convict labour for extending the various branches of agriculture, increasing the wealth of the settlement and improving the productivity of the ground. He did not doubt that diligent labour could be effective as both a preventative and a corrective of moral wrong, nor that specifically agricultural toil was the best means to effect a convict’s reform. But his long and disappointing experience with the convicts led him to the conclusion that idleness was one of their chief characteristics and perhaps their most deeply entrenched and destructive vice. It was an attitude that alienated him further from the prisoner population of the colony.

Samuel Marsden’s ideas about industry and idleness also had important implications for the colonists’ appropriation of the land. He understood the land as an object to which European labour should be applied, as a latent resource that could be made to generate wealth, an article available for the colonists to appropriate to their own purposes and utilise for their own ends. In advocating the investment of convict labour into broadly agricultural pursuits, and indeed in contributing to the improvement of the ground and its productions himself, he advanced a means of colonial growth that assumed European control of the land. Furthermore by his own exertions and his schemes for the convicts, he actively encouraged the very behaviours by which colonists justified their claims to

\textsuperscript{28} Rev C. Pleydell. N. Wilton, ‘On Keeping Holy the Sabbath-day,’ in \textit{Twelve Plain Discourses addressed to the Prisoners of the Crown in the Colony of New South Wales}, Stephens and Stokes, Sydney, 1834, p. 27.

\textsuperscript{29} White, \textit{On Holidays}, p. 29.
the territory. During the early decades of British settlement, the colonists’ investment of labour into the ground was one of the primary foundations for their assumption of ownership. John Locke’s idea that mixing labour with the soil gave rise to a proprietary right enjoyed particular currency. ‘The labour of a man’s body and the work of his hands, we may say are properly his,’ a contributor to the *Sydney Herald* explained in Lockean terms during 1839. ‘Whatoever ... he removes out of the state that nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with ... and thereby makes it his property.’  

It was an argument the *Sydney Herald*, on another occasion, explicitly directed against Aboriginal people: ‘they bestowed no labour upon the land and that – and *that only* – it is which gives property in it.’  

It was in this intellectual context that Marsden articulated and acted upon his particular ideas about work. And crucially, his ideas about convict labour and the importance of directing it towards broadly agricultural pursuits were in deep harmony with these legal and philosophical arguments about land ownership. The chaplain’s ideas about work reinforced the colonists’ legal conceits.

In practical ways, too, Marsden’s attitudes to labour aided the British appropriation of the land. During the 1820s, as the territory actually occupied by colonists began to expand very rapidly, Marsden recognised that the Aborigines sustained a ‘loss’ by ‘the Europeans settling their country.’ He also realised that the formation of those very ‘agricultural settlements’ at which he thought convicts were most beneficially employed had a direct and detrimental impact on the country’s indigenous inhabitants: ‘the Kangaroo, Opossum and other quadrupeds are either destroyed or driven into the interior in every place where Europeans fix their settlements, in consequence of which the Aborigines suffer much at certain periods of the year for the want of both clothing and provisions.’  

But he does not appear to have ever doubted that the British should nevertheless occupy and ‘improve’ extensive tracts of Aboriginal land. With an apparently untroubled conscience, he worked industriously at his own temporal activities, progressively extended his holdings and ran more and more sheep and stock over the

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ground. He also insisted on the necessity of investing of convict labour into rural pursuits and cultivating prosperity by industriously improving the ground and its produce. His vision, then, was both appropriative and expansionist. His ideas about the colonists’ labour and its importance for improvement and prosperity implicated him in the spread of settlement and the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples from their ancient lands.

CIVILISING THE ABORIGINES

Just as the questions of reform and prosperity informed Marsden’s application of Protestant work values to the convicts, the question of civilisation shaped his efforts to induce Aboriginal people to adopt habits of industry. The nature of civilisation was debated in Britain during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, not least because of the spectacle of revolution in France and the threat posed by the continental wars and, internally, the movements for Catholic emancipation and the reform of the British state. Britain’s situation as an imperial power also influenced the discussion of what civilisation entailed. As contact with non-European peoples in the South Pacific and other areas of British settlement became more frequent, more deliberate and more sustained, questions of how to incorporate them into the colonists’ social, cultural and economic world also became more pronounced. Significantly, civilisation was also on the intellectual agenda of the Protestant missionary societies which, in the early years of the new century, were gathering momentum and extending their activities throughout the empire and beyond. Their largely evangelical Protestant supporters were convinced, as Marsden himself was, that their God was a God for all peoples of all times and places, including far off Australia and the many islands of the South Seas. Although their religious views and values were deeply personal they were by no means private: they underpinned a vision of Christian civilisation that evangelical missionaries sought to extend throughout the world.

Marsden had most personal interaction with Aboriginal people during the first ten to fifteen years of his long residence in New South Wales, during the period in which the British settlement at Sydney developed rapidly from a camp into a town and extended
south to Appin, north to Windsor and along the Hawkesbury’s alluvial plains. By then
Governor Phillip was long gone from the colony, but his successors Hunter, King, Bligh
and Macquarie were instructed just as he had been to conciliate the affections of the
natives and to prescribe that British subjects live in amity and kindness with them. 33 In a
general way the paternalism and the commitment to the liberty of British subjects that
had shaped Phillip’s actions in the beginning also informed the attitude of each of these
governors. Just as Phillip had treated Bennelong and his companions as guests at
Government House, his immediate successors also supported the local people in their
leisure. The convict artist Thomas Watling was moved to complain in 1794 that they,
though idle heathens, received a full ‘freeman’s ratio of provisions’ from the government
store while the convicts did little better than starve. 34 With gifts of food and blankets and
other items of value, the colony’s administrators continued their efforts to conciliate the
surrounding tribes. Commissioner Bigge explicitly judged that Macquarie’s annual
meeting with ‘the chiefs and black natives that are nearest to the settled districts ... has
tended in some degree to conciliate them.’ 35

Nevertheless, the context in which Marsden interacted most closely with Aboriginal
people was subtly but significantly different to that in which Phillip and Johnson had
interacted with Bennelong and Booron in the colony’s earliest years. By the very early
1800s, the British had successfully established a permanent presence at Sydney and, by
their unceasing expansion, made clear their intention to appropriate huge tracts of
Aboriginal land. The British no longer sought to negotiate with the natives in relation to
their presence on the land, but responded with force to attacks on British settlers, stations
and crops. During 1801 and 1802, Governor King allowed colonists to resist the
‘invasion’ of their property by appropriately ‘effectual’ means, which sometimes
explicitly included driving them ‘back from the settlers’ habitations by firing at them.’ 36

34 Ross Gibson, ‘This Prison This Language: Thomas Watling’s Letters from an Exile at Botany Bay
(1794)’ in Paul Foss (ed.), Island in the Stream: Myths of Place in Australian Culture, Pluto Press,
Sydney, 1988, p.12.
35 John Thomas Bigge, Report of the Commissioner of Inquiry on the State of Agriculture and Trade in the
Colony of New South Wales (1823), Australiana Facsimile Editions, Libraries Board of South Australia,
Adelaide, 1966, p. 73.
36 King’s proclamation of 30 June 1802, HRA vol.3 pp. 592-3; King to Under Secretary King, 21 August
1801, HRA series 1 vol.3 p. 250; Reece, Aborigines and Colonists, pp.107-110; Keith Willey, When the
As violence escalated subsequent governors despatched military detachments to punish the perpetrators of ‘Crimes and Barbarities’ committed against the colonists and to prevent Aborigines from committing ‘Acts of Atrocity’ again.37 As well as engaging more frequently in violent reprisals, the colonists made more concerted efforts to civilise Aboriginal people, particularly children. The number of settlers who took infants and youths in to their homes increased.38 From the mid 1810s, the government and then missionary organisations established institutions to divest boys and girls of their savage ways and render them useful to civilised society instead. During the colony’s second decade, conciliation came in practice to mean the forceful subjection of those Aborigines who actively resisted the spread of white settlement and the encouragement of the younger generation to conform to British ways.

The Aboriginal boy ‘Tristan’ was about four years old when Marsden took him into his Parramatta home and baptised him in 1794. The particular circumstances of his adoption remain obscure, though the Sydney Gazette once described them as ‘not altogether dissimilar’ to those of James Bath, an Aboriginal infant who was ‘rescued from barbarism by the event of his parents’ death, both being shot while they were engaged in plundering and laying waste’ the settlement at Toongabbee.39 Such violence may also have led to Tristan’s residence with the Marsdens; their efforts to civilise him certainly defined his experience there. They sent him to school, had him instructed in ‘the first necessary branches of education’ and generally raised him according to the colonisers’ way of life in the hope that ‘at some future period he may be a useful member of society.’40 Within about eighteen months, as Eliza reported, he had begun both reading and waiting at table. According to Samuel, writing in 1799, he had ‘become useful in the

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37 Macquarie to Bathurst, 8 June 1816, HRA series 1 vol.9, pp. 139-145.
38 Aboriginal children ‘adopted’ by colonists during the late 1790s and early 1800s included, among many others: James Bath, who lived with the convict George Bath after his parents were shot by settlers near Toongabbee; an unnamed child ‘rescued’ by Thomas Rickerby; the youth ‘Daniel’ who resided with the botanist George Caley; and Tjedboro, who lived with the Macarthurs at Parramatta. See Sydney Gazette, 2 December 1804, 11 August 1805; Alan Atkinson, The Europeans in Australia volume one: The Beginning, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1997, pp. 167, 290; ‘Reverend Samuel Marsden’s report to Archdeacon Scott,’ p. 348.
39 Sydney Gazette, 2 December 1804.
40 Eliza Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 1 May 1796, in Mackaness, Some Private Correspondence, p. 15; Sydney Gazette, 2 December 1804.
family’ and could ‘speak the English language very well.’\footnote{Marsden to William Wilberforce, 1799, BT Box 49, Mitchell Library, p. 77.} Significantly, one of the proofs of Tristan’s improvement was his capacity for domestic work. A value for industry informed Marsden’s intervention into his life and defined his vision for Tristan’s transformation into a civilised member of the labouring class. And like other early colonists, the chaplain was for some time optimistic that Aboriginal people might be civilised by being taught to work.\footnote{For other examples of such hopes, see \textit{Sydney Gazette}, 2 December 1804 and generally Richard White, \textit{On Holidays: a history of getting away in Australia}, Pluto Press, Sydney, 2005, pp. 35-50}

Marsden’s hopes for Tristan were eventually disappointed, though. As Yarwood has documented, he ran away when aged about eighteen years. As the senior chaplain’s son-in-law Thomas Hassall later explained, Tristan fell under ‘the dire influence’ of some convict servants and was ‘taught all that was bad’ – including idle habits, perhaps. Convict influence on Aboriginal people was something Marsden and other would-be civilisers deeply feared. As the chaplain put it in later years, ‘the prospect must always be very discouraging to a Missionary in the neighbourhood of any European settlement, the influence of the settlers and their Servants will counteract in great measure all the efforts for the good of the Natives.’\footnote{‘Reverend Samuel Marsden’s report to Archdeacon Scott ,’ p. 347.} Marsden feared for Tristan’s character and continued progress in civilisation. When the chaplain and his family sailed for England in 1807, he ‘took the lad with him trusting that he would be rescued from his old companions and brought to see the evil of his ways, repent and turn from them.’ In the course of the voyage, however, Tristan was ‘thrown in the way of temptation and got drunk for which he was punished. In Rio de Janeiro he robbed his master of a considerable sum of money and ran off.’\footnote{Undated (and unsigned) note by Thomas Hassall, Hassall Correspondence, vol.2, A1677-2, Mitchell Library, Sydney; Eliza Marsden to Hassall, 9 January 1808, Hassall Family Papers and correspondence, vol.1, p174, A859, Mitchell Library, Sydney.} Tristan’s version of events does not survive, but perhaps his escape can be read as a refusal to transform himself, according to Marsden’s desires, into a member of the labouring class. It is very possible that he resented the definition of civilisation and particularly the servant-master relationship which the chaplain appears to have imposed on him. Conflict over the expectation of industriousness and his performance of ‘useful’ work may have contributed to the breakdown of relations between the young man and his clerical host.
The search for Tristan was unsuccessful and the chaplain’s family eventually sailed on to England without him. But Marsden did not abandon all hope. He left instructions that if Tristan were found, he be offered the opportunity to return ‘to New South Wales and work at the farm.’\footnote{Eliza Marsden to Hassall, 9 January 1808, Hassall Family Papers, vol.1, p. 174, A859, Mitchell Library.} The chaplain apparently persevered with his vision for Aboriginal industry and entertained the idea that Tristan would yet find redemption by returning to civilisation and labouring on the land. Within a few years, however, any such hope had been extinguished. Tristan was recognised in Rio by the Marsdens’ friend John Piper and brought back to the colony in a diseased and miserable state.\footnote{Undated (and unsigned) note by Thomas Hassall, Hassall Correspondence, vol.2, A1677-2, Mitchell Library; Yarwood, \textit{Samuel Marsden}, pp. 112-3.} There, he reverted to the bush and revealed no inclination for the working ways of the whites. The young man turned his back on the future his would-be civilisers had planned for him, leaving the chaplain and his wife to draw the conclusion that ‘he [will] never do any good for himself.’\footnote{Eliza Marsden to Hassall, 9 January 1808, Hassall Family Papers, vol.1, p. 174, A859, Mitchell Library; Yarwood, \textit{Samuel Marsden}, p. 113.}

Marsden was deeply disappointed by his failure to introduce Tristan to the ways of the colonists. But the experience did not dissuade him from adopting further children and attempting to impart British civilisation to them. In 1826, the chaplain described the fate of ‘the Native Harry,’ who probably grew up with Tristan since he had ‘lived in my family 30 years ago for a considerable time.’ To the Anglican Archdeacon T. H. Scott, Marsden gave this revealing account:

‘He learned to speak our language and while he was with me behaved well. I entertained great hopes that from conversing with him upon the comforts of Civil Life, the nature of our Religion, and such subjects as I thought were best calculated to enlarge his mind, he might become civilized. But at length he joined the Natives in the Woods... and he never seems to think he lost anything by living in the woods.’\footnote{‘Reverend Samuel Marsden’s report to Archdeacon Scott,’ p. 347.}
Ten years later in 1836, Marsden expressed his deep disappointment with an Aboriginal child – possibly Harry or someone else – who had lived with him ‘entirely from his mother’s breast until he was about 12 years old’ and yet ‘retained his native disposition.’ Marsden’s personal experience of attempting to civilise the Aborigines was very disappointing indeed.

By the very act of adopting Tristan and other Aboriginal children, Marsden indicated that, like the many other colonists who incorporated Aboriginal people into their households, he considered his own way of life far superior to theirs. He clearly intended to impart something of his civilisation to them. But his relationship with Tristan, to a far greater extent than Johnson’s with Booron, was particularly defined by issues of industry, idleness and work. Marsden’s interaction with him was generally directed towards his transformation into a civilised member of the labouring class, who would contribute to colonial society primarily by performing useful work. And although there is far less extant evidence for Marsden’s relations with the other Aboriginal children who resided for a time in his house, it is probable that his dealings with them were similarly concerned with the inculcation of good habits and efficient methods of work. Work was certainly necessary to obtain to the material comforts of civil life to which he sought to introduce Harry. Marsden’s personal interactions with individual Aborigines and especially Tristan suggest that, although ultimately disappointed, he understood the inculcation of industrious habits and acquisition of agricultural skill as essential to the civilisation of the Aborigines and their progress out of darkness into light.

The importance of diligent labour to Marsden’s ideas about the civilisation of indigenes is very clear in his interactions with the Maori. They attracted his attention and civilising interest very early in his colonial career. He first encountered Maori during his short stay on Norfolk Island during 1795, and became familiar with several individuals including the young chief Ruatara who shared his Parramatta house when visiting Port Jackson in

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49 Marsden to Coates, 23 February 1836, BT Box 54 p1881. Marsden is evidently discussing an Aborigine other than Tristan, as Tristan was seventeen or eighteen years old when he ran away, though Yarwood appears to have confused the two.
Governor King’s time. The initial study the chaplain made of their ‘natural dispositions’ fully persuaded him that the New Zealanders were ‘capable of any instruction that the civilised world would impart to them.’ ‘The more I examined into their national character the more I felt interested in their temporal and spiritual welfare,’ he reflected in later years. ‘Their minds appeared like a rich soil that had never been cultivated, and only wanted the proper means of improvement to render them fit to rank with civilised nations.’

Impressed by their apparent openness to civilizing influences, Marsden undertook to train Maori leaders in agriculture and other arts. Chiefs who visited him at Parramatta were presented with the spectacle of ‘the various works that are going on in the smiths’ and carpenters’ shops, the spinning and weaving, brick making and building houses, together with all the operations of agriculture and gardening.’ On his first visit to New Zealand, made late in 1814, he found that the Maori ‘rose at the dawn of day, both men and women,’ and busied themselves ‘making baskets for potatoes ... dressing flax or making clothing; at least none remained unemployed.’ Their work ethic led him to hope that, with British missionary guidance, the Maori would ‘improve their own country’ and raise their standard of civilisation – developments which he expected would pave the way for their embrace of the Christian Gospel when it was at last proclaimed to them. He established a mission in Ruatara’s territory at the Bay of Islands and staffed it with

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51 Marsden to Bigge, 28 December 1819, BT Box 20, p3410-1; see also Marsden to the Church Missionary Society, 30 September 1814, in Elder, The Letters and Journals of Samuel Marsden, p.134.


54 Marsden’s first New Zealand journal (December 1814 - February 1815) in Elder, The Letters and Journals of Samuel Marsden, pp. 100, 129.

evangelical laymen skilled in agriculture and other trades. Although the recruitment of artisans rather than clergymen may have been partly pragmatic rather than entirely purposeful – no English cleric offered his services when he sought missionaries for the venture – Marsden declared himself well satisfied when the carpenter William Hall and the rope maker and flax dresser John King volunteered to go: ‘I conceived that they, like Caleb and Joshua of old, might open the way for others at a future time to take possession of the land.’

In contrast to the ‘active and industrious’ New Zealanders, though, the native Australians appeared naturally idle and reluctant to work. Whereas Ruatara and other Maori appeared ‘fully convinced that the wealth and happiness of a country depended greatly on the produce of its soil’ and consequently enthusiastic in their work, Aboriginal people did not. Perhaps the Aborigines were so implacably idle, he wondered, that they were impossible to civilise? ‘As far as my own observation and experience go,’ he wrote in 1826, ‘it appears to me an almost an hopeless task.’ His endeavours to introduce Tristan, Harry and other Aboriginal children to the ways of the colonists had led him to the simple conclusion that ‘the civilization of the Aborigines is a very difficult experiment.’ ‘Whether anything can be done for these degraded Tribes I have my doubts,’ he confessed to the secretary of the Church Missionary Society, Dandison Coates, around that time. ‘It is our duty to try what we can do. The time may come when they may feel more wants than they do at present. [But] they seem to have all they wish for, Idleness and Independence.’

A. T. Yarwood was right to suggest that it was during the first two decades of Marsden’s colonial residence, when Tristan and other Aboriginal children shared a house with him, that he arrived at the conclusion that indigenous Australians were incapable of civilisation. Crucially, though, it was a conviction informed by his personal failure to effect their transformation in terms of inculcating industrious habits and making ‘useful’

58 ‘Reverend Samuel Marsden’s report to Archdeacon Scott,’ p. 347.
people of those who appeared to him originally idle. Industriousness was one of his key measures of civilisation, as his very different judgements of Maori and Aboriginal people indicate. It is significant, furthermore, that his early disappointment with Tristan and others caused him to reconsider the Aborigines' capacity for improvement rather than reassess his ideas about industrious labour, upon which his measure of civilisation was substantially based. His sense of failure in civilising the Aborigines did not unsettle his work ethic. Rather, the Maoris’ conformity to his ideal of diligent, productive labour fuelled his missionary exertions among them, while the Aborigines’ unwillingness to become workers sharpened his impression of them as virtually impossible to civilise. Marsden’s Protestant work values galvanised his view of the Aborigines’ savagery.

Marsden’s estimation of the Australian Aborigines as a stubbornly savage race was not entirely in keeping with the prevailing ideas of his time. In the late 1810s and 1820s, when his firmly settled and very negative opinion of their capacity for civilisation became widely known, most others directly involved in such matters were optimistic about the improvement of ‘the natives.’ Both his missionary society correspondents and his co-religionists in the colony tended to uphold the biblical account of the common origins, and thus the common humanity, of all people.60 Many also took hold of the biblical promise that people of every tribe, tongue and language would one day bow before the heavenly throne of God in the company of the redeemed, and committed themselves to the spread of Christianity and civilisation among the Aborigines.61 Such convictions could provide a theoretical basis for the view that Aboriginal people were capable of civilisation and the expectation that many would eventually embrace it. Among Marsden’s educated contemporaries at the decision-making tip of colonial society, such views and expectations were buoyed by the improving ethos of the enlightenment. The evolutionary models of social development propagated by Scottish theorists gave particular shape to the way colonial leaders including Lachlan Macquarie expected the Aborigines would be civilised.62

61 See for example William Grant Broughton, A Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of New South Wales: at the Primary Visitation, holden at Sydney in the Church of St James on Thursday the 3rd December 1829, Sydney, 1830, pp. 28-33.
Though he held the orthodox Christian view of the unity of humankind and was himself an improver, especially in relation to the productions of the land, Marsden had no such confidence. He stopped short of categorically denying the possibility of the improvement of the Aborigines, but even in the most positive statement he made on the subject at any time during the 1820s, he used a familiar agricultural image to suggest their civilisation required nothing less than the intervention of God: ‘It is our duty to sow the seed and patiently to wait, like the Husbandman, for the fertilizing showers from Heaven, which alone can make it vegetate.’ His strict insistence upon diligent labour as a measure of civilisation had led him to conclude that the colonists’ efforts would do little to civilise the Aborigines, even though most of his contemporaries were optimistic about the improvement of the natives in New South Wales.

Lachlan Macquarie, who arrived in Sydney as the colony’s new governor in late 1809, was among those who made a substantial attempt to civilise ‘this Uncultivated Race.’ In his first major statement on the subject, written in 1814, he articulated the view that despite their present ‘Wild wandering and Unsettled Habits,’ the Aborigines might in time be ‘properly cultivated and encouraged’ to become ‘useful to the Country according to their capabilities either as labourers in agricultural employ or among the lower class of mechanics.’ Though admittedly prone to ‘great indolence’ and indeed to ‘wasting’ their lives in wandering through their native woods, they might be encouraged to settle down and cultivate the land and their children brought up ‘to habits of industry and decency,’ he said. For these unenlightened people to become civilised, he explained, they must be taught to prefer ‘the productive Effects of their own Labour and Industry to the Wild and precarious Pursuits of the Woods.’

Useful labour was at the heart of the former missionary William Shelley’s plan for civilising the Aborigines too. In 1814 he proposed to found a school in which Aboriginal students would be taught ‘reading, writing, or religious education, the Boys manual car ts etc., the Girls sewing, knitting, or such useful

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63 ‘Reverend Samuel Marsden’s report to Archdeacon Scott,’ p. 349.
64 Macquarie to Bathurst, 8 October 1814, HRA series 1 vol.8 pp. 368-70.
employments as are suitable for them.’ In his view, the main problem with the colonists’ previous attempts to improve Aborigines was that the more civilised individuals could not procure European marriage partners and consequently reverted to the bush, within a few years, to find companions of their own kind. As other historians have noted, Shelley’s understanding of the colonists’ past failures as well as the methods he considered most likely to achieve future success were concerned with the issue of marriage and expressed complicated assumptions about race, class and gender. But his proposals also indicate that he ascribed great significance to the civilising value of useful work. The main reason he offered for the failure of ‘civilised’ Aborigines to secure white wives was that they had no ‘means of supporting themselves in their improved habits.’ ‘They learned neither mechanical arts nor manual labour, so as to make them pleasant or useful’ to potential European brides. In Shelley’s view, the apparently civilised Aborigines of earlier years had lacked the work skills and the work ethic to win a suitable partner, and their consequent inability to be useful and respected in colonial society contributed to their reversion to their uncivilised mode of life.

Shelley’s proposed school pleased Governor Macquarie and a Native Institution was opened at Parramatta in January 1815. Around the same time the Governor also allotted a piece of land on the northern shore of the harbour to ‘a few of the adult natives who have promised to settle there and cultivate the grounds.’ He furnished sixteen Aboriginal families with agricultural tools and a boat for fishing in the hope that they would ‘become industrious and set a good example to the other Native Tribes.’ He initially thought they had settled ‘permanently’ on the designated farm, but a year later he


67 Shelley to Macquarie, 8 April 1814, HRA series 1 vol.8 pp. 370-1.


69 Macquarie to Bathurst, 8 October 1814, HRA series 1 vol.8 pp. 368-70; Macquarie to Bathurst, 24 March 1815, HRA vol.8 p. 467.
confessed that civilizing the Aborigines might be ‘a more arduous task than I at first imagined.’ His efforts were complicated by the deterioration of race relations more generally. Several recent and very violent encounters between colonists and ‘the mountain tribes’ had prompted him to despatch the troops ‘so as to strike them with terror against committing similar acts of violence in future.’ At least nineteen Aborigines were wounded or killed. Macquarie also issued a proclamation justifying the reprisals and forbidding Aborigines from carrying weapons in the vicinity of settlers’ farms, and at the same time resolved to persevere with his original plan ‘of endeavouring to domesticate and civilise these wild rude people’ through the Native Institution and the designated farms. He hoped to placate the most threatening Aborigines by force of arms and to civilise the others in part by encouraging them to settle on and invest agricultural labour into the ground.

The assumption that the acquisition of industrious habits and especially the diligent performance of agricultural work would lead to the Aborigines’ civilisation also informed the proposals made by the Anglican cleric Robert Cartwright in 1819. In order to ‘ameliorate the situation of the Natives and convey education and habits of industry to the young,’ as he put it to the Governor late that year, land should be reserved for them in a fertile place at some distance from the colonists’ main settlements, a village erected and agricultural improvements encouraged there. He thought his plan for the formation of ‘a settlement and a seminary for these black natives, on a good solid plan for their improvement in the knowledge of our useful arts, as well as in the knowledge and practise of our most holy religion,’ was sure to succeed. The boys and girls who lived on the specially reserved land would be usefully employed ‘till they become Men and Women and are inclined to be or capable of becoming Settlers.’ Upon their marriage, they would be given ‘a small portion of this land with stock and other necessaries ... according to their merit,’ he explained.

70 Macquarie to Bathurst, 8 June 1816, *HRA* vol.9 p. 140.
71 Macquarie to Bathurst, 18 March 1816, 25 May 1816, and 8 June 1816, *HRA* vol.9 pp. 54, 139-145.
72 Macquarie to Bathurst, 24 February 1820, *HRA* vol.10 pp. 262-3.
73 Cartwright to Macquarie, 6 December 1819, *HRA* vol.10 pp. 263-5
Cartwright’s proposals were never carried into effect, but they confirm that Marsden was by no means alone in placing great weight on Aboriginal industry and idleness during the 1810s and early 1820s. The encouragement of industry and the investment of labour into the land had a significant place in the discussion of how to civilise the natives of New South Wales. Governor Macquarie, Mr Shelley and Reverend Cartwright tended to agree that labour was rightly invested into the cultivation of the ground and that it typically had an improving effect not only on the land but upon the people who performed such work. They also shared the fear that, without industrious habits, the Aborigines would fail to fit into colonial society as the British envisaged it, and instead remain idle, unsettled and continue to ‘waste’ their lives. Their common assumptions indicate that, in general terms, a Protestant value for diligent labour, infused with the improving ethos of the enlightenment, informed the discussion of how the British might civilise Aboriginal people and manage their relationship to the land that the colonists now considered their own.

Like many other would-be civilisers of his time, Marsden affirmed that productive labour was essential for the Aborigines’ progress in civilisation and integration into colonial society. But his previous experience had left its mark: he did not share with Macquarie or the other clergy the confidence that the Aborigines could be effectually encouraged to work. When the Governor first signalled his intention to establish an institution for ‘Black natives’ along the lines proposed by Shelley in 1814, the chaplain remarked that ‘I thought an experiment might be made by taking a farm near the flats belonging to the Late Captain Kent near Parramatta river, on which there was some good stone Buildings which might be had for a low annual rent. I recommended this as an experiment.’ It was a response remarkable for its association of instruction with a farm, its assumption that little money should be spent, and its emphasis – suggestive of a lack of confidence in the scheme’s potential for success – on its nature as an experiment. As he recalled his views of 1814 twelve years later in 1826, he perceived considerable, even insurmountable barriers to the civilisation of the Aborigines. The greatest was that ‘they

75 Evidence of Reverend Samuel Marsden, 27 December 1820, in John Ritchie (ed), The Evidence to the Bigge Reports, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1971, vol.2 p. 120.
had no wants, they lived free and independent and thought little more of to-morrow than
the fowls of the air or the beasts of the field, and put no value on the comforts of civil
life.’ As a consequence of this, ‘they cannot be induced to form any industrious habits
to obtain them.’ Marsden approved ‘of some attempt being made, upon a regular plan,
to civilise them, as nothing of that kind had yet been done.’ But he questioned the
likelihood of the Native Institution’s success because he thought Aboriginal people
stubbornly ignorant of the comforts of civil life and incorrigibly idle as a result. His
opinions caused Macquarie great offence and the Governor pointedly overlooked him for
its managing committee.

Marsden was not completely alone in his estimation of Aboriginal people as implacably
opposed to work, though his views remained those of the minority during Macquarie’s
time. According to Archibald Bell, interviewed by Commissioner Bigge in 1819, it was
practicable to civilise the Aborigines ‘but not to bring them to habits of industry.’ In
Bell’s experience they would occasionally work ‘for a short time’ when promised bread
and tobacco. But he doubted their capacity for European labour as he had only ever seen
‘some few reap and one or two hold the plough for amusement.’ The Sydney Gazette
also suggested that Aboriginal people could not be made to abandon their idle ways or
perform agricultural work. Its 1821 obituary for the Aboriginal man Nanbaree focused
almost exclusively on his attitudes to and performance of work. Nanbaree had been
‘taken from the woods’ into Surgeon White’s home at about the same time the Johnsons
adopted Booron, and been employed first as White’s gamekeeper and then as a sailor
under Captains Waterhouse and Flinders, the paper said. He had acquired a reputation for
his ‘orderly behaviour,’ ‘uncommon alertness’ and ‘strict attention’ to his duties, and
seemed to have embraced civilised ways. But upon his return from the sea, ‘he betook
himself to his native wilds’ in the vicinity of James Squire’s residence at Kissing Point.
Although Squire sought ‘to rescue him from wretchedness’ by giving him ‘amusing
employment, accompanied with plenty of indulgence’ whenever he occasionally emerged

76 Marsden, *An Answer to Certain Calumnies in the late Governor Macquarie’s Pamphlet and the third
dition of Mr Wentworth’s Account of Australasia*, J. Hatchard & Son, London, 1826, p. 68. For a very
similar comment see ‘Reverend Samuel Marsden’s report to Archdeacon Scott,’ p. 347.
77 ‘Reverend Samuel Marsden’s report to Archdeacon Scott,’ p. 347.
78 Marsden, *An Answer to Certain Calumnies*, p. 68.
79 Evidence of Lieutenant Archibald Bell, 27 November 1819, in Ritchie, *The Evidence to the Bigge
Reports*, vol.1 p. 173.
from the bush, it ‘all proved unavailing’ in the end. Nanbaree died apparently unreformed at the age of approximately 37 years and was buried in the same place as Bennelong and Barangaroo on Squire’s estate. To the Gazette it was clear that his ‘ancestral habits’ were ‘too indelibly engendered ever to be eradicated by human effort, however strained in its benevolent design.’

Others of Marsden’s contemporaries were confident that the Aborigines could be civilised, including by being taught to work. In March 1819, Macquarie boasted to Lord Bathurst that the Native Institution’s interns were making ‘very great Progress.’ Two years later, the Reverend Richard Hill married two female graduates to Aboriginal men to whom the Governor promised the utensils of civilisation as understood by the colonists: a cow, agricultural tools and a ten acre farm on the Richmond Road at the place that became known as Black Town. In 1822, the Native Institution itself was relocated there. Protestant missionaries also endeavoured to civilise the Aborigines in that period. The Wesleyan Missionary Society, having supported a ministry to the colonists since 1815, turned its attention to ‘the black natives of New South Wales’ in 1820. Between 1821 and 1826, their first missionary William Walker conducted a fairly mobile ministry among the Aborigines of the Sydney area, though his vision for the formation of a self-sufficient agricultural settlement is apparent in his request that his supporters send out ‘axes, adzes, saws and other carpenters tools; spaces, hoes of different sizes, rakes and implements of husbandry.’ The London Missionary Society established a mission at Lake Macquarie in 1824, run by the Congregationalist Lancelot Threlkeld. The Church Missionary Society, supported by evangelical Anglicans, established a mission at the Wellington Valley in 1832. These ventures eventually encountered considerable difficulties and all had been closed by the early 1840s, but they nevertheless reflect the

80 Sydney Gazette, 8 September 1821. Nanbaree is referred to in the article by the name that Surgeon White gave him, Andrew Snape Hammond Douglass White.

81 Macquarie to Bathurst, 24 March 1819, HRA vol. 10 p. 95.

82 Brook and Kohen, The Parramatta Native Institution, p. 83.

83 See generally Carey, Believing in Australia, pp. 53-63, 77; Reece, Aborigines and Colonists.


widespread optimism of the 1820s and early 1830s that the Aborigines could be successfully introduced to the religion and civilisation of the colonists.

Marsden was notorious for his scepticism concerning these government and missionary schemes. When he did not attend the annual meetings that Macquarie convened at Parramatta for the distribution of blankets to Aborigines, contemporaries interpreted it as evidence of his ‘marked disinclination ... to countenance any efforts towards the civilisation of the Natives of this Country.’ In 1823, the Methodist minister Walter Lawry complained that ‘Mr Marsden has completely blocked up brother Walker’s mission to the Aborigines.’ In 1826, Lancelot Threlkeld was emphatic on the same point. He had been struck by Marsden’s ‘total indifference to the Aboriginal concern from the very first.’ ‘I repeatedly urged his attention [to it] ... we dined together at my home but no, not a word could I draw out.’ ‘In fact our ideas are widely different. Our object is first Christianity and civilisation will follow – whatever his are, they are not these.’

The senior chaplain aroused the deep resentment of people who attempted to civilise the Aborigines because of his settled conviction that their exertions could not succeed. It was an opinion he stated repeatedly during the 1820s. A missionary organisation should not form a ‘settlement amongst the natives without any prospect of rendering them much service,’ he told Dandison Coates of the CMS in 1827. ‘I do not think it prudent to run to any heavy expense with the Aborigines in the present state – the Wesleyan and the London Missionary Societies have expended very considerable sums to little purpose.’ Two years later he wrote yet again that there was not ‘the smallest prospect of doing any good to the Aborigines. I therefore felt it my duty to oppose [the foundation of another establishment] from principle. I should rejoice if there was any opening for them, but there is none.’ Though an evangelical Anglican himself, he declined to support the

86 J. T. Campbell to Macquarie, 31 March 1819, HRA series 1 vol.10 p. 140.
87 Walter Lawry to the General Committee, 20 November 1823, BT Box 52 p. 1330, Mitchell Library.
88 Threlkeld to Burden, 27 March 1826, BT Box 53 p. 1617, Mitchell Library.
89 Marsden to D. Coates, 16 May 1827, BT Box 53 pp. 1762-3, Mitchell Library.
90 Marsden to Edward Bickersteth, 24 February 1829, BT Box 54, p. 1836, Mitchell Library.
efforts of his co-religionists to establish a mission among the Aborigines. His close identification of work with civilisation informed his view of such efforts as futile.

In their exertions on behalf of the Aborigines, the government and the missionary societies drew support from the increasing interest of British humanitarians in the colony. From the mid 1820s to the high point of its influence in the late 1830s, humanitarianism directly informed colonial policy concerning Aborigines. In 1825, the newly appointed Governor Ralph Darling was officially instructed to ‘prevent and restrain all violence and injustice’ against ‘the native inhabitants’, and to actively encourage their ‘conversion to the Christian Faith’ and their ‘advancement in Civilization.’\(^91\) In 1834, Darling’s successor Richard Bourke was similarly advised of the House of Commons’ desire to promote civilisation and ‘the peaceful and voluntary reception of the Christian Religion’ throughout the empire and at the same time to ‘secure to the Natives the due observance of justice and the protection of their rights.’\(^92\) Such concerns were particularly prominent in the Select Committee on Aborigines’ evidence and report, transmitted to Bourke’s successor George Gipps in early 1838 with a despatch from the Colonial Secretary urging ‘the adoption of some plan for the better protection and civilization of the Native Tribes within the limits of your Government.’\(^93\) The report itself declared that ‘the native inhabitants of any land have an incontrovertible right to their own soil,’ though the colonists of New South Wales had in practice ‘utterly disregarded’ that right.\(^94\) It recommended the appointment of ‘Protectors of Aborigines’ whose responsibilities should include protecting them from cruelty, injustice and encroachments upon their property, encouraging them in ‘such employment’ as was ‘least foreign’ to their habits and disposition, and claiming ‘for the maintenance of the Aborigines such lands as may be necessary for their support.’\(^95\)


\(^92\) Spring Rice to Bourke, 1 August 1834, *HRA* series 1 vol. 17 p. 491; Reece, *Aborigines and Colonists*, p. 118.


\(^95\) ‘Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines,’ 1837, pp. 83-4.
Several historians have noticed that such directives from Britain were generally supported by humanitarian administrators and missionaries but contested by many other colonists.\(^{96}\) Marsden considered plans for the Aborigines’ Christianisation and civilisation rather coolly, but not because he rejected the humanitarian perspective completely. He in fact had a number of friends and acquaintances among the English evangelical humanitarians. He was associated with Wilberforce and others prominent in the abolitionist movement from the outset of his clerical career.\(^{97}\) From the colony, Marsden sought Wilberforce’s support for his own ‘humane undertakings’ on behalf of ‘the rising generation’ of colonists, particularly the construction of schools and the foundation of an orphan establishment.\(^{98}\) For thirty years until the mid 1820s, he also kept the politician informed of the moral and religious condition of the colony and enjoined him to exert his influence to encourage its progress.\(^{99}\) From at least the late 1810s, Marsden was also in correspondence with Buxton, to whom, on his own initiative at the time of the Select Committee on Aborigines, he addressed an account of the violent acts committed by British subjects against New Zealanders.\(^{100}\) A considerable portion of Marsden’s correspondence with the Church Missionary Society was also brought before Buxton’s committee by Dandison Coates as evidence of the cruel and even murderous behaviour of Europeans towards the Maori.\(^{101}\) The chaplain consistently urged both the local and imperial governments to punish the offenders and provide legal security to ‘this fine race of men’ that they might continue to improve in ‘morals and civilisation.’\(^{102}\)

Marsden and his missionary-minded humanitarian friends shared many values and worked together to extend civilisation and Christianity to the Maori of New Zealand, but

\(^{96}\) See Lester, ‘British Settler Discourse,’ pp.32-7; Elbourne, ‘The Sin of the Settler,’ pars.30-1.

\(^{97}\) Yarwood, \textit{Samuel Marsden}, pp. 9, 12-21.

\(^{98}\) Samuel Marsden to William Wilberforce, 6 February 1800, BT Box 49, pp. 80-1, Mitchell Library. Note also Marsden to Wilberforce 1799, 17 August 1801 and 7 July 1810, in BT Box 49, pp. 74-89, Mitchell Library.

\(^{99}\) See Yarwood, \textit{Samuel Marsden}, pp. 73, 74, 91, 130, 133, 154-5, 182,188, 192, 213-14, 246-50.

\(^{100}\) On Marsden’s correspondence with Buxton in 1819, see Yarwood, \textit{Samuel Marsden}, pp. 213-14. For his letter to the Select Committee, see Marsden to Buxton, 11 February 1835, in ‘Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines,’ \textit{British Parliamentary Papers}, 1836 (538), vol. VII, pp. 684-5


\(^{102}\) Marsden to Darling, 18 April 1831 and Marsden to Buxton, 11 February 1835, in ‘Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines,’ \textit{British Parliamentary Papers}, 1836 (538), vol. VII , pp. 482-484, 684-5.
their opinions diverged dramatically on missionary contact with Aborigines. His correspondent Dandison Coates did not present Buxton’s committee with any of his letters on that subject. And although Marsden had repeatedly stated to the CMS his view that such missions were not at all likely to succeed, Coates told Buxton that the British Government should increase its assistance to the Wellington Valley mission and invest heavily in the introduction of Aboriginal people to Christianity. Marsden’s views were out of step with those of his colleagues and friends but even at the height of evangelical humanitarian interest in the subject, the aging chaplain did not revise his attitudes to the Aborigines. ‘I have had but one opinion of the natives for more than twenty years,’ he wrote to Coates early in 1836, namely that ‘which I expressed very plainly to Governor Macquarie when he was Governor [and] which gave him much offence.’ If anything, he had become more convinced that his estimation of the Aborigines’ character and their incapacity for civilisation had been right. After expending several thousand pounds in providing victuals and clothes, in ‘giving the men and women land, and building comfortable cottages upon [it] and fencing their grounds,’ the whole of Macquarie’s plan ‘went to ruin,’ he went on. The Wesleyan and LMS missions had been similarly given up despite great expense. He interpreted the apparent failure of these schemes as proof that Aboriginal people were impossible to civilise. ‘They are totally different from every race of men that I have known,’ he told Coates. ‘Many natives belonging to the different islands have lived with me, but all were full of wants and capable of improvements.’ It seemed all he could do to hope that ‘the day may come when [Aboriginal people] will think and act differently.’

Although the missionaries themselves, and many scholars since, came to accept the idea that the early missions had failed, recent work by historians including Richard Broome and Jessie Mitchell has offered a far more complex account of the cultural and personal interaction that occurred between missionaries and Aborigines in the early colonial period than the categories of ‘failure’ and ‘success’ allow. In his own time, however,}

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104 Marsden to D. Coates, 23 February 1836, BT Box 54 pp. 1880-1, Mitchell Library.
105 Marsden to D. Coates, 23 February 1836, BT Box 54 p. 1882, Mitchell Library.
Marsden evaluated the character and consequences of the colonists’ first formal attempts to civilise and Christianise the Aborigines in precisely those terms. Importantly, his measure of success and failure not only reflected British notions of civilisation and evangelical standards of conversion, but a particular value for agricultural industry and diligent work. He considered the colonists’ efforts to have failed largely because they had not ‘induced [the Aborigines] to form industrious habits.’ They had not been made to attach themselves to one place or to desire those goods that they might obtain only by participating in the colonial economy specifically by labouring. ‘I cannot see how these impediments are to be removed,’ he wrote tiredly two years before his death.

In the particular circumstances of the colony, Marsden came to closely associate virtue and civilisation with diligent labour, particularly in the agricultural sphere. He placed great value on industriousness, and this helps explain the divergence of his views on the civilisation of Aboriginal people from those of his British evangelical contemporaries during the 1830s. His early experience of failure in personally attempting to civilise Aboriginal children was reinforced by his impression of the failure of government and missionary experiments. He concluded that Aboriginal people could not be taught to perform useful work. Their apparently incorrigible idleness meant they could not be integrated into civilised society. From the mid-point to the very end of his colonial ministry, his strict insistence upon the importance and virtue of industry provided a foundation for his implacable disdain for them. His Protestant work values, in short, contributed to the hardening of his ideas about race.

Marsden’s work values and his impression of the Aborigines’ idleness had further consequences: it led him to advocate their alienation from the land. This is clearest in his response to the missionary societies’ schemes. Christian contemporaries who maintained some hope that the Aborigines could be transformed into agricultural labourers and generally encouraged to become more civilised, suggested that the government reserve extensive tracts of land for them. Cartwright, for example, had proposed that ten thousand acres of land be reserved in a fertile place for the Aborigines’ ‘permanent...
benefit’, and suggested that, upon their acquisition of industrious inclinations and their expression of a desire to settle, the land should be given over to them in individual lots.\(^{109}\) Although he proposed that the Aborigines be granted land on conditions that effectively amounted to the abandonment of their existing culture and traditional ways – on the condition of their progress towards civilisation, he would have said – he nevertheless had their possession of land in contemplation.

By contrast, Marsden considered that all land should be occupied and utilised by Europeans rather than by indigenous people themselves. Even those tracts set aside expressly for the Aborigines’ benefit should not be a home to them, or a resource from which they might derive sustenance in their own way or even a site upon which missionaries might teach them to perform agricultural work. In his view the Aborigines were implacably idle and incapable of participating as either producers or even consumers in the rural economy he envisioned for New South Wales. He saw neither need nor reason to grant them land or to dedicate resources to the attempt to civilise them. When he heard in 1827 that the Colonial Office intended to make the Church Missionary Society a ten thousand acre grant, he advised the Society to protest against any clause that would prevent it ‘from allowing individuals to feed their cattle and sheep on this land, or to make any use of it but for the natives.’ Rather, ‘the trustees should be authorised to rent any part of it for grazing or any other purpose of agriculture, to raise a fund for clothing and victualling the Aborigines and to support a missionary and his family. Unless government grant it upon this just and liberal principle it will be of no benefit,’ he declared. He agreed that the money raised from the land should be applied ‘to the sole benefit of the Aborigines,’ but was emphatic on the point that ‘it can be of no advantage to possess land unless it can be made use of.’\(^{110}\) It was an argument based on the assumption that the Aborigines did not and could not make use of the land, and therefore had no interest in it. It was an argument that explicitly affirmed the appropriation of the land by Europeans who would invest labour into the soil, improve its productions and generate wealth for themselves and the colony from it.

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\(^{109}\) Macquarie to Bathurst, 24 February 1820, *HRA* vol.10 pp. 262-3; Cartwright to Macquarie, 6 December 1819, *HRA* vol.10 pp. 263-5

\(^{110}\) Marsden to Edward Bickersteth, 12 November 1827, BT Box 53 pp. 1778-9, Mitchell Library.
In the years after Marsden’s death in 1838, ideas similar to those he had expressed in the 1810s and 1820s became fairly widespread in the Australian colonies. Industriousness had been important to European attempts to ‘fit’ Aboriginal people into civilised society from the closing years of the eighteenth century. But it was not until the middle decades of the nineteenth that numerous colonists expressed the view that, despite the colonists’ best efforts, the Aborigines could not be made to settle on the land, induced to work or effectively civilised.111 ‘Above all, they are averse to continued toil and industry,’ stated Governor Hutt from the Swan River colony in 1842. ‘The question of civilisation or non-civilisation can only be satisfactorily replied to by discovering some method of overcoming this repugnance to regular work.’112 From South Australia to Moreton Bay, colonists pronounced similar judgements on the Aborigines’ attitude to toil. They exhibited an ‘unconquerable indolence’ wrote one Protector, an ‘insuperable aversion to submit to the habits of civilised life’ including the performance of any kind of work, said a Commissioner of Crown Lands.113 Even the government and humanitarians in Britain conceded that their efforts had apparently failed. And as new racial ‘sciences’ such as phrenology emerged, such views about Aboriginal idleness were increasingly accompanied by the idea that the Aboriginal race occupied the lowest rung in the scale of civilisation, from which it could not be raised.114

The frequency with which colonists’ raised the subject of work and made allegations of idleness in accounting for their failure to ‘civilise’ the Aborigines suggests that the work values so closely associated with Protestantism were an important cultural and intellectual influence upon the hardening of the Europeans’ ideas about race. Notions of the value and virtue of productive industry and disciplined exertion, on the one hand, and the social injury and moral evil of idleness, on the other, had existed alongside the more open and flexible understandings of race common in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and clearly pre-dated the scientific racism so influential from the 1830s and 1840s. But such ideas were nevertheless easily attached to the new racial theories that emerged at that time, and provided positive reinforcement to them. The Aborigines’

112 Governor Hutt to Lord Stanley, 8 April 1842, cited in Reynolds, Dispossession, p. 128.
113 Reynolds, Dispossession, p. 129.
‘prevailing and characteristic vice and failing is indolence,’ a contributor to the *Colonial Literary Journal* explained to Australian readers in 1844. ‘By this we do not intend merely to imply the common acceptation of the word; but also that phrenologically speaking, their temperament partakes largely of the lymphatic quality.’ Such a passage exemplifies the way in which a fashionably ‘scientific’ explanation of the Aborigines’ allegedly degraded state could be advanced on the basis of their apparent unwillingness and even inability to perform productive physical work. The value that colonists so frequently ascribed to diligent toil informed their very negative estimations of the Aborigines’ capacity for civilisation and underpinned their increasingly inflexible impression of the Aborigines’ savagery. Marsden had been one of the colony’s leading advocates of such views throughout his colonial career and, in this very unfortunate respect, had been years ahead of his time.

The significance of industry and idleness to the colonists’ increasingly inflexible ideas about race must complicate our understanding of the contribution of Protestant values to both the interaction between Britons and Aborigines in nineteenth century Australia and the former’s appropriation of the land. The humanitarian impulse of some British evangelicals led them to concern themselves with issues ‘of justice and humanity,’ to announce the Aborigines’ ‘inalienable right to their own soil’ and to advocate their protection in the enjoyment of it. But the work values of some of their co-religionists in the colony led them to dismiss the Aborigines as idle wanderers and act in ways that profoundly undermined their ancient associations with the land. Protestant principles and social values could inspire humanitarian movements for the recognition of land rights, and at the same time inform the colonists’ attitudes to indigenous peoples and the issue of land in other less positive ways. In Marsden’s case, a religious value for industry not only aligned him with the penal authorities in opposition to the convicts under his spiritual charge, but proved a point of cultural conflict between him and indigenous peoples of Australia. His insistence that productive labour in the agricultural sphere was essential for the colony’s progress in prosperity, combined with his sense that the Aborigines could not be made to acquire industrious habits or to perform useful work, led

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him to disregard entirely any claim they had to the soil and even to oppose schemes that placed them in practical possession of the land. As the British extended their hold over the territory of New South Wales, Marsden’s work values helped identify him with colonial power in opposition to the Aborigines’ ancient occupation of the land and traditional way of life. The Protestant work ethic, in this sense, provided moral and intellectual support to their dispossession.
CHAPTER SIX

Church and Country

William Grant Broughton’s travels in eastern Australia

In late June 1829, the convict ship *John* rounded the West African coast and plunged southwards across the Atlantic Ocean, bound for Botany Bay. William Grant Broughton was on board, reading to pass the time as he, like the convict prisoners, endured the journey to his place of exile. It had been difficult to leave old England. Like Johnson four decades earlier, he had accepted the offer of a clerical position in the colony with some hesitancy. New South Wales was not as unknown to Britons then as it had been to the first fleeters and their chaplain. But Broughton was nine years older than Johnson at the time he embarked and, for him, relocating to the colony involved uprooting an established family – his wife Sarah and their surviving children Emily and Phoebe. Broughton sailed with an aching sense of separation from his ‘many dear friends and connections,’ from ‘places with which [he] had been familiar from infancy’ and from the site of his beloved son’s grave. From the deck of the *John*, he watched his homeland slip away until the tip of the last lighthouse ‘disappeared in the waves.’ He wrote down his melancholy feelings in the pages of his journal, along with his comments on the progress of the ship, his descriptions of the storms and his thoughts on the books he read.¹

Friday, 26 June. A showery day of slow progress due to a faint and inconstant wind. Broughton had lately finished *A Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of

India, by the English missionary bishop Reginald Heber.² Published the year before, the Narrative had attracted the acclaim of the reading public and exhausted three editions in twelve months.³ An artefact of the missionary genre of travel literature that burgeoned in the early nineteenth century with the Protestant missionary movement itself, Heber’s Narrative established him as something of a celebrity.⁴ Broughton probably read his book for reasons other than fashion, though. Having worked six years for the East India Company in London before an unexpected inheritance enabled him to pursue his studies at Cambridge, he may have read it out of interest in the country Heber described.⁵ More probably, as a clergyman bound for the edge of the Empire, he read it in search of comfort, guidance or some word of wisdom to take ashore, should God in His goodness bring them all safely to Sydney Cove.

Dissuaded by the weather from ascending to the deck, Broughton settled himself at his desk to compose a response to what he had read. ‘I must confess myself somewhat disappointed,’ he began. The Narrative detailed Heber’s adventures galloping about Upper India escorted by ‘a train of armed followers travelling at full speed,’ pursuing ‘objects of curiosity,’ visiting temples and witnessing sacrifices. The descriptions were ‘entertaining and pleasing,’ but exposed behaviour Broughton judged irresponsible and inappropriate to Heber’s office. A visit to a temple was not an opportunity to take in the sights but to urge the people ‘to turn from idols to the living God.’ And although Heber’s motives ‘were undoubtedly most pure and his intentions most charitable,’ he went on, ‘in reading his book ... I do not quite find my ideas of an apostolical Bishop

⁴ Heber’s fame certainly extended to New South Wales: Thomas Hassall named his church at Cobbitty ‘Heber Chapel’ in 1827 and the publication and contents of The Life of Reginald Heber, D. D., Lord Bishop of Calcutta, by his Widow, with Selections from his Correspondence, unpublished Poems and Private Papers: together with a Journal of his Tour in Norway, Sweden, Russia and Germany; and a History of the Cossaks was reported at some length in the ‘literature’ column of the Sydney Gazette, 25 January 1831. He was also mentioned in Charles P. N. Wilton, ‘The Beauty of Order in the Church of England: A sermon preached in the parish church of St James Sydney on Thursday September 6, 1827’ in The Australian Quarterly Journal of theology, literature and science, vol. 1, January 1828, p. 12.
⁵ Broughton worked for the East India company April 1807 - early 1813. He later reflected on this period of his life as one of ‘hope deferred and disappointment.’ See Shaw, Patriarch and Patriot, pp. 3-5.
realised." The Bishop’s behaviour offended Broughton’s deeply held convictions about the importance and dignity of the episcopacy, convictions that distinguished the high church tradition of Anglican Protestantism with which he identified. It may also have reminded him of the numerous Evangelical Anglicans, Methodists and Dissenters in England who, in recent decades, had embraced itinerancy as a key method for communicating their message - sometimes at the expense of the more embedded Established Church. Confronted with the spectacle of Heber’s travels Broughton denounced clerical mobility in favour of a more settled ministry. ‘Rambling visitations’ were ‘wrong in principle, hurtful in effect,’ he declared in his journal. If a clergyman must take to the road, he should not do so in Heber’s ‘erratic’ manner: rushing from one place to another would never allow a him to ‘leave any very permanent impression’ on a community. Bishops should certainly remain ‘permanently settled somewhere during the greater portion of every year’ - even in expansive diocese such as Heber’s in India or, as it was soon to be, his own in Australia. And having settled his mind on the point, Broughton laid his pen to rest.

The tensions between mobility and stasis largely defined Broughton’s Australian ministry. He had been a parish minister for most of his early clerical career and placed great value on the parish church as a centre of religious and community life. He was also committed to the reformed English Church as the purest representative of Protestantism and to its structures, from the episcopacy at its peak to the local parish at its base, as essential elements of a healthy society. He looked to extend its influence and reproduce its hierarchies, and sailed towards Sydney with the settled intention to develop parishes rather than establish missions among the people of New South Wales. But the actual conditions he encountered - particularly in the outlying districts of New South Wales - were radically different to those with which he had been familiar and those in which the

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6 Broughton, ‘Journal kept on the voyage to Australia,’ 26 June 1829.
9 Broughton, ‘Journal kept on the voyage to Australia,’ 26 June 1829.
institutions of Anglicanism had been formed. He found that distance was a tyrant not only in terms of trade, transport and communication.\textsuperscript{10} Distance also disrupted the colonists’ observance of religion and the continued expression of an Anglican spirituality. He found that the vastness of the territory and the increasingly dispersed state of its population made mobility central to the question of how Anglican Protestantism might be successfully transplanted and established in the colony.

This chapter considers Broughton’s efforts to realise his religious vision for the colony when confronted with its vastly extended and thinly settled state. It traces the implications of his high church values for the way in which he perceived his surrounds and engaged with the land, and examines the effects of colonial conditions on the ways in which he sought to extend the structures and influence of his church. Broughton has often been presented as an intransigent defender of the ideas and institutions of the old world. He was a pillar of the colonial elite that Russel Ward characterised in terms of its ‘natural bent to preserve intact’ the culture and values of old British society; a member of Manning Clark’s ‘Protestant ascendancy’ who attempted to ‘sing the Lord’s song in a strange land to little avail.’\textsuperscript{11} Bruce Kaye and George Shaw have drawn more sophisticated and sympathetic pictures of the man, but neither reflected in depth on the significance of the colony’s particular characteristics in shaping his religious ideas and the conduct of his ministry. But Broughton’s colonial ministry can be fruitfully examined in terms of the tensions between mobility and stasis, mission and parish, itinerancy and incumbency. It can cast new light on the question of whether the religious culture of the colony was shaped more by the cultural and intellectual baggage its clergy brought with them from the ‘old world’, or by the environment they encountered in the ‘new.’

**ENCOUNTERING THE COUNTRY**

Sunday, 13 September. After more than 100 days at sea, Broughton’s ship at last approached Port Jackson. Though the archdeacon looked forward to escaping the


confines of the ship, he found only the language of despair to describe the experience and the place of his arrival. ‘The expected termination of our voyage occasions us some anxiety,’ he wrote, it ‘occasions no sensation of joy.’ ‘In all this country ... there are none of those whom we desire to see.’ The single individual with whom Broughton was already acquainted was the man he was to replace as Archdeacon, Thomas Hobbes Scott. Scott’s own arrival five years earlier had marked the formal introduction of ecclesiastical structures in addition to the chaplaincy and the advent of high church Anglicanism in the colony. In the years just prior to Broughton’s arrival, Protestantism’s professional representatives in the colony had grown more diverse, even within the English church.

As he sailed into the harbour, though, Broughton had no thought for his future colleagues nor any regard for these developments in the colonial church. Still overwhelmed by the sorrow of leaving home, he saw only absences in the shape of the society and institutions he had left behind.

The appearance of the country itself only deepened Broughton’s depression: ‘the cliffs are lofty ... and the foliage and herbage which grow upon them appear stunted in growth and gloomy in colour,’ he wrote of the Sydney Harbour heads. ‘But for the lighthouse tower ... and some adjacent white buildings scattered up and down the rock, the appearance of the whole would be dreary and cheerless.’ Rising out of a weird and depressing landscape, the South Head lighthouse simply highlighted the strangeness of the place: it promised no restoration of the British civilisation he had seen slip away. To many of its inhabitants, though, New South Wales was by no means a barren or deprived country. ‘The finest sheep country’ had recently been reported in all directions from Sydney - in the south by Hume and Hovell, who traversed ‘rich and beautiful’ country covered in ‘fresh and luxuriant’ grass on their way to Port Phillip, and in the north by Allan Cunningham, who found ‘extensive tracts of clear pastoral country’ on the

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12 Broughton, ‘Journal kept on the voyage to Australia,’ 7-10 September 1829.
14 Judd and Cable, Sydney Anglicans, chapter one.
15 Broughton, ‘Journal kept on the voyage to Australia,’ 13 September 1829.
‘conveniently watered’ and extraordinarily luxuriant Darling Downs. At the time Broughton arrived, the air was thick with stories of fine meadows to be found and money to be made.

The rapid expansion of pastoral settlement from the 1820s was accompanied by the dispersion of the colonising population over an increasingly wide territory. The colonial government proclaimed ‘limits of location’ in 1826, but for various economic, environmental and logistical reasons a great number of pastoralists had begun moving their sheep and stock beyond the official boundaries of the nineteen counties by the beginning of the 1830s. The insistence of the imperial government that, from 1831, all crown land within the limits should be disposed of only by sale was intended to encourage the concentration of settlement but in fact provoked further dispersion. As the upset price of land rose throughout the 1830s and early 1840s, land became increasingly difficult to acquire and more and more people moved beyond the boundaries to squat on crown territory.

The dramatic spread of settlement posed problems for both the government and the church. The former was confronted by the need to extend its legal and administrative reach or accept the breakdown of order on a widely extended frontier. The latter faced direct challenges to the structure of settled parish ministry with which the clergy had been familiar in England and which Broughton held in such high esteem. Part of the problem was that the area of settlement expanded faster than the ranks of the clergy. There was always more work to be done than the clergy were able to perform. Their services were also required beyond their own immediate area of residence and in centres so isolated from one another that they were required to travel large distances. These very

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considerable challenges were compounded between the late 1820s and the end of the 1840s by the scattering of a significant population over a vast territory so thinly settled by Britons that their congregation was virtually impossible. How far could the resources of the church be stretched effectively? How could the Church of England bring the doctrines and ordinances of pure religion to people living at great distances from the nearest centre of population? And how might the clergy encourage colonists to maintain their faith when they were so dispersed that they could not gather for divine worship easily? These were questions that confronted the colonial Church of England throughout the period of Broughton’s colonial ministry.

Increased mobility and even the adoption of itinerant methods of mission were among the ideas being considered by Protestants in the colony at the time Broughton disembarked. Rowland Hassall and William Pascoe Crook, of the London Missionary Society, had conducted itinerant ministries from the early 1800s when they arrived in the colony from the South Seas.20 From the mid 1810s, Methodist preachers rode considerable distances to encourage their co-religionists and spread the Gospel of the Lord, though there was no formal circuit beyond the county of Cumberland until the mid 1830s.21 Even to some clergymen of the habitually static and historically settled Anglican church, it seemed that becoming more mobile might prove an effective response to the population’s dispersion. From very early in his chaplaincy, Marsden had undertaken to visit different parts of the settlement at a distance of forty or fifty miles from Sydney.22 In old age, he suggested that ‘it would be a great Blessing to this Colony if one pious clergyman was wholly employed in visiting the different distant districts from fifty to one hundred miles apart and imparting instruction to the scattered population who never hear a sermon.’ Itinerancy would also bring ‘God and his Gospel’ to the thousands of convicts ‘employed upon the public roads in different Gangs and other public services’ who seldom heard of them.23 At about the same time, ‘the galloping parson’ Thomas Hassall began regularly

23 Marsden to Dandison Coates, 4 January 1833, Bonwick Transcripts (Missionary) [hereafter BT] Box 54, p. 1861, Mitchell Library.
travelling many hundreds of miles on horseback in order to minister to the people scattered over the face of the land to the south of his church at Cobbity. The increasingly dispersed manner in which the colonists occupied the land suggested methods of ministry rather different to the parish model of congregation around a church and its incumbent clergyman. It was both an issue and a potential solution that colonial circumstances required Broughton to consider very seriously.

Upon arriving in Sydney, the new archdeacon found he had substantial opportunity to engage formally with questions of how the colonists occupied the land. As the colony’s senior cleric, Broughton sat on the Legislative Council from the time he disembarked until its reconstitution in 1842 and on the Executive Council until his resignation from politics in 1846. His membership of the Councils ensured his involvement in all the major political debates of the period, among which the administration of land featured prominently. He was neither the first nor last colonial cleric to become involved in the issue of the occupation and ownership of the soil in a political way. But whereas Richard Johnson, for example, had become involved in political negotiations over land as a result of his missionary interventions into Booron’s life, Broughton engaged in land politics as a member of the local government in consequence of both his ecclesiastical rank and the historic relationship between the church and the state. And whereas Johnson and the other early officers had been concerned with the practical appropriation of Aboriginal

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land by the Crown, Broughton’s attention, like the Government’s, was focused on the disposal of crown land to colonists. It was an area of policy upon which he bestowed ‘much care and attention’ and to which he made a considerable contribution.\(^{27}\)

The issue of how the land should be occupied also defined Broughton’s clerical career. Historians have declined to explore it, but it was in the satisfaction of his clerical duties, perhaps to an even greater extent than in his formal politics, that he engaged with the land and the question of the colonists’ relationship to it. It was in pursuit of his religious vision for the colony that he responded personally to his new environment and its implications for his church. Unlike Marsden, he did not engage with the land as a farmer, nor did his temporal concerns distract him from his exertions to extend Anglican doctrines and ordinances among the colonists. The improved circumstances of both the colony and the church meant he never struggled, as the early chaplains and other colonists did, to procure food and other provisions for his family. As Archdeacon and then Bishop of Australia during the relatively prosperous 1830s and 1840s, Broughton was entitled to an annual salary of two thousand pounds. Although some of his contemporaries of lesser rank and with larger families may have continued to struggle in financial terms, he did not suffer want and had little reason to reinvent himself as ‘half a farmer’ or to invest in rural pursuits as Johnson and Marsden had.\(^{28}\) He initially resided in what had become the bustling urban centre of Sydney and only ever owned a single cow.\(^{29}\)


\(^{29}\) See Governor Gipps to Lord Stanley, 1 May 1844, Despatches from the Governor of New South Wales, ‘Missing’ despatches, 1844-46, A1267-8, Mitchell Library, Sydney.
The religious vision that defined his whole ministry was a high Anglican Protestant one. Broughton was not an evangelical like the great majority of Anglican clergymen who preceded him to the colony, but he shared with them the understanding that ‘the religion of Jesus Christ’ was centrally concerned with ‘the character of Salvation and the Son of God as the Redeemer of his church.’ Themes of eternal damnation for sin and individual salvation by grace were less prominent in his preaching than they were in, say, Richard Johnson’s, but he was similarly certain that Jesus Christ, ‘by the payment of an inestimable ransom, has opened the doors of our prison-house and set at liberty those … under sin.’ And although his exertions were directed entirely towards the British colonists rather than Australia’s indigenes, there was nevertheless an almost missionary quality to them. If future generations were to ‘enjoy happiness whether national or individual,’ as he put it in 1834, then their principal care and concern must be ‘to scatter plentifully the seeds of religion, the fear of God and the faith of Christ crucified, in all the quarters of the land. They must lay the foundations of the Gospel deep and wide, and strive to bring its heavenly principles into general adoption and operation.’

What distinguished Broughton’s thought from the evangelicals was the particular meaning and significance he attributed to the Anglican Church. He insisted that the Church of England, ‘while she acknowledges all who faithfully call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving him as the Christ and as the Son of the Living God, to be actual members of the visible Church of the Redeemer … yet maintains that there is but one exposition of Christian faith and one form of association in Christian communion strictly conformable to the will and appointment of God’: her own. He believed that only the Church of England accorded with the system of Church Government which the Apostles themselves had practiced and sanctioned –which they would not have, he once added, ‘unless it had been most favourable for guarding and securing in integrity and

30 William Grant Broughton, A Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of New South Wales: at the Primary Visitation, holden at Sydney in the Church of St James on Thursday the 3rd December 1829, Sydney, 1830, pp.8-10. His emphasis.
31 William Grant Broughton, Religion, Essential to the Security and Happiness of Nations: A sermon preached in the Parish of St Philip at Sydney NSW, on Sunday January 26, 1834, being the 46th anniversary of the foundation of the colony, Sydney, 1834, p. 9.
32 William Grant Broughton, ‘The Foundation of the Church, preached on Thursday, 16 May 1837, on the occasion of the foundation stone of the Cathedral of St Andrews’, in Two Sermons preached in the Church of St James at Sydney in New South Wales, Sydney, 1837, p. 17.
purity those truths which they were commissioned to deliver to mankind.’ William Grant Broughton to W. E. Parry, 15 July 1833, in William Grant Broughton - correspondence 1833-1834, B 377, Mitchell Library, Sydney

It was a church ‘built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the cornerstone,’ he declared, the church which best preserved the reformation and promoted unadulterated apostolic truth. Such views rendered Broughton ‘perhaps too high a churchman for our mixt population’ in the eyes of Samuel Marsden. ‘But I may not be so high as I ought to be,’ the more pragmatic chaplain conceded, ‘tho I love and esteem her services above all others.’ Such views, more importantly, were accompanied by a deep commitment to the introduction, endowment and extension of the reformed English church in New South Wales. More than material progress and improvement, Broughton believed the successful transfer of Anglicanism to the colony would pave the way to Christian civilisation.

At the height of his first Australian summer, Broughton mounted his horse and rode off on the first of his numerous journeys throughout the colony. It was important that, as head of the colonial church, he be familiar with the area under his oversight and personally supportive of the clergy of whom he had care. He could only become so, as he realised very quickly, by travelling extensively. The vastness of his charge and the distance over which his clergy were spread meant there was no other way in which he might properly fulfil his responsibilities. By travelling he encountered the country and became acquainted with the state of the colony - including the religious condition of its population and the situation of the church. This initial recognition of the necessity of mobility to his own ministry did not overturn his earlier ideas about clerical travel, though. He continued to reject the touristic manner of travel then growing in popularity among middle and upper class Europeans and embodied, he thought, by Bishop Heber in India. He also eschewed the expeditionary type of travel in which white explorers of the continent – the Oxleys, Humes and Sturts - were then engaged. Broughton instead used the term ‘visitation’ to refer to his journeys. He thus associated his mobility with a five hundred year tradition of travel undertaken by Bishops or archdeacons for the purpose of

33 William Grant Broughton to W. E. Parry, 15 July 1833, in William Grant Broughton - correspondence 1833-1834, B 377, Mitchell Library, Sydney

34 William Grant Broughton, Address delivered on the Occasion of Laying the Foundation Stone of a Church by the Bishop of Australia, Kemp and Fairfax, Sydney, 1845, p. 12.

35 Samuel Marsden to Josiah Pratt, 10 December 1837, BT Box 54, p. 1886, Mitchell Library.

examining the state of religion in dioceses, parishes, or regions. It was a manner of travel consistent with his ideas about the role and responsibilities of Church of England clergymen of his position, a mode of mobility he embraced both in reaction to touristic alternatives and in response to the exigencies of the situation in which he was to work.

In the course of his early visitation journeys, Broughton was made distressingly aware of the terrible lack of churches and clergymen in some parts of the colony. His accounts of his travels suggest that the settlers’ religious deprivation as well as their dispersion over vast tracts of land caused him deep and enduring concern. After touring the Bathurst and the Hunter River regions in late 1830 and early 1831, for example, he reported that in more than 500 miles of country ‘containing two towns’ as well as a very considerable population ‘dispersed among the different establishments,’ the only public means of religious instruction were those afforded by ‘one Catechist not in Holy Orders and who, from infirm health, is very incompetent to much visitation.’ He was similarly distressed by the situation at Port Stephens. Upon visiting the area in June 1831, he found that the man in charge of the settlement had worked hard to provide religious encouragement to nearby colonists, but lacked a church and a resident clergymen. It was all Broughton could do to send the Chaplain of Newcastle to officiate occasionally.

Broughton’s concern at the lack of clergymen throughout the colony stemmed from his particularly Anglican Protestant conviction of their necessity in a community for the maintenance of true religion and right belief. In his view, it was the role of clergymen, by their attentions to the people, to act as their ‘freely-chosen and efficient adviser[s], both spiritual and temporal.’ It was their task to conduct baptisms and funerals, administer communion and officiate at marriages. And perhaps most importantly of all, it was their responsibility to guide the people in their understanding and interpretation of Scripture. Without an ordained minister in a community, there could be no middle way between the Roman Catholic error of exalting church tradition at the expense of the Word and the

38 W. E. Parry to Broughton, 12 November 1834, in William Grant Broughton - correspondence 1833-1834, B 377, Mitchell Library.
39 Broughton, A Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of New South Wales ... 1829, p. 14.
Dissenting error of abandoning the wisdom accrued over ages before the fancies of individual interpretation. Without such a clerical guide, as Broughton put it at the conclusion of a visitation journey in 1831, ‘many thousands and their progeny’ were already ‘going astray to evident destruction.’

The absence of church buildings caused Broughton further anxiety. On a very practical level, as he and other clergy knew, churches made the observance of divine worship very much more convenient. Both Johnson and Marsden had complained about the difficulty and discomfort of preaching outside and in various other locations, rather than a church. Broughton was disconcerted by the performance of divine service in places that were ‘small, inconvenient and mean.’ On his visitations to Penrith, Bong-Bong and Patterson in 1834 he conducted services in police stations, military barracks and places of confinement respectively. ‘Speaking from personal experience,’ he reflected upon returning to Sydney, such buildings were ‘so deficient in all that is requisite for the decent celebration of the worship of God as to excite in the clergy who officiate a sense of shame and degradation [and] any impressions but those of devotion on the congregation who assemble in them.’ Proper churches with incumbent clergy, not buildings such as these, dignified and even intensified the colonists’ worship of God. Broughton considered churches important because they were not only convenient but conducive to the maintenance of ‘the natural order and decency of things.’

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See Robert Allwood, *A sermon preached in St John’s church Parramatta on Thursday September 10, 1840, at the anniversary of the Parramatta district committee of the Societies for Promoting Christian Knowledge & for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts*, James Tegg, Sydney, 1840.

Broughton to the SPG, 15 February 1831, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.


Broughton to Campbell (SPG), 9 December 1834, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.


Anon. [Church of England, Diocese of Australia], *The Order for Consecrating a Church with a Church-yard; or a Church-yard Singly*, James Tegg & Co., Sydney, 1839, p. 5.
The high churchman did not confine his god to a building, but nevertheless had great difficulty conceiving of a society in which religion flourished yet churches were few. From his reflections on his visitations in New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land in 1829 and 1830, it is apparent that he considered such buildings important for the colonists’ continued expression of belief and adherence to Anglican truth. The majority were well disposed towards the Church of England, he told the clergy in Hobart and Sydney at the conclusion of his first tours. The problem was that great numbers of them lived in circumstances that unavoidably deprived them of all participation in its services and sacraments. ‘Our churches are few in number and placed at such inconvenient distances as greatly to impede, and too often wholly to frustrate, their inclination,’ he said. But even more worryingly, he went on, ‘a decay of real piety’ and ‘even a want of outward observance of religion’ was already becoming apparent in those areas that lacked a church and clergyman. ‘Many are gone astray in the wilderness,’ he despaired. Unless strong and speedy efforts were made to secure the colonists to ‘the Institutions of the mother-country,’ he wrote to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at the conclusion of his Bathurst and Hunter tours, their descent into ‘semi-barbarism and total infidelity… must inevitably come to pass.’ The dearth of churches and clergymen, especially in the outlying districts, made him fear for the colonists’ souls.

Having been exposed to the ‘very lamentable situation of our Establishment’ in various parts of the colony during the early 1830s, Broughton began campaigning to have more churches built and more clergymen stationed throughout his archdeaconry. He outlined his initial intentions in a letter to the like-minded Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG). He would seek from the government ‘an increase of the clerical establishment’ in the counties of Northumberland and Durham, and had seen enough of the colony to know that ‘the same application must also be made’ with reference to the southern counties of Camden, Argyle and St Vincent. He also hoped to see an increase in ‘the accommodation for attending religious services’ in the main settlement itself. He judged that there were ‘at least 3000 Protestants in this town of Sydney and its suburbs’

46 See William Grant Broughton, *A Charge to the Clergy of Van Diemen’s Land: at the Primary Visitation, holden at St David in Hobart Town on Thursday 15 April 1830*, James Ross, Hobart, 1830, pp. 6-7;
Broughton, *A Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of New South Wales …1829*, p. 15.
47 Broughton, *A Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of New South Wales … 1829*, p. 16.
48 Broughton to the SPG, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
who were ‘destitute of any means of attending the public service of our Church, or indeed of any place of worship whatever.’ He hoped this fact would persuade Governor Darling of the pressing need for more churches in the city as well as the country. His campaign mirrored the English church building movement that flourished with the support of government and middle class philanthropy between the early 1820s and the late 1840s. It similarly attempted to respond to changes in population while retaining an emphasis on the establishment of local churches for communities characterised more by stasis than mobility. Broughton maintained his campaign to supply the lack of churches and clergymen and thus provide for the proper observance of religion in the colonies for more than two decades until his death in 1853.

Broughton’s campaign for more Anglican churches and clergymen sprang from his deeply held beliefs about their importance for preserving Protestant religion in its purest form. His initial impressions of the colony also influenced his outlook, though, by causing him to reflect on the role of mobility in the ministry of a colonial clergyman. His early tours of his vast archdeaconry both convinced him of the necessity of travel for the proper performance of his own duties and prompted him to toy with the idea of itinerancy for his clergy. ‘Inconsiderable in number as we are in comparison with the space we occupy, we must be condemned to witness the subjugation of many parts of the land to the dominion of wickedness, unless we rise with the exigencies of our situation,’ he told the ministers of Van Diemen’s Land at the conclusion of his first visitation there in early 1830. The ‘uninstructed and widely scattered population’ were in urgent need of religious instruction, he observed, and the clergy would need all their physical powers to ‘afford the means of grace and to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom’ to them. Consider ‘the extent of the field which we ... are appointed to cultivate,’ he urged, and take ‘every favourable opportunity’ to visit those parts of it which lay within ‘an accessible distance from your usual abodes.’ ‘On these itinerant missions (for such in reality they are),’ he continued, ‘Preach the Gospel; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, convince, exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine.’ Such journeys were not to interfere with the discharge of their appointed duties ‘nearer home,’ he added, but they might effectually

‘prevent the disuse of religious ordinances and the decay of religious impressions’ in the more remote parts until parishes could be formed, churches built and clergymen stationed in each district of the colony.\(^{51}\) This early suggestion of itinerancy was a strategic concession to colonial conditions, but his tolerance of clerical mobility remained conditional on the proper performance of the clergy’s more settled work.

**ENCOURAGING RELIGION**

During his first five years in Australia, Broughton became acquainted with much of the area for which he had been given spiritual responsibility. He responded to his new circumstances by embracing mobility in the form of visitation as a key means by which he fulfilled his own responsibilities. He also began to broaden his ideas to include itinerancy, with particular conditions, as a strategy for preserving the colonists in true religion despite the dearth of churches and clergy. As his time in the colonies lengthened, however, both the circumstances in which he ministered and the resources at his disposal for strengthening the colonial church altered in ways that reshaped his experience of travel and his response to the land. Rapid pastoral expansion continued and the colonising population spread out over an increasingly vast territory. The Irish liberal Richard Bourke, who governed New South Wales between 1831 and 1837, proposed to end to the Anglican church’s uniquely privileged status and extend state aid to Catholics, Presbyterians and perhaps the larger Dissenting groups.\(^{52}\) Both developments caused Broughton deep concern, though he felt the threat of multi-establishment most immediately. The archdeacon made his views on Anglican privilege clear to the governor and embarked for England in 1834 to put his arguments personally to the Colonial Office. But Broughton found the Whig administration ultimately unsympathetic and, after a frustrating fifteen months, returned to the colony as the newly consecrated Bishop

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\(^{51}\) Broughton, *A Charge to the Clergy of Van Diemen’s Land ...1830*, pp. 9-10 citing 2 Timothy 4: 2.

of Australia but without positive reassurances concerning the privileged position of his church.  

Broughton’s elevation to the episcopacy at once affirmed his considerable abilities and strengthened his political and ecclesiastical hand in the colonies. But it did nothing to prevent Bourke’s liberal scheme for state aid to several denominations from being carried into effect. His Church Act, passed in July 1836, established a pound-for-pound grants scheme open to Anglicans, Catholics, Presbyterians and other groups who raised certain minimum sums themselves. The newly supported denominations welcomed the change of policy with ‘unmingled feelings of gratitude and joy’ and rejoiced in the opportunities it afforded them to develop their institutions and influence. But Bishop Broughton condemned it as profoundly ungodly and gravely dangerous for the colony. It threw down ‘every barrier which ought to have been upheld as the most sacred,’ he thundered, and checked ‘the progress of the Reformation’ by dividing the Protestant witness and extending government support to Catholics. The high Anglican was distressed at the sight of the church establishment that he believed best preserved apostolic Christianity and protected the people from religious error, crumbling before his eyes.

Bourke’s religious reforms, his own rise to the episcopacy and, in a more general way, the unceasing expansion of pastoralism helped reshape the context in which Broughton ministered from the mid 1830s. Importantly, these changes also impacted his ideas about mobility and the ways in which he engaged with his surrounds in pursuit of his religious vision for the colony. In the years between his return from England in early 1836 and his departure again in 1853, he expended his energies in numerous and extensive visitation trips. In the course of these travels, he gathered subscriptions for more Anglican churches and clergymen according to the terms of the Church Act. He also made the most of his

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53 On his trip to England see Shaw, *Patriarch and Patriot*, pp. 82-100.
new episcopal powers to confirm people and consecrate churches and burial grounds. He not only carried the ordinances of religion to colonists living on far distant settlements himself, but increasingly employed other clergy to conduct itinerant ministries. By these means he sought to transform the colony as he found it into a firmly Anglican society.

Usefully, Broughton documented his various exertions in letters to the SPG. He had strengthened his relationship with the Society during his stay in England and successfully interested its members in the condition of the Church of England in the Australian colonies. Although its own income had suffered considerable cuts in the course of Whig budget reform, the Society had agreed to direct some of its limited resources towards the colonial church.  

To both report the progress being made with the funds received and inform the Society of the colonists’ outstanding religious needs, Broughton maintained a regular correspondence with its secretaries throughout the late 1830s and 1840s. He also forwarded diary-style accounts of several of his visitation tours, which the Society published in its series *The Church in the Colonies*. From these writings, Broughton appears deeply fearful for the colonists’ spiritual health. He was deeply worried by many colonists’ ‘long continued privation of religious services’ as well as by the collapse of the Anglican church’s former privileges under Bourke’s scheme. His emphasis on the colonists’ religious destitution and vulnerability to irreligion and even atheism can be explained partly by his hope of stirring the Society to greater action. But his correspondence is often deeply personal in content and tone, and discloses his real concern for the colonists’ spiritual state as well as his enduring desire to see the influence of Anglicanism increase.

November 1836. From the beginning of the month until the middle of February the following year, Broughton was continually occupied, as he put it, in ‘travelling through the different Districts of this very extensive Colony.’ It was the first of numerous

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57 ‘Bishop Broughton’s letters 1834-49,’ Australian Papers Box 12, C. MSS., Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, London; copy at FM4 560, Mitchell Library, Sydney. These letters are generally addressed to its secretaries A M Campbell and Ernest Hawkins.
journeys he undertook as Bishop over subsequent years. He made an extended trip to Port Philip and Hobart between April and June 1838 and rode through the Hunter and Southern districts during the first five months of 1840. For nine weeks in mid 1843, he travelled throughout the Hunter and central west regions of New South Wales, including Morpeth, Murrurundi, Bathurst and Mudgee. The southern counties, the New England and the Illawarra were also among the regions he visited during the 1840s. He persisted with these personal visitations despite his advancing age: even after his sixtieth birthday in 1848, he travelled through the southern counties, visited Albury, toured the Sofala goldfields and rode more than three thousand miles in the course of a four month visitation around New South Wales. These numerous trips did not express a personal preference for frequent travel so much as the necessity of mobility for the proper performance of his religious tasks. They also constituted an ongoing acknowledgement that the vastness of the land itself made mobility an indispensable mode of ministry in the colony.

On these journeys Broughton was distressed by the impression that the colonists’ general religious health was deteriorating and the need for churches and clergymen remained very great indeed. ‘If the services of fifteen additional clergymen were at this moment placed at my disposal,’ he told the SPG in July 1837, ‘I should before the conclusion of the day licence them to the care of souls in Districts where up to this time the sound of the Gospel has scarcely been heard.’ Along the colony’s northern edge, he wrote, ‘the name of religion is almost unknown.’ On the southern side, especially in and between the towns of Geelong and Portland, a ‘very considerable number’ of settlers were similarly ‘cut off from all acquaintance’ with the Church of England. The inhabitants of the counties of Brisbane, Bligh and Phillip were at risk of losing ‘all sense of religion’ and their descendants of falling ‘into heathenism.’ ‘Much ignorance and much vice’ already prevailed among ‘the scattered population’ of Wilberforce and Sackville Reach, on the Hawkesbury. And at Wollen Hills, in the Hunter Valley, the colonists were falling ‘into habits of absolute unconcern and insensibility respecting the most awful and

60 Broughton to A M Campbell, 21 July 1837, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
61 Broughton to A M Campbell, 28 November 1838, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
serious of all interests,’ religion. ‘If there were a clergyman in the colony whose services were not engaged elsewhere, it might be possible to remedy, partially at least, this crying evil,’ he added. ‘But the labourers are few and the harvest in consequence cannot be gathered.’\(^65\) He found ‘the insensibility and neglect of the inhabitants ... very distressing to contemplate.’\(^66\) If something was not done, ‘Atheism and Impiety would spring up and prevail.’\(^67\)

It was a distressing situation, but at least by travelling Bishop Broughton was able to respond to the needs he encountered by seeking subscriptions for the provision of churches and clergymen in the different regions of the colony. He did not always do this in the course of his visitation tours: he established Diocesan branches of the SPG and also the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge to request donations and raise money in more conventional ways. But during his winter 1836 visit to Scone, East and West Maitland, Paterson and Patricks Plains, he raised more than two thousand pounds.\(^68\)

In autumn 1838 he visited ‘the town of Melbourne’, which had ‘already 600 residing inhabitants.’ ‘Morning and evening prayers with printed sermons are read every Sunday in small building (used also as a School-house) by Mr James Smith, a worthy and much respected settler,’ Broughton noted. And with the colonists’ encouragement he gathered subscriptions for the erection of a church so successfully that he was confident to report to the SPG that ‘this important object will be accomplished.’\(^69\) On several other occasions he was similarly encouraged by the willingness of some of the more settled rural families to make the subscriptions necessary to qualify for government support for church building and the payment of clerical stipends under the Church Act. In the particular circumstances of the colony, mobility afforded Broughton unique opportunities for encouraging the colonists in religion by raising support for the extension of the services of the church.

Travel also helped him overcome the religious destitution of the colonists, at least temporarily, by enabling him to bring its ordinances to them himself. He felt he could not

\(^{67}\) Broughton to Campbell, 9 December 1834, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
\(^{69}\) Broughton to Campbell, 22 May 1838, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
‘practically do much for the benefit and instruction of the scattered inhabitants,’ but hoped his visits would at least ‘afford them proof that they are not overlooked or forgotten’ and ‘keep alive among them a feeling of attachment to the ordinances of the Church until the time shall arrive for their enjoyment of some better provision, which the mercy of God may have in reserve for them.’ In the course of a three month visitation to Port Phillip and Van Diemen’s Land in 1843, for example, Broughton preached fifty nine sermons within the space of ninety days. ‘I trust on God some good affects will have attended them,’ he added tiredly. During a trip to the Hunter region in the same year, he busily brought religion to the people in a number of different ways. He spent his first day in the ‘village’ of Scone walking from hut to hut endeavouring ‘by exhortation to awaken the people to a more becoming sense of their religious duties.’ The next morning, he consecrated the churchyard in a ceremony attended by ‘the principal families in the neighbourhood.’ In the afternoon he proceeded nearly thirty miles to Murrurundi ‘on a bad and difficult road,’ reaching the small inn by nightfall. The following day, being Sunday, he preached to a congregation of about thirty at the courthouse in the morning and surveyed a sight for the construction of a church in the afternoon. On the Monday he ‘baptised a baby in a hut’ and offered prayers of thanksgiving with its mother: ‘her mind was evidently filled, as mine also was, with feelings of reverence and affection at the remembrance of our common Church and country; placed as we were, at a vast distance from both, in the midst of the wilderness.’ That afternoon the nostalgic Bishop rode on towards Muswellbrook. As he travelled, Broughton performed myriad tasks in a manner that suggests his continued commitment to the ideals of clerical travel he had formulated after reading about Bishop Heber back in 1829. He did not travel with an eye for curiosities but for opportunities to bring the ordinances of religion to otherwise destitute colonists.

To resist the incursions of irreligion, Broughton expanded the scope of his travels and developed new strategies for meeting the religious needs of the European inhabitants. In consequence of his elevation to the position of Bishop in 1836, Broughton acquired new powers to confirm people and consecrate places including churches and churchyards.

70 Broughton to the Society for the Propagation, 3 July 1843, in Broughton, ‘Two Journals of Visitation.’
71 Broughton, ‘Second Tour, 1843: Voyage to Port Philip,’ 17 December 1843.
Until 1836, neither confirmation nor consecration had been performed as properly Episcopal functions. Some time prior to 1805, the Archbishop of Canterbury John Moore had granted Samuel Marsden special authority to ‘separate’ churches from ‘all profane and common Uses’ by dedicating them ‘entirely to the Worship of Almighty God.’ The senior chaplain had duly consecrated his own church at Parramatta, St Matthew’s Windsor and St James’ Sydney. But it was not until Broughton returned to the colony as its first Bishop that consecration was possible in the normal Anglican way. His elevation not only expanded his basic ministry beyond preaching, baptising and administering communion, but offered him new means of ameliorating the causes of the settlers’ religious destitution. The episcopal authority to confirm and consecrate expanded his capacity to enliven the religious life of the settlers in the course of his visitations and became an important part of his response to the degrading effects of distance and dispersion. By confirming people and consecrating places, Broughton hoped to facilitate the growth of a recognisably Christian society in a transformed land.

Confirmation quickly became prominent among Broughton’s activities. ‘After the example of the Holy Apostles,’ as he put it, he laid his hands upon thousands of young people who ‘ratified and confirmed … the engagements of their Baptism.’ In August 1836 he confirmed 116 people at Parramatta, 47 at St Phillip’s Sydney and 141 at St James’. On a visitation tour of Van Diemen’s Land in 1838, for example, he conducted confirmation services in no less than twelve different towns. During the mid 1840s, he confirmed more than fifty people in the Hunter Valley and spent a fortnight preparing ‘the young and others’ for confirmation in Geelong. Closer to home, he confirmed ‘upwards of 300 belonging to the parishes of Sydney’ on a single day and in the

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73 ‘Form of Sentence of Consecration’, n.d., Marsden papers, Mitchell Library, C244, pp.115-117. John Moore was Archbishop of Canterbury between April 1783 and January 1805.

74 On the consecration of St John’s Parramatta, see Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 27 April 1803, in George Mackaness (ed.), *Some Private Correspondence of the Rev Samuel Marsden and Family, 1794-1824*, Review Publications, Dubbo, 1976, p. 30; concerning St James’, see *Sydney Gazette* 12 February 1824. Note, however, that several other churches including St Luke’s Liverpool were left unconsecrated.

75 William Grant Broughton, *The nature and intent of the Holy Communion explained for the use of those recently confirmed: a sermon preached in the parish of St James at Sydney, in New South Wales, on Sunday August 22, 1841*, James Tegg, Sydney, 1841, p. 6.


77 Broughton to Campbell, 22 May 1838, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library. Confirmation services were held at Newtown, New Norfolk, Hamilton, Bothwell, Jericho, Ross, Perth, Launceston, Longford, Oatlands, Sorrell and Hobart.

following weeks held more services at Windsor, Richmond, Penrith, Campbelltown, Liverpool, Prospect and Parramatta. Most of these services attracted a considerable crowd, which he considered a good indicator of the settlers’ interest in religion. He took ‘particular satisfaction’ in the ‘evidence’ they provided of ‘the admirable order and religious feeling in which so large a proportion of our population are brought up,’ however much he ‘might have expected something very different.’

Broughton understood confirmation as the ritual doorway to participation in communion and a foundation for the development of a more deeply Christian community. This attitude may have stemmed in part from his openness to early Tractarianism, which emphasised the importance of the sacraments at the time he encountered it during his stay in England. ‘To have a deep, settled, awful and feeling remembrance of [Jesus], and of what he did, continually occurring to our minds is, I am sure, the most powerful of all preservatives against sin,’ he once told a congregation at St James’, Sydney. The Lord’s Supper was not ‘the only means’ by which such a remembrance of Jesus might be strengthened, but it was nevertheless ‘the means most directly and specially appointed for that end’ and ‘the service which does most exactly and impressively shew forth the Lord’s death.’ Particularly in those regions of the colony thinly populated by Europeans, confirmation functioned as a buttress of religion and morality. In one of his visitation journals published by the SPG, Broughton described Hunter Valley confirmees as people who had been ‘trained in an acquaintance with the truths of Christianity.’ Their confirmation created a community of people prepared to ‘regulate their lives according to … holy principles’ rather than relax into the ‘habits of absolute unconcern and

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79 Broughton, ‘Two Journals of Visitation’, 1, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15 January 1844.
82 Broughton, The nature and intent of the Holy Communion, p. 6
insensibility.' He dearly hoped that ‘under such a dispensation of the means of grace,’ a ‘gradual but certain’ improvement in morals and religion would take place, even in the outlying regions of the colony. As he travelled throughout eastern Australia, Broughton also exercised his Episcopal authority by transforming colonial spaces into religious places that were holy to the Lord. In his visitation journal for 1843, for example, he wrote happily of having ‘fixed on a site for [a] church and burial ground’ and of ‘preparing designs’ for religious buildings. Even better than designating a place as sacred was actually consecrating it to be so. On his first visit to Port Phillip and Van Diemen’s Land following his elevation to the episcopacy, he consecrated no less than seven different churches and four burial grounds. He consecrated numerous churches and cemeteries in New South Wales, too. In a letter written during ‘an extended visitation of the Southern Districts’ upon which he was absent ‘about six weeks,’ he reported his consecration of the ‘neat and respectable edifice’ of St Mary Magdalene at South Creek. To his gratification, the ceremony was attended by ‘a respectable congregation so numerous as to occupy every seat in the church.’ During 1841, he consecrated churches at Prospect and, after travelling a great distance through ‘very wild country,’ in the township of Mudgee. While touring the Hunter region in 1843, he consecrated St Peter’s on the east side of the river at Maitland and the Church of the Virgin Mary on the west. In the single year of 1845, he consecrated buildings at Sydney, Camperdown, Ashfield, Denham Court, Goulburn, Queanbeyan, Canberra Plains, on Allyn, Muswellbrook, Scone, Paterson and Bong Bong. The Bishop delighted in ‘dedicating churches to the worship of God.’

84 Broughton to Campbell, 22 May 1838, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
86 Broughton to Campbell, 22 May 1838, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library. The churches consecrated were in Hobart, Newtown, Hamilton, Jericho, Ross, Richmond and Perth on the South Esk River.
91 Broughton to Campbell, 22 May 1838, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
Consecration was one of Broughton’s primary activities while travelling and an important means by which he engaged with the land. He understood it as a ‘pious practice … approved and graciously accepted by our heavenly Father,’ as both an encouragement to and a demonstration of a community’s religiosity. It was a deeply significant rite because it radically redefined the meaning of a place in keeping with the Anglican Protestant faith Broughton proclaimed. As the liturgy for consecration he had published in early 1839 explained, it involved ‘setting apart’ a place ‘in solemn manner, for the performance of the several offices of religious worship.’ It dedicated a place holy to the Lord and prevented its ‘profane and common’ use. As Broughton made clear at the consecration of St Mary’s Balmain, though, it not only separated the religious from the profane but the Christian from the pagan. The very purpose of the ritual was to dedicate the site to the sole service ‘of Almighty God, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the Creator, redeemer and Sanctifier of man,’ he explained.

‘To that one God, the Holy Blessed and Glorious Trinity, eternal, Uncreated and Incomprehensible, or not to be limited by space, will religious worship, homage, adoration and devotion henceforth be rendered here; but to no other being or substance whatsoever will any sort of degree of worship or adoration be permitted to be rendered.’

The ritual of consecration created a specifically Anglican site in part by excluding all alternative spiritual meanings that might be attached to the place.

Broughton’s ritual attribution of specific religious meanings to the land had important implications in the context of colonial settlement. He does not appear to have had indigenous ideas of sacredness particularly in mind when he excluded other religious uses of a consecrated Anglican place, but by consecrating churches and churchyards he completed the colonial appropriation of numerous tracts of land at the expense of Aboriginal people. Not only had those tracts been claimed by the British, cleared, fenced and had church buildings erected upon them. Their religious meanings had been remoulded according to the particular forms of sacredness that colonists recognised - in a

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92 Anon. [Church of England, Diocese of Australia], The Order for Consecrating a Church with a Church-yard; or a Church-yard Singly, James Tegg & Co., Sydney, 1839, p. 5
93 William Grant Broughton, The Value and Authority of Holy Scripture: A sermon preached at the consecration of St Mary’s church at Balmain, near Sydney on Tuesday 2nd May 1848, Kemp & Fairfax, Sydney, 1848, p. 3
way that denied the profoundly spiritual relationship between Aboriginal people and the land.\textsuperscript{94} Broughton’s acts of consecration expressed deep assumptions about religion, civilisation and land ownership. And although he almost certainly did not conceive of his actions in such terms, the rituals he performed as he travelled erased existing indigenous meanings from the country. Consecration was a method of appropriating Aboriginal land as distinctively Episcopal as the almost sacramental investment of godly labour into the ground was evangelical.

Broughton rarely mentioned ‘the natives’ in his travel accounts and was apparently oblivious to their spiritual connections to country. But he did not lack personal contact with them or live in ignorance of their claim to the land. He had encountered Aboriginal people in Sydney very soon after he arrived, and been shocked to find that interaction with Europeans had reduced them ‘to a state worse than barbarian wildness’ rather than facilitated their elevation to Christian civilisation from ‘their original benighted and degraded state.’\textsuperscript{95} He had also been exposed to the cruelties and violence of colonial life as chair of an inquiry into ‘the origin of the hostility displayed by the Black Natives’ during his first visitation to Van Diemen’s Land in 1830.\textsuperscript{96} And as he testified to Buxton’s Committee while in England during 1835, he had seen ‘many hundreds’ of Aboriginal people ‘in travelling through the different parts of the country’ during his first five years in the colony.\textsuperscript{97} He was aware, as he put it to Buxton, that ‘they have a notion among themselves of certain portions of the country belonging to their own particular tribe; they have frequently said to me that such a part was their property.’ But he dismissed that notion quickly and simply by affirming the land was ‘all assigned now to

\textsuperscript{94} For a brief survey, see Heather Goodall, Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770 - 1972, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1996, chapter one.

\textsuperscript{95} Broughton, A Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of New South Wales ... 1829, p. 27.


\textsuperscript{97} Evidence of Archdeacon Broughton, 3 August 1835, in ‘Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements) together with Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index,’ British Parliamentary Papers, 1836 (538), vol. VII , p. 14.
Europeans,’ and proceeded to construct and consecrate churches throughout the territory in his effort to meet the religious needs of its colonists.

Consecration was significant because it not only redefined the spiritual meaning of a place but reframed the relationship between the colonists and the dedicated tracts of land. Each time he consecrated a church or burial ground, he invested a scene of settlement with religious meaning and called down God’s blessing on the community of colonists that gathered there. ‘O God the Father of Heaven,’ he prayed on each occasion, ‘come unto us and bless us who now put upon this place the Memorial of Thy name.’ In doing so, he enabled positive religious relationships between colonists and particular tracts of land that were all the more important, perhaps, in the absence of thoroughly settled parishes. He created familiar, sacred havens which Britons could easily inhabit and where they could indeed feel at home. And although he consecrated churches and churchyards in the course of travelling widely, his performance of the rite expressed his enduring commitment to a Protestant religion that was thoroughly embedded in the land. He encouraged the development of a static, localised Anglican spirituality among the members of an increasingly settled British community.

English churches and churchyards often powerfully symbolised the connections between a community and a particular place over several generations, even centuries. Broughton’s exertions to establish and consecrate such places in Australia expressed his yearning for a similarly settled and stable society in which the Anglican church played a central role. By those same actions, however, he also reminded colonists that they were essentially spiritual people whose existence was not confined to earth. The ritual of consecration asserted the importance of heavenly realities at the same time that it strengthened the colonists’ relationship with an earthly territory. Churches were ‘separated’ from ‘all profane and common uses’ precisely in order to ‘fill men’s minds with greater reverence for [God’s] glorious Majesty.’ And on each occasion that he performed the ritual, Broughton prayed aloud that ‘all carnal and worldly imaginations’ would be ‘put away’ from those who entered the building, that ‘spiritual thoughts and desires may come in their place and may be daily renewed and grow in them.’ ‘Accept, sanctify and bless this

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98 Order for Consecrating a Church, p. 6.
place,’ he earnestly entreated God, ‘that it may be a sanctuary to the Most High and the Gate of Heaven for us.’\textsuperscript{99} By consecrating churches he created religious spaces that were at once tangibly local and a doorway to the heavenly world.

The complex relationship of the worldly to the otherworldly is particularly apparent in Broughton’s consecration of burial grounds. ‘There is a difference between the spirit of a beast that goeth downward to the earth and the spirit of man which ascendeth up to God who gave it,’ affirmed his Anglican liturgy for the dedication of churchyards.\textsuperscript{100} But the dearth of consecrated cemeteries meant that what he called ‘the indecent and unchristian practice of burying the dead on farms or in the open bush’ was a common practice in the colonies. ‘It has ever been a source of offence and grief to me’ as ‘one principal cause of that tendency to a profane contempt of all religious ordinances... which is a sure forerunner of a disrespect for religion itself,’ reflected the Bishop to the SPG.\textsuperscript{101} In his view, the practice distracted the colonists from God and identified the deceased too closely with the ground. He sought to overcome it by creating ‘peculiar places where the bodies of Thy saints may rest in peace and be preserved from all indignities, whilst their souls are safely kept in the hands of their faithful redeemer.’\textsuperscript{102} Consecration made a burial plot sacred and prompted those present to look beyond their life on earth to eternity. It gave social and spiritual meaning to a particular place and at the same time potentially unsettled any nascent sense of permanency or belonging the area’s British inhabitants may have felt. As Broughton urged the congregation to admit with the Psalmist at every consecration of a burial ground, ‘My fathers were but strangers here and as they were am I.’\textsuperscript{103}

Anglicanism upheld and promoted the idea of an omnipresent God whose Word was universally true, but it was also a tradition that placed considerable value on the local religious space. The ritual of consecration was a significant point of mediation between

\textsuperscript{99} Order for Consecrating a Church, pp. 5-8.
\textsuperscript{100} Order for Consecrating a Church, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{102} Order for Consecrating a Church, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{103} Psalm 39:5-7, to be sung at the conclusion of the service for the consecration of a church yard. Order for Consecrating a Church, p. 16.
these aspects of Anglican belief and spirituality, especially in the particular context of a recently established settler colony. Bishop Broughton reminded the colonists of the universal truth and significance of Christianity. But he also sought to anchor their religious life to particular places and localities. Indeed, he expected that the construction and consecration of churches and church yards would actually help preserve the colonists in the faith. Between the mid 1830s and the early 1850s, the creation of sacred spaces was one of his main Episcopal prerogatives. Mediating the local and universal aspects of the Anglican tradition of spirituality was his clear responsibility. And he took the opportunity afforded by his visitations to encourage the settled observance of that religion in numerous localities throughout the eastern Australian colonies.

EMBRACING ITINERANCY

Broughton’s sustained exertions to construct and consecrate Anglican churches effected physical and spiritual changes to parts of the colonial environment. But even as he invested considerable time and energy into these activities, he became increasingly aware that the environment in turn demanded changes in his church and ministry. By the beginning of the 1840s, he was acutely conscious that the colony’s pastoral expansion and the associated dispersion of its British inhabitants presented new and substantial challenges to the Anglican church. Even inside the official limits of settlement, the colonists’ lack of opportunity for religious observance was exacerbated by their scattered state. ‘Their dispersed condition in the employments of sawyers, shepherds, stockmen and others prevalent here, is unfavourable in high degree to the maintenance of regular habits and religious impressions,’ he observed in 1843.¹⁰⁴ The situation still worse in the squatting districts beyond the official boundaries of the colony. As Stephen Roberts put it, ‘practically every man’ in the colony had sent sheep inland to graze on Government Territory, which by then extended more than 10,000 square miles.¹⁰⁵ To Broughton’s ‘great anxiety,’ as he put it to the SPG, this entire area was ‘in a state, as concerns the


219
offices of religion, not only of want but of entire and appalling destitution." Many thousands of people had fixed their abodes in pastoral regions ‘where the name of Christ is never heard and the very belief of a God bids fair to be soon forgotten.’ ‘Perhaps there can be no part of the world,’ he concluded in 1842, where efforts were ‘more urgently needed’ to preserve the inhabitants ‘from sinking into confirmed irreligion and hopeless ignorance.’

In the face of these challenging circumstances, Broughton clung to his vision of ‘all our most sacred ordinances and institutions’ being established ‘along the hitherto deserted shores of this great continent.’ But he also realised that preserving the people in true religion was not only a matter of getting churches built and clergymen established. Nor was it enough to raise a new generation of confirmees to live God’s way in the wilderness, or even to take that wilderness and consecrate it to the Lord. By all these means Broughton sought to encourage the colonists in religion and extend the structures and influence of the Anglican church, and he did not abandon them at any point in his long ministry. But for effectiveness they relied, like the Church Act itself, upon the existence of settled communities whose members lived in sufficient proximity to gather for divine worship. As the British population dispersed, congregation became an impossibility in many regions of the colony. Broughton eventually recognised that his religious vision had to take greater account of the colonial environment: the vastness of the land and the population’s scattered state demanded church practices concerned less with locality and more with mobility.

Bishop Broughton began the conscious adaptation of his church to its circumstances towards the end of the 1830s. In 1837 he wrote to his supporters at the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel outlining his need for more clergymen to serve in the colony. Though he had in mind to post them within the official boundaries of the colony and license them to towns in the normal way, he realised that the scattered state of the settlers even in those districts would make a difference to the actual course of their ministries.

107 Broughton to SPG, 3 April 1845, *HRA* series 1 vol. 24 p. 495.
108 Broughton to SPG, 10 January 1842, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
When the Reverend Stack arrived later that year, he appointed him to West Maitland to which he felt ‘compelled to annex the charge of the township and district of Paterson, with the whole wide range of country extending to the North and West to the very limits of the colony on that side.’ He similarly stationed the Reverend Walpole at Bathurst, allotting him an extent of territory ‘which is far too wide for the physical exertions of any human being to occupy.’ Broughton knew that both the vastness of the areas in which he stationed these clergy and the dispersion of the population he had committed to their care, would require them to travel extensively. He had recognised that in such areas, preserving the interests of religion required more than a church building and a resident clergyman: it was also necessary at times for the minister to travel throughout the surrounding county.

While this combination of stasis and mobility was an appropriate form of ministry for places such as Bathurst and West Maitland, it was not for less settled districts. As pastoralist John Coghill put it to Broughton in 1838, in counties such as St Vincent, ‘the stations are so distant, and the country so thinly inhabited, that great difficulty would prevail in affording any general means of religious instruction.’ It was quite impracticable to build a church because ‘it could not be attended by the inhabitants of the district generally, in consequence of them being so widely scattered.’ There was no town in which a clergyman might effectively reside. As he saw it, the solution lay not with the construction of churches or the employment of resident clergymen or even of partly mobile ones: instead an itinerant minister should visit each of the stations in the region. This perspective was shared by other pastoralists in similar circumstances. Settlers in the neighbourhood of Charles Campbell’s property at Duntroon on the Limestone Plains put their money behind a travelling clergyman rather than the construction of a church. Living more than 100 miles from a place of worship and entirely without the services of a minister, they agreed to give 150 pounds per annum towards employing a Church of England man to visit each of their estates and conduct Divine Service twice on Sundays. It was a system devised with the vastness of the district and the dispersion of its colonisers in mind, and Campbell hoped that ‘the same

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111 John Coghill, examined 11 August 1838, ‘Report of the Committee on Immigration with the Minutes of Evidence,’ *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council of New South Wales*, 1838. Broughton was the chairman of the Committee that year.
disposition [to support a travelling clergyman] might be shewn in other parts’ of the colony.\textsuperscript{112}

By the late 1830s, Bishop Broughton was ready to approve clerical itinerancy in such circumstances. He wrote to the SPG proposing to employ six clergymen to minister in twelve counties ‘chiefly occupied for pastoral purposes.’ The colonists in those areas were ‘so scattered that any attempt to assemble congregations ... would be perfectly fruitless’ and the construction of churches would be ‘of no utility whatever.’ The parish model of ministry was impossible in such conditions of settlement, but clergymen might nevertheless be licensed to the charge of two such counties and given the responsibility ‘to visit periodically the different farming and grazing establishments which are scattered over that space.’\textsuperscript{113} Broughton’s proposal marked a considerable departure from his former campaign for more church buildings and resident clergy, and indeed from the idea he articulated back in 1830, of clergy undertaking occasional itinerant missions to the extent that it did not interfere with their more settled ministries. But from the ‘most attentive comparison of our wants with the means of supplying them,’ he had concluded that regular itinerancy was ‘the most economical and effectual [method of ministry] which circumstances would permit me to adopt.’\textsuperscript{114} His earlier reservations about extended clerical travel had dissolved in the face of the challenges confronting his Church. He had come to consider it essential for the religious health of the colony that he employ some of his clergy in a manner informed by colonial experience and thoroughly adapted to both its physical vastness and its colonists’ dispersion.

Broughton had considerable difficulty putting his new plan into action, though. On the one hand, he struggled to raise the finances necessary to support the clergymen who would work among the scattered settlers of the outer districts. Under the Church Act, the colonial government would contribute to clergyman’s salary only after the people to whom he would minister had contributed a portion themselves. Though effective in many areas, the scheme was problematic beyond the boundaries. ‘It may be hardly reasonable

\textsuperscript{112} Charles Campbell, examined 15 August 1838, ‘Report of the Committee on Immigration with the Minutes of Evidence.’

\textsuperscript{113} Broughton to A. M. Campbell, 21 July 1837, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.

\textsuperscript{114} Broughton to A. M. Campbell, 21 July 1837, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
to expect pledges of a permanent nature from people who are themselves only occupiers by the sufferance of the government,’ as Broughton put it during his visitation to the squatting district of Port Philip in 1843.\textsuperscript{115} It was also difficult in those places populated primarily by people who were either too poor or unwilling to give money to the church.\textsuperscript{116} These effects of localised poverty were exacerbated by the economic depression which gripped the whole colony in the early 1840s.\textsuperscript{117} This ‘most painful interruption of [the settlers’] accustomed prosperity,’ as Broughton described it, made it extremely difficult for him to collect the money promised towards existing church projects and virtually impossible for him to raise funds for new ones.\textsuperscript{118}

As well as this shortage of money, Broughton faced a shortage of suitable clergy willing to work in the colony. In the absence of a local college to train its own clergy, the colonial church relied on men educated in England to serve in its ranks. The Bishop sent detailed descriptions of the kind of people he thought conditions required to assist recruiters at the SPG. To those who would take up itinerant positions, ‘comfort or accommodation or a very regular supply of any thing beyond the very necessities of life [could] not be promised,’ he explained. They would be required to spend forty weeks of the year ‘in motion, going through various parts of [their] charge’ – and a mere twelve at home refreshing themselves and arranging their future circuits. Their ministry would be utterly unlike their previous situations in England, where clergy were ‘supported by the credit of an established and endowed religion, surrounded by friends, brethren and advisers to whom recourse may immediately be had, and secure of those comforts which cannot be wholly wanting to any in a highly civilised state of society.’ New South Wales, by contrast, was a ‘rugged field of labour’ which demanded men of ‘no ordinary stamp.’\textsuperscript{119} ‘Personal fatigue and privation, separation from their families and association with a race of men who can only be brought gradually to entertain any concern for ... blessed truth’ must not discourage them. They must be of hardy constitution and possess

\textsuperscript{115}‘Districts beyond the boundaries’ in ‘Second Tour, 1843: Voyage to Port Philip.’
\textsuperscript{116}See Broughton to Campbell, 30 October 1839, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
\textsuperscript{118}Broughton to Hawkins, 26 June 1841 and 3 Jan 1842, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
\textsuperscript{119}Broughton to SPG, 10 January 1842, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
both resolve in the face of trials and wisdom in the midst of perplexities.\textsuperscript{120} In short, conditions demanded robust missionaries rather than settled parish clergy.

The particular challenges of extending the services of the church to a dispersed population beyond the formal limits of the colony were made painfully clear to Broughton on the Monaro. Although he had never been there himself, the ‘Maneroo’, as he called it, was one of the first regions in which he implemented his ideas about itinerancy. Stretching from Michelago to what is now Gippsland, from the Australian Alps to the Pacific coast, the Maneroo attracted Europeans from the early 1820s.\textsuperscript{121} Its picturesque plains and delightful streams made it a pastoralists’ paradise.\textsuperscript{122} By the early 1840s, when Broughton turned his attention to the area, its colonising population numbered around 1550 people with nearly 80,000 cattle and more than 230,000 sheep.\textsuperscript{123} Very few of these squatters had made improvements on their stations, ‘beyond a few bark huts and a woolshed,’ and it seemed to some observers that in moral terms, too, there had been little if any advance.\textsuperscript{124} Though some individuals found the stock keepers kind and hospitable, a great many more considered it a region of ‘anarchy and absolute lawlessness’ dominated by drunkards and thieves.\textsuperscript{125}

The moral state of the people and absence of a clergyman were of great concern to Broughton. When a Queanbeyan clergyman, Edward Smith, visited the area in the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[120] Broughton to SPG, 10 January 1842 and Broughton to Hawkins, 3 April 1841, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
\item[121] This was the area declared the Maneroo squatting district in 1836. Note, however, that its boundaries have been subsequently drawn and redrawn and it no longer includes the region east of Braidwood. See generally Mark McKenna, \textit{Looking for Blackfella’s Point}; W. K. Hancock, \textit{Discovering Monaro: A Study of Man’s Impact on his Environment}, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1972.
\item[122] W. A. Brodribb, \textit{Recollections of an Australian Squatter, or Leaves from my Journal since 1835}, John Ferguson and the Royal Australia Historical Association, Sydney, 1978, p. 9; John Lhotsky, \textit{A Journey from Sydney to the Australian Alps} (1835), Blubber Head Press, Hobart, 1979, p. 95; Bourke to Glenelg, 4 July 1834, cited in Roberts, \textit{The Squatting Age in Australia}, p. 73
\item[124] Brodribb, \textit{Recollections of an Australian Squatter}, p.13
\item[125] Brodribb, \textit{Recollections of an Australian Squatter}, p. 9; Lhotsky, \textit{A Journey from Sydney}, pp. 79-80; McKenna, \textit{Looking for Blackfellas’ Point}, p. 246; Hancock, \textit{Discovering Monaro}, p. 37
\end{footnotes}
summer of 1840-41, he found the colonists in ‘urgent need’ of religious instruction. ‘Children are unbaptised, the dead are buried (as one remarked to me) ‘like dogs’ ... and what is worse, vice of almost every kind is awfully prevalent.’ His report confirmed Broughton’s fear that ‘if the means of grace be much longer withheld,’ the settlers ‘must sink into confirmed ignorance, unbelief and barbarism; qualities which also will be transmitted to their children.’ There was small encouragement, though, in Smith’s comment that some had expressed a desire for a clergyman. They had even given a tentative indication of their willingness to contribute towards his salary - though ‘they would be much more willing to do this if they could be assured that the government would assist them,’ Smith said. Having already made preliminary arrangements to station a cleric in the region, Broughton wrote to the SPG immediately upon receipt of Smith’s letter, stressing the urgency of filling the position.

William George Nott sailed into Sydney in early 1842 with the intention to work as a missionary on the Maneroo. Just four months after his appointment, though, he wrote to complain about his conditions on the pastoral frontier. Already in his short ministry, his feelings of propriety had been ‘wounded’, his studies ‘interrupted’ and his health ‘destroyed.’ The climate was cold, the available habitations were wretched and he felt himself a ‘homeless wanderer.’ ‘Were I enabled to return to England,’ he hinted, ‘I should be happy to do so.’ Broughton was disappointed that his missionary had not shown ‘traces of a firmer resolution to cope with the difficulties of [his] undertaking,’ and replied sternly. ‘Such hardships [were] to be foreseen,’ he explained, and in any case should have been minimised. ‘It [is not] obvious to me whence the necessity for

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131 Nott to Broughton, 4 July 1842, quoted in Broughton to SPG, 11 November 1842; Broughton to Nott, 9 July 1842, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
[homelessness] can arise. There are in the district more than two hundred houses or huts in some of which assuredly I had reason to hope you might establish yourself.'\textsuperscript{132}

In August, Nott resigned. His housing had not improved, his pay had not been adequate and his district had proved too large. His letters justifying his decision to the SPG suggest that on all three counts, the difference between the expectations he had formed and the reality he encountered was so great he could not adjust.\textsuperscript{133} He had expected to undertake the charge of a country 60 miles in diameter, but found ‘Maneroo is 100 miles long and as many broad.’ And although he had been appointed to ‘Maneroo and to that alone,’ ‘when I arrived in New South Wales I was ordered to preach at Braidwood every fifth or sixth Sunday. Braidwood is in the county of St Vincent and is more than 100 miles from the nearest part of Maneroo. The whole county was annexed to my care.’\textsuperscript{134} It was a situation Broughton could well have explained in terms of both the great need of the population and the vastness of the colony. But to Nott it seemed a breach of his conditions of employment and sufficient excuse to resign. Bishop Broughton was deeply disappointed by these events. He felt he had made ‘every possible arrangement’ for the clergyman’s ‘temporal advantage and comfort,’ only to receive a ‘disrespectful and unbecoming’ resignation in reply.\textsuperscript{135} Unless ‘a self-denying and truly devoted man’ was found as a replacement missionary for that remote and long-forsaken district, ‘the very name and influence of religion’ would remain ‘in danger of decaying,’ he despaired.\textsuperscript{136}

Early in 1843, the Reverend Edward Gifford Pryce, already ministering in a widely-extended district on the Hawkesbury, agreed to move south to the Maneroo.\textsuperscript{137} An energetic, single man in his late thirties, Pryce proved a deeply committed and highly capable appointment. He had a sensitive eye for his surrounds and travelled constantly

\textsuperscript{132} Broughton to Nott, 9 July 1842, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
\textsuperscript{133} See the extract of Nott’s letter of 13 August, in Broughton to SPG, 11 November 1842, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library; Nott to SPG, 16 March 1843 and 12 September 1843, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 561, Mitchell Library.
\textsuperscript{134} Nott to SPG, 16 March 1843, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 561, Mitchell Library.
\textsuperscript{135} Broughton to SPG, 11 November 1842, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
\textsuperscript{136} Broughton to Hawkins, 3 September 1842, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
over his new district to reach ‘the people amidst their flocks and herds.’ He became acquainted with all the settlers, from the proprietors of stock to the labouring population, and endeavoured to impress upon them ‘the unspeakable importance’ of religion and of participating in the ministrations of the church. To a relieved Broughton, who received his reports, it seemed that the services he held at many of the larger stations, along with his other ‘indefatigable and zealous exertions’ for the settlers’ welfare and improvement, quickly earned him their high esteem.

As determined and successful as he was, Reverend Pryce still struggled with many of the issues that had defeated his predecessor. As he reported to Broughton after his first year of itinerant labour, moving ‘from house to house’ was utterly exhausting. ‘During the whole time I have been in this district I have not … been more than three days at once in the same place,’ he explained. And although this constant travelling gave him ‘better opportunities’ to fulfil the duties of his ministry, ‘it would greatly lighten my difficulties … had I a home to return to, … where I could enjoy a little relaxation and find time for a little study.’ Without such a place, he went on, it was difficult to preserve his ‘spirituality of mind’ and avoid becoming ‘mechanical’ in the performance of his ministry.

Pryce was the kind of Anglican who refreshed himself by the personal study of God’s Word and who, though he willingly exerted himself strenuously to bring true religion to the colonists, did not elevate activism as many evangelicals did as either a particular virtue or an end in itself. His constant mobility had proven appropriate to the settlers’ dispersion and effective for maintaining their religious observance, but so personally taxing it could not long be sustained. There seemed a limit to which the Anglican church and its clergy could adapt to their colonial surrounds.

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February 1845. Bishop Broughton rode south to see Maneroo for himself. After a lonely journey through ‘very rude country,’ he at last reached the station of William Bradley on its northern side. Although delighted by the scenery of this ‘fertile district’ he did not pause long to admire it. With the ‘destitute condition’ of its settlers weighing on his mind, he lost no time in meeting with Reverend Pryce and ‘devising and commencing’ measures to ensure ‘the progress of religious improvement among the people.’

Prominent among Broughton’s concerns was the construction of a church for the district. He was thankful for Pryce’s efforts ‘itinerating among the scattered inhabitants.’ But there was a limit to how far he would relax his parish ideal and he considered it both proper and important that the district also have ‘one centre of visible religion, one place provided and set apart for the decent and orderly administration of its ordinances – that is, a church.’ There, settlers might gather for the occasional service, as well as for baptism, marriage, confirmation and ‘above all ... the most Holy Sacrament of the body and blood of Christ.’ There, the spiritual efficacy and impressiveness of these rites would be plainly apparent – and the degradation of the bush overcome.

Over the following few days, the Bishop selected a site for the building, sketched out its design and, before a remarkably large assemblage of settlers, laid its foundation stone. ‘With respect to the edifice itself, it is erected in honor of that God who was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself: and it is therefore to bear the name of ‘Christ-Church,’ he explained to those present on the occasion. ‘It is thus called, also, as being the first Christian structure projected in this district; and, as such, is most becomingly called after him ‘who is the image of the Invisible God: the first-born of every creature.’”

Mark McKenna has rightly suggested that the foundation of Christ Church satisfied Bishop Broughton’s need to make material the Christian civilisation he longed for. To render the invisible, visible, was deeply important to the high churchman both personally and theologically. ‘Every time the duty of my office calls me to engage in a work such as I have this day executed, I experience a feeling of joy unspeakable in thinking that, so far as human means can be applied to the extension of the kingdom of

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143 Broughton, Address delivered on the Occasion of Laying the Foundation Stone of a Church by the Bishop of Australia, Sydney: Kemp and Fairfax, 1845, p10. He is citing Colossians 1:15.
144 McKenna, Looking for Blackfellas’ Point, pp. 98-9.
God, we are applying them,’ he reflected publicly. As he then proclaimed to the assembled crowd, ‘We by the erection of this and other Churches seek for means of more extensively inculcating’ those ‘Christian principles’ which must guide and govern ‘every dweller on earth’ for ‘his happiness and security.’

In laying the first stone Broughton not only gave solidity to his vision for the foundation of a Christian society, he enacted his particular ecclesiology. The nature and intention of the proceedings, as he told the colonists who witnessed them that day, was ‘to show that we are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets; Jesus Christ himself being the cornerstone. We stand in defence of that faith which was once delivered to the Saints, and shall be here faithfully promulgated.’ He explained his hopes for the future of Christ church Maneroo in distinctively high Anglican terms:

‘May this church continue, to the latest generations, a place for the assemblage of the faithful believers in [Christ]; and here may the doctrines of his gospel be forever taught in accordance with the principle of the English reformation: the principle of referring to Holy Scripture for the proof of all things necessary to salvation; yet piously upholding the just authority of the true Catholic church as witness and keeper of holy writ, and as our safe and proper guide in controversies of faith. For ever adored be that mercy which in reforming has yet preserved to us the primitive constitution of the Church.’

As the first church founded in the squatting districts beyond the official boundaries of the colony, Christ Church Maneroo was an instance of success, an example of both clergyman and church reaching the dispersed population of a squatting district. Broughton’s exertions to see a ‘striking and respectable’ church building raised in such a ‘wild and little frequented neighbourhood’ embodied his high Anglican vision for religion and its observance in New South Wales. His long experience in the colony had prompted him to expand his idea of ministry to include itinerancy, but he adopted a

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145 Broughton, *Address delivered on the Occasion of Laying the Foundation Stone of a Church*, pp. 6, 9
146 Broughton, *Address delivered on the Occasion of Laying the Foundation Stone of a Church*, p. 12
147 Broughton, *Address delivered on the Occasion of Laying the Foundation Stone of a Church*, p. 11
missionary approach only when the parish model could not yet be established or maintained. Mobility was indispensible to both his own ministry and that of a great number of clergy under him. But the Bishop remained thoroughly committed to the local expression of religion, to the settled worship of God, to seeing churches built throughout the territory.

DISTANCE AND DEFEAT

The foundation of a church ‘beyond the boundaries’ in 1845 signalled neither the end of itinerancy nor the beginning of the rapid development of Anglican institutions in the more remote districts of the colony. Reverend Pryce officiated occasionally at Christ Church, but otherwise continued to travel widely, holding services on various stations throughout the Maneroo and sometimes accompanying the squatters moving deeper into Gippsland.¹⁴⁹ Within ten years of the church’s foundation, though, the growth of the township of Cooma at some distance down the creek made gathering there impractical for many people. Morning services continued but in 1855 the evening meeting moved to a store in town while plans were developed for a second, better situated building. St Paul’s Cooma was eventually opened in 1872, and Christ Church finally closed.

To Bishop Broughton, the experience of ministry on the Maneroo indicated both the value and the limits of the church’s adaptation to its colonial environment. On the one hand, it had demonstrated the very real and considerable benefits of itinerancy. ‘It is impossible to estimate too highly the services which our clergy [beyond the boundaries] are ... in a position to confer,’ he wrote to the SPG in 1844. ‘They may in reality be said, so far as their restricted efforts can accomplish it, to be resisting the establishment of the dominion of atheism.’¹⁵⁰ If the right man was chosen for the job, his travels could ensure the religious survival of those he met and to whom ministered, at least until the church itself arrived. At the same time, itinerancy was so personally demanding that even the

¹⁵⁰ Broughton to SPG, 3 April 1844, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
right kind of clergyman could not sustain it indefinitely. It seemed a model of ministry with essential short term benefits but little long term future.

Even as Broughton learned this lesson, however, the very conditions to which he sought to adapt threatened to overwhelm him. Throughout the 1840s, he repeatedly expressed his great and growing anxiety ‘concerning the districts beyond the boundaries, over which population is extending rapidly, without any attendant provision even for their maintenance in the belief of Christianity.’ His letters to the SPG are burdened with this concern. Eight such districts had ‘the means of grace in some degree afforded them’ by Reverend Pryce and three other itinerant missionaries. But ten others were ‘altogether destitute of that blessing,’ Broughton wrote sadly in 1844. It was a desperate situation with fading hope of relief. He did his best to visit the destitute districts himself, but his diocese was an ‘immense tract of country’ of ‘enormous extent’, ‘the largest diocese in the world.’ Even excluding Tasmania, South and West Australia, ‘the part already settled, and which must therefore be traversed by the Bishop, contains from about eight to ten times the area of the United Kingdom.’ But even if his ability to travel was twice what it was, ‘it would be physically impossible to accomplish all that is required for the due inspection of a flock so scattered.’ He simply needed more clergymen of ‘iron constitution’ and ‘apostolical zeal’ to help him with a task that seemed impossibly immense. In their absence, he was not even confident that ‘the profession of Church of England Christianity will outlive the present century.’

This, in the end, was the main thing at stake: the preservation of true religion, the observance of Anglican Christianity. And to Broughton, this was everything. He travelled extensively, served faithfully and worked extraordinarily hard - but did not see his vision fulfilled. Instead he recognised that the difficulties of his diocese, particularly those of distance and dispersion, were too substantial for his few resources to overcome. ‘Affairs are more and more perplexing from want of men and means,’ he lamented towards the end of the 1840s, ‘and the weight of anxieties begins I think to be more felt

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152 Broughton to SPG, 3 April 1844, ‘Broughton’s letters’, FM4 560, Mitchell Library.
by me than it was when I was younger. Still,’ he explained to a friend, ‘you will not think that I am losing my confidence in God or manifesting a disposition to yield to dissatisfaction. It is not so, you may be assured. But this field is so vast and my resources so limited, that every day brings its own questions of difficulty.’ ¹⁵⁵

Bishop Broughton persevered with his ministry until late 1852, when church business drew him England where he died the following year. But by the mid 1840s, the significance of distance was already clear. The vastness of the colony and the scattered state of its settlers had defined the context of his ministry and posed challenges he could only partially meet. On the one hand, distance and dispersion had substantially impacted the Church itself. These characteristics of the land had forced Broughton to rethink ministry methods by necessitating extensive visitations and itinerant missions. They had stretched the Church’s resources and, at the same time, increased the people’s need of them. It seemed to him that dispersion undermined settled religion and exposed many settlers to the dangers of moral degradation and even atheism - and yet placed them beyond the reach of the church. And as the colony continued to expand and the settlers to spread out, Broughton’s resources for adapting to the situation were increasingly dwarfed by the size of the task. Distance and dispersion proved characteristics of the land and its European occupation that profoundly shaped the context, character and ultimately the effectiveness of his ministry.

In the several months since John Wollaston had last made an entry in his journal, he and his family had experienced many new and challenging things. They had concluded the long voyage from England to their ‘adopted country,’ western Australia, unpacked their possessions on the banks of the Preston, a few miles south east of Port Leschenault, and turned their attention towards making ‘a Settlement’.\footnote{John Ramsden Wollaston, *The Wollaston Journals*, vol. 1: 1840-1842, Geoffrey Bolton and Heather Vose (eds.), University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1991, pp. 119, 125.} As he contemplated the task of accounting for that crucial time in late 1841, it was abundantly obvious to him that his new situation was utterly unlike the one he had left behind in rural Cambridgeshire, where he ministered in a parish church, and utterly unlike what he had expected of the colony.\footnote{The biographical literature on John Wollaston and his family includes G. Bolton, ‘Introduction’ in Wollaston, *The Wollaston Journals*, vol. 1, pp. xii-xxx; Rowan Strong, ‘The Reverend John Wollaston and Colonial Christianity in Western Australia, 1840-1863,’ *Journal of Religious History*, vol.25, no.3 (2001) pp. 261-285; Allan Watson, ‘Wollaston and Women,’ *Early Days* vol.10 no.6, (1994) pp. 647-657; Marian Aveling, ‘Western Australian Society: The Religious Aspects (1829 – 1895)’ in C. T. Stannage, ed., *A New History of Western Australia*, Nedlands, 1981, pp. 575-598. On Mary Wollaston see her ‘Reminiscences 10 July 1869’, MN 880, Acc no. 695A, Wollaston Papers, Battye Library, State Library of Western Australia, Perth, and Helen Wallace, ‘Mary Amelia Wollaston: A Life of ‘Amusing Contrast,’’ *Early Days* vol.11 no.4 1988, pp. 510-523.} ‘I have always wished to see a Country in a state of primitive nature, and now that wish has been granted; but the impression on my mind has been very different to what I anticipated,’ he explained.

‘Nothing can be more depressing than the loneliness of the Bush away from any Settlement ... such an awful silence prevails, except when broken by the horrid screech of the great black or white Cockatoo, that I have been almost tempted to shed tears at the desolateness of the scene, had I not called to mind the ubiquity of the God of Nature who can make ‘a wilderness like Eden and a desert like the Garden of the Lord’ – can cause ‘joy and gladness to be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody.’ Before, however, this happy time can come the moral wilderness of the world must be broken up and cultivated. And this forcibly reminds
me of my Clerical duties & the great responsibility resting upon me, the first of Christ’s ordained Ministers who has officiated in this extensive District.’

Wollaston never explained the precise reasons why, at the age of fifty, he decided to relocate his family to a little-known place on the opposite side of the world. Both he and his wife Mary Amelia apparently enjoyed good relationships with the community of West Wickham and provided generous and capable leadership for its parish church. By the middle of 1840, though, he felt so tired by his Sunday duty that he felt he ‘could not go on many years longer as I am.’ ‘I hope I shall not offend God by abandoning my charge here,’ he added, ‘to enter upon a scene of greater usefulness.’ His professional interest to minister in a new place and his personal desire for a change disposed him positively towards emigration, but it was most probably his family’s particular circumstances that finally persuaded him of ‘the necessity and prudence’ of relocating to the colonies. By 1840 he and Mary had five sons and two daughters aged between five and twenty. The older four would soon reach an age where they might begin to establish their independence and Wollaston was keen to provide them with opportunities for employment and advancement, as his writings from the colony indicate. He apparently anticipated that migrating to Australia would yield new openings for both them and him and looked forward to establishing his family on the land and to planting ‘the Church of Christ in a new district of the World’ as the Anglican chaplain to the new settlement at Australind. Wollaston set his face towards Australia with a freedom and an overall optimism that his co-religionists Richard Johnson and William Grant Broughton had lacked.

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5 Wollaston, *Journals* vol. 1 p. 4.
6 Wollaston, *Journals* vol. 1 p. 4.
7 They were: John jr (20), William (19), Henry (18), George (17), Edward (13), Agnes (9) and Sophia (5)
8 Wollaston, *Journals* vol. 1 p.132. Wollaston’s expectation of being appointed chaplain is clear in his entry for 19 November 1840, in which he writes of having ‘obtained a government appointment.’ Wollaston, *Journals* vol. 1 p.5
Like so many of his fellow colonists in the south west and his clerical predecessors in the east, Wollaston found that, upon arrival, the colony generally disappointed him. He was able to purchase a farm begun by an American whaling captain on the Preston river about twenty kilometres from Australind, and to select the one hundred acres for which he had paid in England adjacent to it. Although thankful for the start this afforded, he found the soil very patchy in quality and soon realised that ‘time and much labour must be bestowed’ on it to make it sufficiently productive.\(^9\) The challenges of farming were no small matter because the government failed, for obscure reasons, to formalise his appointment as chaplain to Australind. He did not receive the salary he had expected and his material situation was consequently far more difficult than he had foreseen. With an urgency born of the need to physically supply his family’s needs, Wollaston and his sons turned their attention to clearing, enclosing, manuring and sowing the land.

In addition to these physical labours and even in the absence of an official post, Wollaston also sought ‘to be instrumental,’ in spiritual terms, ‘in the advancement of all within my reach.’ He read prayers each evening with his family, held Sunday services and generally ministered to other colonists in his vicinity too. But he found most settlers generally unresponsive to his efforts and neglectful of the church. Most did not ‘seek after the truth as it is in Jesus’ but behaved in ‘utterly ungodly’ ways he found ‘sickening to the clergyman’s heart.’\(^10\) These disappointments impressed upon him that he had arrived in a physically and spiritually desolate place in need of transformation into a ‘Garden of the Lord.’ Both his present difficulties and future hopes spurred him to exercise his literary gifts in the personal journal he wrote in lieu of letters for his closest English relatives and friends.

This chapter explores the idea of wilderness that numerous colonists of Australia, including Wollaston, brought with them from Britain and made use of to express their sense of their new surrounds. Whether their primary intellectual influence was the enlightenment, romanticism or biblical Christianity, numerous colonists drew on biblical

\(^9\) Wollaston, *Journals* vol. 1 p. 129.

notions of wilderness deliberately or unconsciously as they described their Australian surrounds. In doing so they often stressed its uncultivated state and articulated a longing for its transformation into something that better reflected their expectations and ideals. For Wollaston, one of the most overtly religious early colonists of the south west, the idea of wilderness was saturated with theological promise and significance. Biblical ideas about the land percolate through the journal he kept throughout the first four years of his residence in the south west. In it, he explicitly referred to his surrounds as a wilderness at least eleven times.\footnote{Wollaston, \textit{Journals} vol. 1 pp.128, 141, 221, 225, 263, 265 and Wollaston, \textit{Journals}, vol.2 pp.7, 58, 102, 117, 123.} He used the language of wilderness to express his idea of the physical bush as both a site of divine judgement and a place in which he maintained a glimmer of hope, to emphasise the immoral and irreligious habits of the settlers and to lament the degraded state of colonial society. Wilderness had physical, moral, social and spiritual dimensions and lay at the heart of his understanding of his unfamiliar new environment. And although wilderness was beginning to acquire more positive meanings by the mid nineteenth century, perhaps especially in North America, for Wollaston it was always a negative idea. He used the image to express his sense of the chasm between the ordered, godly society he so deeply desired and the colonial reality. In the face of initial disappointment he clung to the biblical promise that the wilderness would one day be transformed like Eden and committed himself, in his particularly Anglican way, to cultivating the garden of the Lord.

**THE IDEA OF WILDERNESS**

John Wollaston was by no means unusual in using wilderness terminology to articulate his impressions of the colonial environment. The idea was important to the ways in which many British colonists who arrived in Australia during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries described their new surrounds. The language of wilderness appears in sources ranging from the journals kept by officers who sailed with Phillip’s fleet to the diaries of young women who established homes in the lonely bush, from the polemical publications of aspiring leaders who trumpeted the colony’s progress abroad to the sermons of Protestant clergy who longed to see a godly society emerge from the...
moral wasteland of the world. A great variety of early colonists evoked an idea of wilderness to convey their sense of their situation and environment. Their uses of the term indicate that wilderness had a wide range of meanings, many of which were informed by the biblical text.

The concept of wilderness is so prominent in the Christian scriptures that, as one North American scholar exclaimed, ‘it is not possible to read the Bible without being impressed’ by it. The *King James* version familiar to many of Australia’s early British colonists contains almost three hundred explicit uses of the term. In Genesis and other books it is used simply in a geophysical sense to describe desert regions whether grassed, barren or in drought. The distinguishing feature of such areas was their uncultivated state. The meaning of wilderness is extended beyond the physical in the narrative of Israel’s wandering in the desert of Sinai, though. According to the Hebrew scriptures, the Israelites sojourned in the wilderness for forty years between their exodus from Egypt and their entry into the Promised Land of Canaan. In the wilderness they found refuge from Pharaoh’s army but then faced other trials and temptations. Yahweh revealed himself, helped them and gave them the law and the covenant which marked them out as His people, but they also grumbled and rebelled and consequently suffered the judgement of their God. This complex narrative provided what David Williams called ‘the model and the original’ for all subsequent wilderness imagery in the Bible. It gave the wilderness a range of ethical, psychological and spiritual meanings that later scriptural authors developed both negatively and positively. Some associated the wilderness primarily with moral trial, spiritual failure and the destructive wrath of God. Even Christ

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15 David Williams, *Wilderness Lost*, p. 25.

was sorely tempted in the wilderness of Judea. But others pointed to the redemption of
God’s people and prophesied the transformation of their place of difficulty into a garden
of the Lord.

Three ideas of wilderness thus emerge from the biblical text. It was an uncultivated or
barren region not permanently settled but travelled across or wandered through. It was
also a place of moral disorder, religious failure and consequent suffering at the hands of a
punishing God. And it was a site of divine salvation that could itself be positively
transformed. Each of these ideas exerted a strong influence upon Wollaston and a number
of his less overtly religious contemporaries. Some colonists used wilderness language to
express an overwhelmingly religious vision of the colonial environment. Others used the
language of wilderness in ways that overlapped with these biblical notions to express
ideas usually associated with romanticism or the enlightenment. The colonists’ various
descriptions of Australia as a wilderness thus provide an insight into the ways in which
biblical religion, among other European cultural and intellectual traditions, informed their
impressions of and response to their new surrounds.

Australia’s early British colonists most frequently made use of wilderness language in
the first sense, to convey an idea of their own unsettled and uncultivated surrounds. ‘I can
never forget those first nights of tent life,’ the Quaker Louisa Clifton wrote in her
Australind diary for 1841. ‘This spot was then a wild untrodden wilderness; bushes,
zamia, brushwood and small trees thickly covering the soil.’ Though she had found parts
of it rather beautiful, she was nevertheless glad it was soon ‘quite cleared.’[17] In June
1843, Wollaston similarly recalled his arrival in a ‘thick and gloomy wilderness’ two
years’ previously. ‘I remember wandering about without knowing where I was and
almost shedding tears at the apparently hopeless task of subduing such a labyrinth.’ He
had found the uncultivated wilderness disorienting and distressingly chaotic, but there
was now ‘a beautiful green level of springing corn’ in its place, he continued joyfully.

[17] Louisa Clifton, ‘Diary 1840-41,’ in Lucy Frost, No Place for Nervous Lady: Voices from the Australian
The sight of that ordered and productive patch was ‘an inexpressible relief to the eye,’ he effused, ‘and no less to the mind.’

Other early western Australian colonists used the language of wilderness to emphasis the absence of both cultivation and settlement as they lamented the way the bush overran their failed farms. Some months after her family abandoned their first settlement on the Blackwood, upriver from Augusta, for more promising land at the Vasse, Miss Elizabeth Bussell visited their first home. She strolled into the old garden, as she later recounted to an English friend, only to find that the ‘trees and shrubs have grown up to considerably higher than myself’ and she ‘could not recognize the neat and well-kept paths in the present wilderness.’ When Wollaston’s eldest son John visited another abandoned farm near Augusta during 1841, he similarly discovered that ‘all sorts of things introduced were growing wild, but rapidly giving way to the exuberance of growth in the Native Plants!’ He found the ‘deserted ruinous huts’ a ‘melancholy’ sight and judged that ‘a few years would be sufficient to obliterate the traces of a Settlement.’ Wollaston himself was thankful that his own exertions had initially prospered sufficiently to enable him to carry on, but he confessed in his journal that such evidence of the ‘abortive attempts of poor struggling Emigrants to establish themselves’ brought ‘a distressing train of thought’ over him.

These early colonists of the south west described their environment in ways that suggested it was wild and disorderly in its natural state. For some the wilderness seemed threatening and difficult to subdue. Establishing a successful farm was such a struggle that the Bussells and other families gave up their first attempt at Augusta and began again on better land at the Vasse. So many others gave up altogether that abandoned huts seemed ‘abundant in all directions whither man has wandered,’ wrote Wollaston. There

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18 Wollaston, Journals vol. 2 pp. 122-3.
20 Wollaston, Journals vol. 1 p. 260.
21 Wollaston, Journals vol. 1 p. 260. On the abandonment of farms during the difficult years of the early to mid 1830s, see James Cameron, Ambition’s Fire: The Agricultural Colonisation of Pre-Convict Western Australia, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1981, chapter six.
was nothing in his outlook that anticipated the later nineteenth century romantics, who would admire colonial ruins in the absence of classical ones. To Wollaston and his son, and perhaps to Miss Bussell too, the old huts and overgrown farms signalled the great difficulty of establishing a successful settlement. Although some colonists might triumph over the wilderness for a time, it nevertheless remained a threat to permanent settlement.

Other colonists described their surrounds as an uncultivated wilderness in far more positive terms. Their sensibilities were influenced more by Romanticism and their survival was often less dependent than Wollaston’s on the immediate success of a farm. They tended not to fear the wilderness as a threat to settlement but to celebrated it as the creation’s originally perfect state. George Worgan was perhaps the country’s first romantic: uniquely among the colonists who sailed with Phillip’s fleet, he brought a piano with him to New South Wales. There is little record of how he played it, but upon arrival he certainly amused himself by taking in ‘Romantic Views, all thrown together in sweet Confusion by the careless hand of Nature,’ on his rambles in the bush. His journal reveals his fascination with the curious plants and exotic peoples that populated ‘these wildernesses’ and includes vivid descriptions of them for the entertainment of his brother at home. Worgan depicted Aboriginal people as ‘children of nature’ and in more than one passage portrayed them as Adams and Eves. They lived as savages in the wilderness, he wrote, but ‘they were naked and not ashamed’ like the inhabitants of Eden before the Fall.

Some years after Worgan returned to England, Alexander Harris depicted the colonial wilderness as a home for unencumbered and uncorrupted European people too. The pastoral establishments he visited in Argyle County appeared to him as ‘perfectly natural Edens’ surrounded by ‘parklike tracts of bush’ with sheep grazing under the shade of the trees and men ‘slowly sauntering to and fro and getting all their work done by ten in the morning.’ ‘Inanimate nature is universally lovely amidst these wildernesses,’ he sighed, and its inhabitants led lives of ‘still and unmolested’ leisure rather than hard labour.

there. His description, like Worgan’s, of Australia as a wilderness evoked an image of the colony as an untouched and uncorrupted place rather than one of precarious survival or bustling industry. Such writers used wilderness language to convey an idea of the environment as an Edenic paradise to be admired more than something to be improved or subdued.

These Romantic descriptions of the colony as a wilderness echoed European responses to the environment in North America and parts of the Pacific such as Tahiti. Interestingly, though, they drew on the biblical tradition in complex ways. On the one hand both Worgan and Harris stretched the meaning of wilderness beyond the biblical text. In Genesis, Eden is described as a garden paradise not as a wilderness. When Eden is associated with wilderness elsewhere in scripture it is not as an equivalent but as an ideal into which the uncultivated wilderness will be transformed. These divergences suggest that although their ideas overlapped with biblical ones, their understanding of their surrounds was not governed by strictly scriptural notions of wilderness. On the other hand, though, these colonial romantics retained the biblical language of Eden and referred to distinctively scriptural figures such as Adam and Eve to convey their particular vision of the environment. Their easy resort to biblical terms and images suggests that biblical Christianity could have a significant influence on colonists’ imaginations, even those influenced primarily by Romanticism.

The second biblical idea of wilderness as a place of moral trial, religious failure and punishment by God also informed some Britons’ writings about the colony. This particular notion of wilderness was rooted in the narrative of Israel’s faithlessness and rebellion in the wilderness of Sinai and developed in several other parts of the Old Testament. As Ulrich Mauser pointed out, the picture of the desert ‘assumes a decidedly darker tint’ and the wilderness takes on characteristics ‘in close proximity to the powers of darkness and death’ in a number of Psalms and prophetic books such as Hosea, Ezekiel and Jeremiah. For example Psalm 106 recalls how the Israelites ‘lusted

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25 Mauser, Christ in the Wilderness, pp. 36-50
26 Mauser, Christ in the Wilderness, p. 36
exceedingly in the wilderness and tempted God in the desert ... therefore he lifted up his
had against them to overthrow them in the wilderness.’27 And Jeremiah had the terrible
vision that, because of Israel’s sin, ‘the fruitful place was a wilderness and all the cities
thereof were broken down at the presence of the LORD and by his fierce anger.’28

Such biblical associations of the wilderness with spiritual crisis and the judgment of God
were readily reinforced by the key texts of English Protestantism. Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s
Progress and Milton’s Paradise Lost associated the wilderness with disorder, death and
the demonic.29 For members of the Church of England, these ideas were further
emphasised by the Book of Common Prayer. ‘Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not
your hearts as in the provocation and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness,’ urged
Psalm 95, familiar to Anglican church-goers as the first canticle of Morning Prayer. That
passage presented the Israelites who wandered the Sinai desert as ‘the example of sinners
par excellence’ and at the same time generalised the significance of their wilderness
experience by developing it into a warning against further sin.30 The frequent liturgical
repetition of the Psalm probably encouraged observant Anglicans like Wollaston to
associate wilderness with compromised religion and to identify its inhabitants as morally
and spiritually deficient and thus at risk of the judgement of God.

Several devout Anglicans were heavily influenced by this conception of wilderness. One
of William Grant Broughton’s early impressions of New South Wales was that ‘a decay
of real piety’ and ‘even a want of outward observance of religion’ characterised those
vast parts of the colony beyond the reach of ministerial superintendence. ‘Many are gone
astray in the wilderness,’ he said.31 Wollaston similarly understood his context as one of
spiritual trial in which the colonists’ faithfulness to God was put to the test. In several
journal passages, he suggested that life in the colony was morally perilous, especially for

27 Psalm 106:14, 26; note also the more generalised view of the relationship between wrath and wilderness
in Psalm 107:33 - God ‘turneth rivers into a wilderness and the watersprings into dry ground’ (King
James Version).
28 Jeremiah 4:26 (King James version)
29 George Williams, Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought, pp. 76f, 84.
30 Mauser, Christ in the Wilderness, pp.40-41
31 William Grant Broughton, A Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of New South Wales: at the
Primary Visitation, holden at Sydney in the Church of St James on Thursday 3rd December 1829,
Sydney, 1830, p. 15

242
the young. When the death of the Presbyterian colonist Georgiana Molloy seemed near, for example, he prayed that her ‘five little girls may not be left motherless in this moral wilderness.’

He expressed a similar concern for the moral and spiritual welfare of his own children when he prayed that ‘their repentance [will] be heartfelt and sincere and the many sins of their youth washed away by a lively faith in His all sufficient atonement.’ His wife Mary Amelia urged them to ‘cleave to him your Heavenly Father, your Adorable Saviour and your Holy Comforter, the Blessed Trinity.’

In July 1843, he was encouraged to observe that his sons held ‘sound views and pious opinions’ and had developed into ‘staunch Protestants as well as zealous and obedient churchmen.’ Neither moral rectitude nor Christian faithfulness could be taken for granted in the Australian wilderness. He counted it ‘a blessing indeed, in this wild country too,’ that his children had persevered in Christian truth.

Wollaston was full of thanks to God that his own sons had not ‘been led astray,’ but remained deeply distressed by other colonists’ wickedness and irreligion. Drunkenness seemed rife, Sabbath-breaking was endemic and even the ‘better classes’ of colonists appeared content to live lives of ‘open infidelity’ at some distance from the church. His Sunday congregation at Bunbury was often ‘fair’ or ‘very small’ – and on at least two occasions he had to cancel the service for want of worshipers. Most settlers failed even to observe the main festivals of the Christian calendar. On Good Friday 1842 he was disappointed that no one but his family attended service at his home. ‘No one thinks of keeping the Day as it ought to be kept,’ he lamented, ‘yet what a solemn season it is, when we reflect on the event that occurred on this day affecting the eternal welfare of all Mankind!’

At Christmas the same year, Wollaston was again ‘much vexed ... at the careless indifference of the People respecting Divine Service, including the Governor himself.’ He enjoyed friendly relationships with the settlers of the area but doubted that, if he left, they would regret ‘the departure of a Minister of God’s Holy Ordinances’

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32 Wollaston, Journals vol.2 p. 7
33 Mary Amelia Wollaston, ‘Reminiscences.’
35 Wollaston, Journals vol 2 p.117.
36 Wollaston, Journals vol.1 p. 262
37 Wollaston, Journals vol.1 p. 128.
38 Wollaston, Journals vol.1 pp. 233, 259, 263, 270.
39 Wollaston, Journals vol.1 p. 199.
40 Wollaston, Journals vol.2 p.11
or care much ‘whether my place is supplied or not.’  

41 If only the colonial Anglican church were stronger and better organised, he lamented in 1843. Only an orderly church could ‘guarantee’ to the people that its clergy ‘all teach the same thing’ and convince them ‘that that ‘thing’ is far more needful ... than they at present imagine.’  

42 The absence of such a church entrenched his view of the colony as a religious wilderness characterised by moral failure and spiritual trial.

Such a place was not entirely devoid of hope, though. It was physically uncultivated and populated by people in rebellion against God, but the biblical text offered a third idea of wilderness with change – even salvation – at its heart. This idea was clearly expressed in Old Testament books such as Isaiah, which prophesied salvation and the transformation of the wilderness into a garden of the Lord. In places Isaiah also presented the desert as place of chaos under God’s curse and used the language of wilderness to signify both physical barrenness and spiritual dryness, as Jeremiah did. But in several passages well known to colonists, it announced the radical transformation of the wilderness and the redemption of the people of God.  

43 As one biblical commentator put it, Isaiah promised that ‘everything in the nature of the desert which is troublesome for the journey of the redeemed will be transformed ... mountains will be made low, valleys lifted up, the desert will turn into a pool of water, full of shady trees, the roadless wilderness will yield a well-prepared path.’  

44 This profoundly hopeful vision of the transformation of the wilderness was one that Protestant clergy and other deeply religious colonists drew upon to express their longing for the transformation of their Australian surrounds.

One passage in Isaiah apparently had special significance for Georgiana Molloy, the early Presbyterian colonist who became justly famous for her knowledge of Western Australian botany: ‘The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.’  

45 She turned to those words for comfort and strength on at least two occasions of deep grief. In late 1837, her nineteen month old son


42 Wollaston, _Journals_ vol.1 p. 254.  

43 Mauser, _Christ in the Wilderness_, 50-52; see also Isaiah 44:3.  

44 Mauser, _Christ in the Wilderness_, 51.  

45 Isaiah 35:1 (_King James Version_).
John tragically drowned. When she wrote of the event in a letter to her fellow botanist and confidant Captain Mangles, she moved directly from an extended account of his loss to the observation that there was yet beauty in the wilderness. ‘We have but only a few flowers until Spring. September and October are our most delightful months. The purple creeper begins to bloom in July, the red in August, but in those two months the wilderness indeed ‘begins to blossom as a Rose.’’

Two years later when Georgiana left her beloved Augusta for the Vasse – a move so painful that she compared herself to Eve being driven from her Garden in Paradise – she again found comfort in Isaiah’s words. She reported to Mangles her immediate deposit of the ‘poor plants’ she had uprooted from their native soil into the garden of her new home, and her astonishment when, that August, ‘the flowers in the wilderness began to bloom’ with all their former loveliness.

Molloy’s several biographers have suggested that her initially fervent Protestant faith receded as time passed in the colony and her botanical pursuits came to provide her with meaning and purpose in old religion’s place. But the biblical image of the desert rejoicing and the wilderness blossoming as the rose evidently remained important to her. She drew upon it to express hope for the future in some of the most difficult periods of her Australian life.

For the Anglicans Broughton and Wollaston, it was another text from Isaiah that perhaps meant most: ‘For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.’

Very soon after his arrival in Sydney, Broughton publicly articulated his hope that true religion would take hold there by quoting those words: ‘Here, it is true, from the beginning of time, desolation and darkness had reigned; but that resistless word has gone forth which

46 Georgiana Molloy to Captain Mangles, 25 January 1838, James Mangle papers, MN879, Acc 479A, Battye Library, State Library of Western Australia, Perth, vol.1 p. 303
47 Georgiana Molloy to Captain Mangles, 31 January 1840, James Mangle papers, vol.2 pp.14-15
49 Isaiah 51:3 (King James Version).
Wollaston’s first recorded pronouncement on the condition of the colony made use of the same verse. Isaiah’s words encouraged him, when confronted by the depressing loneliness of the bush, to fight back the tears he was tempted to shed and to look forward to the transformation of his surrounds. The recollection that the ubiquitous ‘God of Nature’ could make the wilderness like Eden sharpened his longing for the colony’s physical and spiritual transformation and his hope for salvation from the Lord.\(^{51}\)

Numerous other colonists less obviously indebted to the Isaianic text also looked forward to the transformation of the wilderness. These typically educated people had been exposed to the biblical tradition but were more deeply influenced by the European enlightenment. They used wilderness language in ways that suggest they were more concerned with improvement than redemption, though much of it nevertheless had a religious quality. When William Wentworth accounted for the foundation and future of New South Wales in 1819, he wrote of ‘what is now one vast and mournful wilderness becoming the smiling seat of industry and the social arts … covered with bleating flocks, lowing herds and waving corn.’ Such a transformation of the country would fulfil ‘the gracious intentions of its all-bounteous Author,’ he declared.\(^{52}\) In 1826 James Atkinson expressed a similar vision for the improvement of the unruly natural environment by the application of human industry. At ‘some future and not distant time,’ he promised, the colony’s ‘untenanted wastes … shall be covered by productive flocks and herds and enlivened by the presence and industry of civilized men.’\(^{53}\) By 1841, Edward Macarthur could write confidently of the ‘thousands of industrious families … who were changing the face of the country.’ Indeed, the settlers had already transformed ‘the wilderness of

\(^{50}\) William Grant Broughton, *The Counsel and Pleasure of God in the Vicissitudes of States and Communities: a sermon preached in the church of St James, Sydney, on Thursday November 12, 1829, being the day appointed for a general thanksgiving to Almighty God in acknowledgment of His mercy in putting an end to the late severe drought and in averting His threatened judgements from this colony*, Sydney: Robert Howe, 1829, pp. 11-12, citing Isaiah 51:3.

\(^{51}\) Wollaston, *Journals*, vol.1 p.128.


yesterday into the scene of improvement and order that was now to be seen. Colons committed to improvement used wilderness language in publications intended to promote the colony’s material development with complete confidence that it would be transformed by the application of human diligence and intelligence.

Like their more Biblicist contemporaries, colonists influenced primarily by the enlightenment looked forward to the transformation of the Australian wilderness in human as well as material terms. Watkin Tench’s embrace of enlightenment ideas is apparent at numerous points in his account of the beginnings of the British colony at Sydney. ‘Untaught, unaccommodated man is the same in Pall Mall as in the wilderness of New South Wales,’ he insisted to his readers during the 1790s. ‘Hope and trust that the progress of reason and the splendour of revelation will ... be permitted to illumine and transfuse into these desert regions, knowledge, virtue and happiness.’ Three and a half decades later, the leading colonists who constituted the Agricultural Society of New South Wales made a similar claim that the progress of knowledge and virtue would transform the colonial wilderness. They would not fail ‘to civilise this new world and to give our Religion, our Laws our Language and all the civil blessing we enjoy to this rude, uncultivated wilderness,’ they declared. They used the terminology of wilderness to express a distinctively enlightenment vision of progress and improvement that nevertheless had some things in common with Wollaston’s idea of the colony’s need for transformation. They desired change in physical and moral terms and, as indicated by the references to revelation and Britain’s religion, acknowledged a place for Christianity in bringing that transformation about. Though such colonists generally put their faith in human industry, reason and intelligence rather than God and his church, they shared more than the language of wilderness itself with their clerical contemporaries.

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54 Edward Macarthur, Colonial Policy of 1840 and 1841 as Illustrated by the Governor’s Despatches and the Proceedings of the Legislative council of New South Wales, John Murray, London, 1841, p.35
55 Watkin Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years, being a reprint of The Expedition to Botany Bay and A Complete Account of the settlement at Port Jackson by Captain Watkin Tench, L. F. Fitzhardinge (ed), Sydney, 1979, p. 294.
Wilderness was a concept of considerable flexibility during the first decades of Australia’s British settlement. Romantics and enlightenment visionaries, ordinary colonists and Anglican ministers, all found it useful for conveying their ideas of their surrounds. They employed the term in ways that reflected the wide range of intellectual influences on the newcomers’ assumptions and attitudes concerning the environment, including religious ones. Wollaston was by no means unusual in using wilderness language to articulate his impressions or even in applying the word in its various biblical senses. The notion of wilderness as an uncultivated and unsettled place was widely shared, perhaps because it overlapped with romantic ideas of uncorrupted nature and resonated with many colonists’ personal experience. The second and more specifically biblical association of wilderness with spiritual failure and the judgement of God probably had little influence beyond the ranks of the clergy. The third scriptural idea of wilderness emphasised its future transformation into a garden of the Lord. This idea resonated with enlightenment visions of the colony’s progress and improvement and directly informed the outlook of overtly Protestant colonists like Broughton, Molloy and Wollaston. In the journal he kept during his first years in the colony, the west Australian clergyman used wilderness language to express his dissatisfaction with the physical, moral and religious state of his surrounds. But he also understood that wilderness was a temporary state, a liminal condition, a threshold over which a people passed on the way to either condemnation or redemption at the hands of the biblical God. While exile could be indefinite, a sojourn in the wilderness could not. And he clung to Isaiah’s promise that the wilderness would one day be transformed.

ESTABLISHING ORDER

Reverend Wollaston was neither comfortable nor content with the colony in its wilderness state and, for sixteen years until his death, he sought to influence its transformation into a godly, settled society that accorded with what he understood to be the revealed will of God. He did not think his own efforts would be sufficient to bring the desired change about: like the prophet Isaiah, he looked to the God of Nature, ‘the Great Husbandman,’ to transform the wilderness. And like Richard Johnson decades earlier, he
felt he could ‘safely leave the result’ of his labours in the hands of God.  

At the same time, though, he saw the transformation of the wilderness as a process to which he might personally and practically contribute. In one of his earliest reflections on his responsibilities as a minister in the colony, he described himself as ‘a humble Labourer’ in God’s harvest field. He acknowledged, as his evangelical predecessors in New South Wales had done, that the work was the Lord’s but that there was nevertheless a ‘great responsibility resting upon me.’  

He was neither as confidently optimistic as Marsden nor as prone to bleak depression as Johnson had been, but he similarly understood his various activities in the colony as aligned with the very purposes of God.

Crucially for the contribution of Protestant religion to the British colonisation of south western Australia, Wollaston envisioned the transformation of the wilderness in distinctively Anglican terms. Like other members of his church, he believed that ‘the Almighty is not a God of confusion’ but of order and regularity. He was well aware of Paul’s New Testament command that human society and especially the church should be decent and regular too. ‘God is not the author of confusion but of peace … Let all things be done decently and in order,’ said the first letter to the Corinthians. This biblical encouragement to order took shape in Wollaston’s life under the particular cultural and intellectual influence of Anglicanism. His ideas about what godly order actually entailed were formed prior to his migration in a rural English setting and within a church tradition historically intertwined with a particular social and political form. Having lived and ministered in rural Cambridgeshire for most of his fifty years, Wollaston valued close rural settlement and habitually considered the parish church the locus of community life. He also understood that community in fundamentally hierarchical terms. From the lord in his manor to the labourer on his land, God had allotted each person their place for the good order of society. ‘High and low, rich and poor … form together one great system of things under the unerring Providence of God,’ as a like-minded cleric in the eastern

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57 Wollaston, *Journals*, vol.1 p. 152.
60 1 Corinthians 14:33, 40 (*King James Version*).
colony had said. In Wollaston’s habitual view, the Church of England was not only the custodian of religious truth but the essential foundation for stable government and orderly society.

In the decades immediately prior to Wollaston’s departure for Australia, these particularly Anglican values had been challenged by changes in both British society and the English church. Relationships of obligation and patronage were being replaced by those of employer and employee; class was becoming more important to many Britons’ sense of identity. A substantial population was drifting away from England’s ancient villages towards industrialising areas and large towns and cities. The centrality of the Church in civic and political life had been undermined in part by reform and the loosening of its ties to the state. Its authority was questioned and its doctrines rivalled by the evangelical movement and the resurgence of dissent. In 1842, Wollaston acknowledged ‘the very imperfect order of things’ even in England. But he remained committed to that order and, with a certain nostalgia for a society that had passed, strove to transform the wilderness by recreating it in the colony. He sought to extend physical order through cultivation and close rural settlement, to observe social difference in his own relationships and to encourage the colonists to live upright and respectable lives. He also worked to establish an orderly Anglican church which commanded the obedience and loyalty of his fellow colonists. Wollaston’s religious vision was defined by a value for order and he sought to transform the colonial wilderness by establishing godly order in physical, social and religious terms.

Upon arriving in the south west and locating their farm, Wollaston and his sons invested their energy first into taming the bush and cultivating the physical wilderness. Their efforts soon met with modest success. On a summer morning just six months after they had sowed their first seeds, ‘we began our little Harvest’ the clergyman wrote. Beginning with the oats and then moving on to the wheat and barley, they worked for a month to gather their first crop. Although hot, hard work, it was manageable enough that

64 Wollaston, Journals, vol.1 p. 148.
Wollaston sought to clear more ground for cultivation in subsequent seasons. This next step towards taming the wilderness proved more difficult than he initially anticipated, though. ‘They turn the edge of the axe [and] we can only subdue them by sawing and burning’ he wrote of the trees, as if they were his adversaries. Despite such challenges, Wollaston and his sons successfully wrought a change in their physical environment. In the sowing of English seeds and the clearing of Australian trees, they gradually pushed back the wilderness and grew a productive garden in its place. In the winter of their second year Wollaston acknowledged that he and his family had ‘great reason to be thankful’ that ‘a beautiful green level of springing corn’ was now to be seen in the place of ‘a thick and gloomy wilderness.’

The activity of farming brought some order to Wollaston’s physical environment and secured his family a source of food, but it also had unexpected consequences that forcibly reminded him that he inhabited a wilderness. In physical terms, he found that the effort to supply their table and establish themselves by cultivating the land provoked ‘enormous appetites.’ His ‘poor lads’ often left the dinner table unsatisfied, he observed. Hungry for fresh meat that their own herds were yet too small to provide, they turned to hunting the creatures of the bush. They ate kangaroo, opossum, bandicoot and fish. Cockatoos and crows were not despised, ‘the Bronze winged Pigeon’ made excellent eating and they occasionally ‘feasted’ on Emu. The clergyman was only half joking when he remarked that if his friends in England visited the Zoological Gardens they might form ‘some idea … of our repast.’ By eating the wild creatures of the wilderness as well as the grains of the ground, the Wollaston family engaged bodily with their surrounds and literally consumed the country they colonised.

The Wollastons had not been accustomed to hunting and fishing for food in Cambridgeshire and found the practice somewhat unsettling in the young colony. There was no intrinsic shame in relying on the earth to provide: one of England’s wisest and most famous cooks began her instructions with ‘First catch a Hare.’ Since ‘the Kangaroo

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is in the Forest and the Fish in the River ... we have also found this an indispensable preliminary step in our culinary routine’ the clergyman observed lightly. But it seemed to him that the labour required to put such food on the table was unbecoming for people of their class. ‘Could our friends see the shifts we are sometimes put to, to obtain a meal for nine hungry Stomachs, they would be indeed surprised and doubtless distressed,’ Wollaston reflected in January 1843. The need to hunt for food challenged the social hierarchy he valued in other ways too. One day the announcement that Governor Hutt would visit sent Mrs Wollaston into a spin. ‘Poor Mary has just been consulting me about what we shall be able to get him to eat’, Wollaston noted, but beside killing a chicken and perhaps catching some fish they could only ‘trust to [their] hunting on Monday.’ Whatever they thought appropriate for a guest of such distinction, the standard of their hospitality was dictated by their provisions and their surrounds. The family’s circumstances in the wilderness meant that farming the land and hunting its animals – though necessary to survival and effective for taming the bush – actually eroded the social practices and relationships they had brought with them from England. Although his garden was progressing well and the physical wilderness was apparently being ordered effectively, there lurked the possibility that the wilderness was, in some more sinister way, undermining the kind of society the clergyman hoped to see established in the colony.

Wollaston was disconcerted by the kind of society he encountered in the colonial wilderness and disappointed by the poor quality of the relationships that its white inhabitants maintained. The apparent erosion in the colony of civilised society and particularly the patterns of deference and obligation he had valued so highly at home, helped entrench his sense of the generally unsettled and unruly state of the colony. He often remarked on the dearth of good servants, which he blamed in part upon the inappropriate ambitions of labouring people in the colony to rise quickly above their God-ordained station in life. He also considered very few families to have a ‘right, well bred English feeling about them,’ as he once praised the Molloys. In his view, life in

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68 Wollaston, *Journals*, vol.1 p. 163. Wollaston alludes to ‘First Catch Your Hare...The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy’ by Hannah Glasse (1747).
69 Wollaston, *Journals*, vol.2 p. 27.
the wilderness generally tended to ‘uncivilize’ people, especially the young, ‘most lamentably.’ 72 It was a saddening feature of the wilderness that he sought to counteract by conducting his own relationships in a manner that encouraged civilised behaviour and the observance of class hierarchies. In the first place he sought out opportunities for elevated and intellectual discussion, whether by corresponding with other settlers, receiving visitors into his home or calling on other colonists who lived relatively close by. ‘Mr and Mrs John Bussell, their son and daughter drank tea with us yesterday evening,’ he noted one day in the autumn of 1842, and ‘this evening we most of us drink tea at Mr Ommaney’s.’ 73 He rejoiced that, within twelve months, he had had ‘most of the respectable people in the Colony, from all parts, in my House.’ Although many of the colonists of superior rank did not always live moral lives or support the observance of religion to the extent that he expected or wished, he valued his personal interaction with other gentlemen. He was particularly glad on one occasion when Captain Molloy, Mr Bussell and Mr Eliot made him a present of a jar of snuff, ‘for it is my only indulgence in the wilderness.’ 74

The preservation of respectable order and the enjoyment of civilised talk appear to have been priorities for Mary Amelia too. Although a delicate gentlewoman who, prior to meeting Wollaston, had been introduced by her uncle and aunt to the pleasures of refined society including fashion, visiting and balls, she was required by her circumstances in the colony to expend herself in household work. ‘My poor wife is gone to bed the very picture of fatigue, having been washing,’ Wollaston wrote one evening in March 1843. The dearth of domestic help meant it was the most he could do to assist her himself. ‘Nothing goes against the grain so much as Washing,’ he complained after exhausting himself in that very task. ‘I cannot imagine any work more disagreeable & awkward to a Gentleman.’ 75 ‘I do all I can to lighten [her load],’ he added another time, but ‘I really fancy sometimes she begins to grow double.’ 76 ‘On washing days she can hardly, when her jobs are over, leave her bed.’ 77 Fortunately, in April 1843 Mary found both some help and some permanent society in the person of Mrs Ash. She and her husband, a

72 Wollaston, Journals, vol.1 p. 132.
74 Wollaston, Journals, vol.1 p. 221.
75 Wollaston, Journals, vol.2 p. 66. The error in ‘disagreeable’ is his.
76 Wollaston, Journals, vol.2 p. 186.
77 Wollaston, Journals, vol.2 p. 115.
doctor, had become ‘much prized friends’ of the Wollastons during the outward voyage and subsequently settled in Perth. 78 When the Doctor sadly fell ill and died, Mrs Ash accepted the Wollastons’ invitation to live with them on their farm. ‘She will be an inestimable comfort to Mary,’ Wollaston wrote upon her arrival at the house, ‘and a great acquisition to us all.’ 79 The presence of Mrs Ash enabled Mary to enjoy some civilised company, as did the kind invitations to tea and ‘a Conversazione’ issued by her neighbour across the river, Elizabeth Ommaney. The importance of such interaction is evident in a reply Wollaston made to one invitation on behalf of his wife. She and Mrs Ash would be happy to accept, he said, ‘not only from the pleasure they always take in their Society, but also the natural and eager desire which anything like talk is caught at to relieve the monotony of Female Colonial life.’ And as he added in his journal, he always ‘rejoiced at any little relaxation of this sort for poor Mary’ because it provided her ‘an Oasis in the Wilderness.’ 80

The struggle to maintain anything of their former civilised standard of life and society would continue, Wollaston thought, so long as the colony remained in its unsettled and disorderly wilderness state. Upon arriving in the south west he had been forcibly struck by the terrible loneliness of the bush. The silence of his surrounds and the apparent absence of settlement had in fact provoked his initial description of it as a wilderness. And over subsequent months and years, as he made journeys from his farm to other areas of European settlement, he was repeatedly impressed by the distance between the colonists’ establishments and moved to describe the moment he first discerned ‘the twinkling of a light through the trees.’ 81 Unless settlement thickened and the colonists gathered regularly as members of a community, he expected they would continue to merely inhabit the wilderness rather than properly settle the land. In his estimation, such changes were essential if the colonial wilderness was to be transformed into a garden of the Lord. His desire for deeper community, richer society and closer settlement was grounded in his family’s own needs and experiences in the wilderness, but also informed his vision for the development of order in the colony more generally.

78 Wollaston, Journals, vol.2 p.50.
Just as Wollaston considered the bush prior to cultivation a wilderness, he saw a region prior to the preaching of Christianity as a religious wasteland. He wrote tellingly of the south west as ‘a new district of the World’ where the Gospel ‘was never before heard.’

He did not recognise the spirituality of the Aboriginal inhabitants, and even if he had, would have been highly unlikely to consider them as having true knowledge of God. Of more immediate concern to him, though, was that the colony was a religious wasteland in another sense too. Like his colleague Broughton in the east, he understood the Anglican Church as the institution through which the truth of Christ and the means of his grace were offered to the people. And without a strong Church of England, he thought, the south west would remain a moral and spiritual wilderness. ‘Nothing impresses me so forcibly in this Country as the necessity of the Church to keep alive anything like true religion,’ he wrote in the winter of 1843. But as he reflected from experience on another occasion that same year, the church had not taken the colonising population ‘under her fostering care’ and ‘incalculable evil’ had been the result. ‘Many mistakes and misapprehensions arise from the Church having been so long out of sight,’ he observed. ‘Young men leave England … [and] come to a new Country where for eight or ten years they never see a church or hear the Church’s doctrines explained. They altogether forget how to use a prayer book and in fact at 25 or 30 are mere children in Christian knowledge.’ Even those colonists who had been observantly religious in the old world proved prone to forgetting what they knew of God because their faith was largely unsupported in the new. From ‘habitual neglect,’ he was sorry to say, ‘Religion has sunk to a miserably low ebb in the Colony.’

It was a deep disappointment to Wollaston that in twelve years the British had apparently done little to disturb the region’s original state of spiritual wilderness, but rather succumbed to it themselves. The overstretched Anglican church fell far short of its

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82 Wollaston, *Journals*, vol.1 p. 132.
83 Wollaston explicitly compared his views with Broughton’s times in during his career: Wollaston, *Journals*, vol. 1 p. 159.
84 Wollaston, *Journals*, vol.2 p.113.
87 Wollaston, *Journals*, vol.1 p. 159.
calling and the colonists neglected their responsibilities towards God. Numerous people did not attend divine service even when they could, he commented in July 1843, but ‘lived without God in the world – [as] they had learnt to do in England.’\textsuperscript{88} He feared that ‘indifference, disunion ... doctrinal errors and the grossest practical infidelity’ had ‘spread themselves from the Parent-country even over her most distant colonies.’\textsuperscript{89} Several other passages in Wollaston’s journal indicate that he considered the population of England more firmly and thoroughly religious than that of the colony. But he was realistic enough to recognise that in England, too, the church did not have as firm a hold over the hearts and minds of the people as he might have wished, and that the irreligious habits of some had been transferred to Australia and exacerbated in the colonial wilderness. ‘In a new country,’ he reflected late in his colonial career, ‘all things tend to retrogression in Christian knowledge and practice, and in particular, to the gradual obliteration of the principles of the Church of England.’\textsuperscript{90} The colonists’ pronounced tendency to wander further away from God in the colonial wilderness sharpened his sense of the need for its transformation into a garden of the Lord.

Within a short time of his arrival in the south west, Wollaston had come to the view that the colony was a spiritual wilderness that its British inhabitants had largely failed to cultivate. And they had little chance of doing so, he thought, so long as the English church remained in its weak and disorganised state. ‘Nothing can be more melancholy & distressing to a clergyman who has been used to even the very imperfect order of things in England, under due authority in Church & State,’ he explained in October 1842, than to find in the colony ‘his Countrymen & fellow Churchmen running wild & lapsing into ignorance and greater darkness, from the want of any order at all or authoritative custom, & requiring to be urged on to resume the religious habits of their Native Land.’\textsuperscript{91}‘Without order,’ as he put it even more directly in 1848, ‘true Religion does not take root

\textsuperscript{88} Wollaston, Journals, vol.2 p. 127, alluding to Ephesians 2:12 (King James Version): ‘at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.’


\textsuperscript{90} Wollaston, Journals, vol.3 p. 69.

\textsuperscript{91} Wollaston, Journals, vol.1 p.253.
and prosper.’ The absence of order was the problem, as he saw it, and its creation was the solution he proposed.

From the beginning to the end of his colonial career, Wollaston sought to bring order to the religious wilderness primarily by extending the influence of Anglicanism among the people and providing a physical and ecclesiastical structure to his church. He went out of his way to accommodate the settlers’ needs and circumstances, often travelling significant distances to conduct baptisms and weddings on whatever day of the week suited them best. He held Sunday services weekly in his farmhouse at Picton and fortnightly in the nearby township of Bunbury, and made regular trips through the bush to the Vasse to minister to the people there. Particularly in the period after his move to Albany, he made regular excursions all over the colony in the effort to encourage his brother clergy and bring the means of grace to settlers who lived a prohibitive distance from a church. With considerable effort and increasing mobility, he developed and maintained connections with a substantial number of British settlers, particularly in the region south of Perth. ‘I am above all things anxious to keep together the members of our Church,’ as he put it in January 1842. He was determined to preserve as much as he could of the Anglican tradition which the colonists had brought with them from home, and exerted himself to draw the colonists into an Anglican community.

By the end of February 1842, Wollaston’s desire to ‘keep together’ colonial believers had developed into plans to build a church. He was well aware that erecting a chapel and opening it for divine worship would render him eligible for a government salary as a clergyman, but he was also motivated to undertake the task by his desire to ‘collect Churchmen together in a regular, decent and orderly manner.’ He could think of no other way to do so than by inviting them ‘into the House ‘which God has chosen to place His Name there.’ And so, like Johnson had in early Sydney, Wollaston set about

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94 Wollaston, Journals, vol.1 p.169
95 Wollaston, Journals, vol.1 pp.169, 216
designing and building the church himself.\textsuperscript{97} Progress was frustratingly slow, as the other colonists did not help him ‘as they promised’ but left him and his sons to gather the timber, reeds, sedge and other materials themselves.\textsuperscript{98} By the spring, however, the building was complete, the doors hung, the walls plastered and whitewashed, and – in the absence of glass – the windows filled with light cloth.\textsuperscript{99} It was, as its minister proudly described it, a ‘neat and ecclesiastical’ building, appropriately modest in cost and yet fully adequate to ‘the decent and reverent performance of Divine Worship.’\textsuperscript{100} On Sunday 18 September, Wollaston had the joy of officially opening ‘my new Church, the first testimony for God and His Christ erected in this District. Blessed be His Holy name!’ As he later reflected happily in his journal, the occasion was ‘the most important event of my life.’\textsuperscript{101}

Disappointingly for Wollaston, the opening of the Picton church did not lead to appreciably larger attendances at Sunday service or provide a complete solution to the wilderness state of his environment. ‘As I walked up and down in my Church,’ he reflected one Sunday the following year, ‘my thoughts wandered homewards to Churches and Congregations in England and a feeling of sorrowful wonder came over me that people on leaving their Native land should be such renegades to the Church of their fathers.\textsuperscript{102} ‘If I could but sound a Bell for church Prayers,’ he mused another time, ‘though no one should attend the Summons ... the very sound and the Knowledge of its cause [would] be a moving testimony for God.’\textsuperscript{103} He longed to hear the ‘awful silence’ of the wilderness transformed by sounds more pleasing to the English God. He looked forward in hope to a time when ‘the Country should become more settled’ and ‘our church will acquire gradually more and more attendants.’\textsuperscript{104} But for all his efforts there was little progress yet.

\textsuperscript{97} Wollaston, \textit{Journals}, vol.1 pp. 191, 212, 219
\textsuperscript{98} On the construction of the church, generally see Wollaston, \textit{Journals}, vol.1 pp. 228-235
\textsuperscript{100} Wollaston, \textit{Journals}, vol.1 pp. 240-2.
\textsuperscript{101} Wollaston, \textit{Journals}, vol.1 pp. 240-2.
\textsuperscript{102} Wollaston, \textit{Journals}, vol.2 p. 126.
\textsuperscript{103} Wollaston, \textit{Journals}, vol.1 pp.252-3.
\textsuperscript{104} Wollaston, \textit{Journals}, vol. 2 p. 35
Even in the face of its apparently slight influence on the colonists’ spiritual lives, Wollaston understood his church as a valuable improvement to the original wilderness. Although ‘a regular congregation’ could not be reasonably expected ‘while a new Country is in the course of formation … I do rejoice that we have a church to go to,’ he wrote in late 1842. In itself it provided an ordered space in which the colonists might gather for religious worship and the ceremonies of civilised life might be properly observed. ‘Decency and order’ had ‘hitherto been utterly lost sight of here,’ as he noted with an allusion to Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians in March 1843. Marriage ceremonies, for example, had been conducted in private houses by the district registrar. But now his own presence in the area and the existence of a church would put an end to such ‘irregularities’ and enable people to ‘come quietly’ and be married by a clergyman in a church. The chapel he built was a tangible response to the social and religious disorder he encountered in the vicinity of his farm and expressive of his larger vision for the transformation of the whole colony into a garden of the Lord. Over subsequent years, he made efforts to have churches established at Busselton and Bunbury and encouraged communities all over the south west to gather together in the worship of God. He was committed to the introduction of religious order to the colony and delighted in every occasion that ‘decent, attentive, orderly people’ congregated for the purpose of divine worship in the midst of the wilderness.

Wollaston’s exertions to see the religious wilderness transformed extended beyond encouraging colonists to ‘keep together’ as members of the church and providing a physical structure for Anglicanism in the south west. He also sought to bring religious order to the colony by formalising and strengthening the organisational structures of the English church. ‘However the exertions of solitary individuals … may be blessed,’ as he put it after several years in the colony, ‘her light will [remain] under a bushel’ unless ‘a Church system [is] formed upon however small and humble a scale, in each of these Colonies.’ There were already four Anglican clergymen in the south west at the time he arrived. The High Church Tory John Wittenoom, whom Wollaston found ‘argumentative [and] somewhat stiff,’ was the government-supported chaplain in

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108 Wollaston, Journals, vol. 3 p.69
Perth. The Reverend William Mears was stationed as a chaplain at York; George King was sponsored by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to minister in Fremantle; and the ‘firm, zealous and active’ evangelical William Mitchell was a Colonial Church Society missionary on the Upper Swan. Not only did they report to different societies at home rather than a leader among themselves, Wollaston found that there was very little informal consultation or practical co-operation between them in the colony.

Dismayed by this situation and wary of the effects of party spirit within the Anglican church in England, Wollaston committed himself to the formal organisation and practical unity of the clergy in the colony. As early as February 1842, when he had been resident in the colony just nine months, he arranged a meeting of all five Anglican clergymen to discuss the situation and opportunities of their church. He subsequently attempted to establish a regular correspondence between them, and suggested that they form one ‘Colonial Church Association’ in aid of all three missionary societies active in the colony, rather than separate and competing branches of each. He sought his fellow ministers’ co-operation for the sake of both the church and the religious health of the whole community.

With the exception of Mitchell, whom Wollaston praised as ‘meek, mild and conciliating,’ the other Anglican clergy did not appear to share his vision for church unity. The senior man, Wittenoom, showed little enthusiasm for developing the church as an institution and failed to support annual conferences of the Anglican clergy. The ministers stationed at the Swan showed no inclination to meet together despite their proximity and Mr King voted down the idea of forming a single missionary auxillary. Wollaston lamented that ‘there is not that unanimity which I pray for’ and interpreted the situation as evidence of the need for stronger ecclesiastical structure in the colony. ‘The fact is,’ he wrote bluntly in July 1843, ‘we want a Bishop to exercise ecclesiastical authority over us.’ Episcopacy, as he saw it in typically high Anglican terms, was the

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109 Wollaston, Journals, vol. 1 p.182
church’s ‘primitive model’ which the Church of England, though reforming, had rightly maintained. He was positively committed to it as a means of improving ‘the Stability and Efficiency of our Reformed branch in whatever part of the World she is planted.’\textsuperscript{114} He was very glad that the evangelicals had breathed new life into the Church ‘both outwardly and inwardly’ – but maintained the importance of the Visible Church of which, ‘in the contemplation of the invisible,’ he considered them to have unfortunately ‘lost sight.’\textsuperscript{115} He looked to a Bishop to resolve disputes and establish order among the clergy, and expected he would encourage religion in the colony by ‘consecrating our churches, defining our duties, confirming the Young and generally ‘setting things in order.’\textsuperscript{116} Wollaston revealed the cast of his faith by placing such confidence in properly ecclesiastical Anglicanism to establish religious and ecclesiastical order and transform the spiritual wilderness of the colony into a garden of the Lord.

It was not until late 1848 that Wollaston got his wish. Prior to that time, Bishop Broughton remained in far-off Sydney, prevented by the terms of his life insurance from visiting the western region of his vast diocese.\textsuperscript{117} This was a great disappointment to Wollaston, who from a distance admired his correspondent for his ‘purity of motive and love of the Truth.’\textsuperscript{118} In 1847, however, Broughton’s sprawling Diocese of Australia was divided up into new bishoprics including one, the Diocese of Adelaide, that coincided with the civil boundaries of the colonies of South and Western Australia.\textsuperscript{119} Its first Bishop, Augustus Short, accepted Wollaston’s earnest invitation to visit the church in the west in spring the following year. He reached Albany, where Wollaston by then resided, in early November 1848 and spent eight weeks travelling throughout the most settled areas of the colony. He consecrated several churches and burial grounds, confirmed dozens of candidates, preached to congregations from Albany to Perth, inspected various schools and paid pastoral visits to colonists.\textsuperscript{120} By his actions Short began to establish the kind of religious order Wollaston had long desired. By his words he signalled that,

\textsuperscript{114} Wollaston, \textit{Journals}, vol. 2 p. 133.
\textsuperscript{115} Wollaston, \textit{Journals}, vol. 2 p. 133
\textsuperscript{116} Wollaston, \textit{Journals}, vol. 1 p.182, Feb 1842, alluding to Titus 1:5.
\textsuperscript{118} Wollaston, \textit{Journals}, vol. 2 p. 133.
\textsuperscript{120} Brown, \textit{Augustus Short}, chapter five; Wollaston, \textit{Journals}, vol. 3 p. 122.
although formerly a wilderness in which the Gospel ‘was never before heard,’ the southwest being transformed into a Garden of the Lord. As he commented to a delighted Wollaston, ‘What a blessed thing [it is] to find the Gospel has reached this remote corner of the Earth.’

A WAY IN THE WILDERNESS

John Wollaston’s vision of the colony as a wilderness and his attempts to bring transformative order to it reveal the nature of the relationship between his Anglican Protestantism and his engagement with his surrounds. Most basically, his use of wilderness language in his journals points to the significance of biblical narratives and images to his ideas about his environment. Like so many other early British colonists of eastern and western Australia, he interpreted his new world within the cultural and intellectual traditions which he carried with him from the old. He was among those many colonists for whom the King James was particularly influential, and drew from it a complex idea of wilderness that extended beyond the physical character of the land to the condition of society and the moral and spiritual state of its population too. One of the most influential features of the biblical idea of wilderness for his perception of his surrounds was that it denied distinctions between the secular and the sacred, the spiritual and the material. His familiarity with the theological meanings of wilderness expounded in the Old Testament prophets and particularly his appreciation of the Isaianic vision of the transformation of the wilderness into a garden of the Lord also meant, significantly, that he understood wilderness as a place of change and not, as many romantics did, as a place simply to be preserved and admired.

Wollaston was of the same generation and similarly averse to identifying himself along church party lines as William Grant Broughton, though he ministered at a very different stage of his colony’s development to the Bishop of Australia. He was by education and interest a literary man, though perhaps neither as intellectual as Broughton nor as

121 Wollaston, Journals, vol. 1 p. 132.
conspicuously cultured as his nearer colleague Wittenoom. His faith was both activist and pragmatic, and in this respect he shared much with the evangelicals of his time. But he explicitly distinguished himself from those who diminished the importance of the episcopacy or the sacraments and although he greatly appreciated the benefits brought by evangelicals to the Church, he generally maintained a small distance from them. Wollaston saw himself as an Anglican in non party terms and, in common with the general temper of Anglicanism at that time, placed great value on order in and beyond the church. The importance of order to his vision for the transformation of the colonial wilderness exposed the character of his Protestantism very clearly.

Particularly during the first several years of his colonial career, Wollaston’s specifically Anglican notion of order defined his exertions to tame the wilderness of the south west. He was by no means the only colonist who understood the transformation of the wilderness in those general terms: as John Gascoigne has shown, colonists influenced by the enlightenment often wrote of ordering of the environment through the application of human industry and technology. It was an age of system, after all, as Alan Atkinson has shown. But Wollaston did not seek the same kind of order as the improvers nor did he go about effecting transformation in the same ways. He was not concerned so much with improvement and making productive use of the land as the imposition of physical order and the creation of a settled rural society. He longed for the colonists’ improvement in morality, but not by progress in reason and knowledge so much as the regular observance of religion and participation in the life of the church. He considered the introduction of the Anglican church in both a physical and ecclesiastical sense essential to the creation of a godly society in the colony. A strong and orderly church was the only true foundation for social and religious order - and in its absence the colonial wilderness could not be expected to blossom as the rose. In contrast to the enlightenment visions of order expressed by some of his contemporaries, Wollaston placed his confidence in the Anglican church and expected that as that institution developed and its influence spread throughout the south west, the colony would indeed be transformed into a garden of the Lord.
The main deck of the *Fortitude* was packed with people that early autumn day in 1848. Having stowed their luggage, numerous emigrants gathered with a large party of their relatives and friends to worship one last time in sight of the English shore. The ship’s bell rang, an opening psalm was sung and prayers were said. Then an impressively tall, middle-aged clergyman stepped up to the flag-draped capstan and, with a keen sense of the occasion, began to address them in thick Scottish tones: ‘Fellow-countrymen and Christian friends, it is … the eve of your departure from this land of your fathers to the far-distant land of your adoption.’ He imagined that they, like anyone with a rightly cultivated mind, were moved and affected upon ‘ beholding their native land perhaps for the last time.’ He had felt as much when emigrating himself. But for all these feelings, he assured them, they could be confident in their decision to depart because ‘Divine Providence is, for the wisest and most beneficent purposes, now saying to many of the very best men in our country, as to Father Abraham of old, ‘Get ye up out of your country and from your father’s house, unto a land that I will show you. And I will make of you there a great nation.’”¹

Perhaps at that point the Reverend Lang paused and looked keenly at the faces in the crowd. They had heard his ideas about the colonisation of Cooksland, as he called southern Queensland then. They may have caught something of his vision for its development into a stronghold of evangelical Protestantism, which would secure the colony against popery and shine the light of Christian truth into the Pacific. Perhaps they appreciated the potential of their labour in the colonies not only to bring the land into cultivation but to break yokes of oppression and set the enslaved free. He believed the first cotton bale they produced would bring an end to ‘Negro’ slavery by proving the superior quality and profitability of crops grown by free men. As he looked over the

crowd, Lang saw a group of people about to embark on an expedition of great significance. Far from abandoning their homeland or simply escaping their condition in life, they were on the verge of a history-making exodus that would benefit themselves, the empire and all humanity. And in keeping with the idea of exodus, he described their destination in expansive terms. ‘The land whither you are going is a good land,’ he declared. It resembled ‘that glorious and pleasant land which the Lord gave to Israel of old - it is a land of hills and valleys, of rivers and streams of water … literally a land flowing with milk and honey.’ Like Abraham before them, the Fortitude migrants set their faces towards the Promised Land.

Ideas of Australia as an unruly wilderness persisted well into Lang’s time, perhaps especially in the struggling south west, and some new arrivals continued to made sense of their experience of migration in terms of exile. But such negative ideas were being gradually overhauled by more positive images of the country. To Barron Field, the Bathurst Plains appeared ‘the promised land of Australia’ in 1822. In the eyes of the young pastoralist William Broddribb, the Monaro similarly seemed a ‘land of promise’ where sheep, cattle and horses would ‘do remarkably well and ... get very fat.' As the surveyor general Thomas Mitchell journeyed south into what is now Victoria during the 1830s, he was moved to describe the land as ‘indeed a sort of paradise to me.’ And according to its promoters, South Australia was a land of ‘beautiful hills, valleys, waters and provisions’ with scenery somewhat like ‘the Holy Land of Judea.’ Lang was also among those who energetically advertised Australia as a place of abundance and opportunity. As extravagant in his descriptions of the land as he was optimistic about the colony’s future, he promoted it as a country bounteously blessed by God and helped recast its popular image as working man’s paradise. This chapter explores his use of

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2 Lang, ‘Departure of the Ship Fortitude’.
5 W. A. Broddribb, Recollections of an Australian Squatter, or Leaves from my Journal since 1835, John Ferguson and the Royal Australia Historical Association, Sydney, Sydney, 1978, pp. 7-11.
6 Thomas Mitchell, Three Expeditions into the interior of Eastern Australia (1838), Libraries Board of South Australia, Adelaide, 1965.
biblical narratives of exodus to the Promised Land to express his vision of eastern Australia’s population and possession by British Protestant migrants.

Like Marsden before him, Lang understood his clerical vocation in broad, worldly terms and involved himself in many different aspects of colonial life. Over the course of his extraordinary career, which extended more than half a century from his arrival as a young man in 1823 to his death in his late seventies in 1878, Lang was active not only in founding and developing the Presbyterian church, but as an educator, newspaper proprietor, member of parliament and migration propagandist. He travelled extensively within the colony and back and forth from Britain via both north and south America, and published widely on subjects ranging from Polynesian history to convict transportation and geology. Thoroughly Calvinist, he was an energetic and activist evangelical whose political and ecclesiastical views became progressively radical. His thought often betrayed the influence of both the enlightenment and romanticism, including on social and political questions as in his advocacy of an independent Australian republic made up of its eastern provinces.

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The promotion of free migration was a pursuit particularly dear to Lang’s heart. A prominent subject of public and political debate, migration brought questions of land, labour and the moral and social character of the population into direct relationship. Particularly in a colony founded for penal purposes and dominated by transportees, it also had implications, some argued, for the development of settler civilisation and government. In the aftermath of the Swan River experiment and in the face of the continued expansion and dispersion of the European population of New South Wales, systematic colonisers associated with Edward Gibbon Wakefield designed new settlements in South Australia and at Australind. They also influenced the overhaul of the regulations governing the disposal of land in the eastern colony. Others including Lang were more pragmatic in their approach. ‘The benefit likely to accrue to the colony’ from the introduction of a virtuous, industrious British population was ‘incalculably great,’ as he put it in the early 1830s. Convinced of this, he wrote and spoke a great torrent of words, made an early foray into skilled migration, attempted to persuade the imperial government to adopt his plans for large-scale Protestant colonisation, and eventually acted unilaterally to charter and supply six ships – including the Fortitude - from his personal resources. Over a period of approximately forty years, as Don Baker observed,
Lang ‘spent a great deal of time, trouble and money’ promoting British migration to the eastern Australian colonies.\textsuperscript{13}

There were profoundly religious dimensions to Lang’s promotion of migration. Previous historians have remarked upon the virulently anti-Catholic opinions that informed his criticisms of Caroline Chisholm’s female migration schemes and noted his expectation that greater Protestant migration would raise the moral tone of colonial society.\textsuperscript{14} But the significance of Protestantism to Lang’s vision ran deeper still. Like his predecessor Richard Johnson, he employed scriptural language to convey his ideas and drew on biblical models for the movement of people to new lands. But he did so with an optimism that reflected both the strength of evangelicalism and wider British confidence in the triumph of progress in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. His historical vision was informed by a typological reading of scripture that upheld the experiences of biblical Israel as somehow normative for the British nation in his own day. Just as Israel had enjoyed divine blessing and entered into Canaan by the appointment of God, the British Protestants who migrated to Australia would occupy the colony in fulfilment of God’s purposes for all humanity. He emphasised mobility, rather than stasis, as the normal condition of humanity in obedience to the biblical command to ‘fill and subdue the earth.’ And while the Anglicans Wollaston and Broughton articulated essentially static, settled ideals for colonial society and embraced mobility only as a matter of necessity, Lang considered mobility - and particularly migration - God’s appointed means for fulfilling His divine plans.


Crucially for the British colonisation of eastern Australia, the biblical narratives Lang employed in promoting migration had direct consequences for the occupation and possession of the land. His Promised Land rhetoric provided a scriptural justification for the expansion of European settlement and numerous families responded to his call to migrate and became colonists of the land. His ascription of such meanings to the landscape and the colonists’ occupation of the ground had complex implications for the newcomers’ relationship with the original inhabitants. He at once advocated the British occupation of the Aborigines’ homeland on deeply religious grounds and refused to equate the Aborigines with the Canaanite tribes that, according to the biblical account, were destined for destruction by God’s chosen people as they entered the Promised Land. Lang’s idea of Australia as the destination of an exodus existed alongside his creation-based belief in the original equality of all peoples including Australian Aborigines, but it nevertheless provided an ideological justification for the British colonisation of Aboriginal land.

EXODUS JOURNEYS

The scriptural narrative of journeying to the Promised Land begins in the book of Genesis with God’s pledge of land to Abraham:

‘The LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.’

Significantly, this text relates the promise of land to God’s special appointment of Abraham as the founder of a blessed and holy nation. Subsequent passages reiterate the promise of land to Abraham, his descendants Isaac and Jacob, and later to Moses as the representative of all Israel. It is a promise of land that not only marks Canaan as the

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15 Genesis 12:1-2 (King James Version).
16 For instances of its confirmation to Abraham see Genesis 12:6-7, 13:14-15 and 15:18. For its repetition to Isaac see Genesis 26:1-5 and to Jacob see Genesis 28:1-5 and 35:11-12. For the promise to Moses, see Exodus 6:4. All these references are collected in Conor Cruise O’Brien, God Land: reflections on
site of Israel’s future home, but confirms the identity of the children of Abraham as the chosen people of God.

Before the promise is fulfilled, however, a famine prompts Jacob and his sons to settle in Egypt where there is a more secure supply of food. The Israelites become both numerous and prosperous there - until, fearing them, the Pharaoh enslaves them. According to the book of Exodus, they eventually escape from Egypt under Moses’ leadership. The Israelites’ elude Pharaoh’s army and miraculously cross the Red Sea into the wilderness. They wander there for forty years before Moses’ successor Joshua leads them into the Promised Land. They then conquer and occupy Canaan as the chosen people of God and live in it according to the covenant:

‘I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD.’

The Old Testament consistently presents the Israelites’ conquest of Canaan as both the end point of the exodus and the fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham. The biblical narrative of journeying to the Promised Land thus involves election, promise, servitude, salvation, migration and the establishment and enjoyment of a new home. Numerous twentieth century commentators have noted, however, that the biblical narrative is not unambiguously positive. It celebrates Israel’s liberation from oppression and affirms the grace and faithfulness of their God but simultaneously justifies their conquest and colonisation of an occupied country: ‘I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your

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hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee.'¹⁹ The biblical reason for the Canaanites’ dispossession is their wickedness before God: Israel’s seizure of the land is presented as divine judgement upon its original inhabitants.²⁰ In order to avoid being tainted by wickedness, Israel is prohibited from co-existing with them: ‘Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me: for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee.’²¹ The Israelites were enjoined not to oppress strangers in their midst, ‘for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt,’ but they were nevertheless to maintain their identity and purity as the chosen people of God.²²

The complexity of the biblical narrative and particularly its potential to inspire both liberating and oppressive behaviours, helps explain the great variety of ways in which it has been used and interpreted in the centuries since the biblical passages were authored. Most obviously it has informed diverse Jewish visions of return to Palestine. But it has also influenced other groups familiar with the scriptural text, including the Puritans of North America and the Boers of South Africa. The narrative has underpinned many European colonisers’ accounts of settling a new place, and the ways in which they understood and articulated their experiences of migration, settlement and national formation - including in contexts of colonisation.²³ For twentieth century critics of colonialism including Edward Said and Michael Prior, the exodus narrative of journeying to the Promised Land was itself profoundly reprehensible as a justification for

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¹⁹ Exodus 23:31 (*King James Version*).
²⁰ See Deuteronomy 9.4-5 and Genesis 15:6.
²¹ Exodus 23:32-33 (*King James Version*).
colonisation, expulsion and perhaps even extermination. A few Australian historians such as Don Watson have considered the ways in which once-oppressed groups became colonial oppressors themselves, but in general the importance of promised land journey narratives has received little attention in relation to the Australian colonies. One reason for this may be that the colonist who drew on the narrative most articulately was also an outspoken critic of settler violence towards Aborigines. Lang applied the exodus story in ways that suggest Said’s discussion of its implications was inadequate, though his promised land rhetoric indeed had important consequences for the British appropriation of the territory.

**LANG’S EXODUS TO AUSTRALIA**

On several occasions during his long life, Lang drew on biblical ideas of exodus to the Promised Land in relation to his own migration to New South Wales. The son of a small landowner and craftsman, Lang had grown up along the Firth of Clyde on Scotland’s western coast. He had received his education at the Largs parish school and the University of Glasgow with the settled intention of entering the Presbyterian ministry. A widely interested young man with a confident, practical, evangelical Protestant faith, he graduated Master of Arts in April 1820 and was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Irvine in the following months. Though a bright and energetic candidate, Lang was not called to a parish immediately and like so many of his contemporaries who intended to enter the church, spent several months visiting different congregations and preaching in urban and rural parishes. In the midst of this uncertain and frustrating time, however, he heard from his younger brother George, who had recently migrated to New South Wales, that there were opportunities for a Presbyterian clergyman there. Lang was ordained with

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a view to embarking for the colony ‘to form a church in connection with the Scottish national church in that colonial dependency’ in September 1822.  

The occasion of embarking aboard the *Andromeda* aroused in Lang the usual feelings of affection for his country and sadness at leaving it. ‘Lives there a man who hath not said / This is my own, my native land?’ he wondered in the pages of his journal. At the same time, however, his young heart was brimming with confidence: ‘How gallantly the ship rises over the waves’, he wrote on his second night on board, ‘carrying in her bosom an insignificant fragment of Britain’s supplementary population, but a great empire, perhaps, in embryo.’ In Lang’s optimistic outlook, the *Andromeda* emigrants would transform themselves into the founders of a great nation. Buoyed by a notion of the historic importance of their voyage and a hope for the colony’s future glory, Lang looked towards the future with great enthusiasm. He was not entering into exile in an unknown land, as Johnson had a generation before, but undertaking an exodus journey to a country of boundless opportunity.

In keeping with his sense of history-making, Lang kept a journal of his passage to Australia. He recorded the progress of the ship, the conduct of its passengers and his own manner of passing the time – learning German, reading, and composing the sermons he preached each Sunday. These early writings suggest that his initial optimism about Australia lasted the full length of the voyage. When the *Andromeda* at last neared her destination, he declared ‘It is impossible to describe our sensations on seeing the wished-for land. When the cry of land was heard every person was in motion,’ scrambling onto the deck. ‘The moon was in her wane … and the stars shining beautifully. It was just such a morning as we could have wished for [gaining] sight of our adopted country.

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Every eye was fixed on the object of our wishes and every heart was glad.²⁹ Lang’s expression of rapture at the sight of the shoreline confirms that he perceived Australia as a land of great promise.

Lang’s excitement and sense of the significance of arrival are also apparent in the scriptural allusions he made at that time. ‘We were all delighted,’ he continued in his journal, at ‘the prospect of a speedy destination to our voyage and of being delivered from this land of Egypt, this house of bondage.’³⁰ The biblical reference in this passage hints that his overwhelmingly positive expectations of the colony expressed more than the idealism of youth or the optimism of the emigrant. It suggests Lang understood his own voyage in religious terms as a journey similar to Israel’s exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. It exemplifies the quickness with which he employed scriptural narratives to describe experiences of his own.

The connection Lang made between Egypt and the Andromeda implied a parallel between the Israelites’ destination and his own. The biblical narrative allowed for more than one possibility, as Israel escaped Egypt first into the wilderness and only reached Canaan after forty years of wandering there. When alluding to his voyage as an exodus Lang did not explicitly identify the colony as a promised land. But his expectations of his destination were so overwhelmingly positive that they exclude the possibility he anticipated a desolate wilderness. He also described the continent with phrases that suggest a sense of possession appropriate to the act of entering a promised land: ‘adopted country’, ‘object of our wishes,’ ‘wished-for land’. And by emphasising the similarities between the Tasmanian coastline and the scenery of Scotland, he also claimed the landscape was familiar and thus for him a possible home.³¹ In the context of his voyage journal, it also hinted at his hope that what Canaan was to Israel, Australia would be to him: a God-ordained home and promised land. And as he sailed into Sydney harbour he

²⁹ Lang, ‘Journal of a Voyage,’ 3 May 1823.
³⁰ Lang, ‘Journal of a Voyage,’ 4 May 1823.
³¹ Lang, ‘Journal of a Voyage,’ 6 May 1823.
exclaimed in the words of the Psalmist, ‘This is my rest. Here will I stay, for I do like it well.’

Little more than a month passed before Lang’s rapturous first impressions of the colony began to give way to a sense of revulsion and despair. ‘The climate is delightful, the country is highly productive, but the people!’ he moaned, ‘A generation of infidels!’

Contrary to his hopes and expectations, his exodus had apparently ended in a moral wilderness rather than a promised land. The shock of this disappointment shook his confidence in the colony’s character as a place of blessing and prompted him to seriously consider returning to Scotland again. His disillusionment was temporary, though, and the arrival of the rest of his family in January 1824 and the progress of the Scots church eventually proved inducement enough to stay. Ultimately it did not overturn either his idea of Australia as a promised land or his understanding of his own emigration in terms of exodus. By 1828, when he gave his first public account of his experiences in the pamphlet *A Narrative of the Settlement of the Scots Church*, he wrote in entirely positive terms of having ‘gone forth from his native land,’ at ‘what he conceived the call of divine providence’, ‘not knowing whither he went.’ Interestingly it was not lost on Lang’s contemporaries that, with these words from the book of Hebrews, he identified himself directly with Abraham.

‘Surely, when Dr. Lang had made up his mind to embark from Leith for New South Wales, he could not, unless in a most metaphorical sense indeed, compare himself with the Patriarch Abraham,’ the pamphlet’s reviewers at the *Australian Quarterly Journal* snorted contemptuously.

But the young clergyman seems to have been quite serious in associating his own journey with Abraham’s and thus aligning his personal decisions and activities with the providential purposes of God. His sense of his own significance was sufficiently extravagant for that to be the case.

Lang’s early writings about his own emigration indicate that the biblical narrative of God’s call to Abraham to leave his home and journey towards the Promised Land made a

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34 Lang, *Narrative of the settlement of the Scots Church*, p. 13
35 See Hebrews 11:8-9
very deep impression on his thought. It underpinned his understanding of Australia as the
endpoint of an exodus and a divinely favoured land of opportunity. It also provided him a
structure for understanding his personal experiences and informed his identity as a person
who carried out the purposes of God. The allusion to the exodus in his voyage journal
helped suggest the historical significance of his journey to Australia. And in his
*Narrative* he identified himself with Abraham to cast himself as an appointed leader and
to claim divine support for his management of the Scots church. In the 1830s and 1840s
he made far more explicit references to Abraham and the exodus in order to present the
large scale colonisation of Australia as the irrepressible plan of God. But even in the
1820s, he drew on that scriptural story to identify his exertions with the workings of
divine providence and to weave a web of positive religious meaning around the act of
migrating to the colony.

**ENCOURAGING EXODUS**

Lang began to show a particular interest in the issue of British migration to Australia in
early 1830. Both the severe shortage of skilled labour and the apparently idle and
immoral habits of most unskilled convict workers at that time were frustrating his plans
to build an Australian College for the secondary education of youth. But both problems
might be overcome, he thought, if skilled operatives of good character and positive moral
influence could be persuaded to migrate to the colony. When he visited England later that
year, the Colonial Office accepted his offer to charter a ship at his own risk for the
conveyance of mechanics and their families to New South Wales, and satisfied his
request for an interest free loan to start the school.  

37 Lang, giving ‘every possible regard to moral and religious character,’ proceeded to recruit ‘Scotch mechanics’ with skills that
would directly aid the construction of the college buildings. More than forty men entered
into a contract to work for him at colonial rates and repay their fare to Sydney by
instalments from their weekly wage. With their wives and children, three teachers for the
school and three clergymen for the colonial Presbyterian Church, they sailed from

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37 Baker, *Days of Wrath*, pp.72-80; John Dunmore Lang, *An Historical and Statistical Account of New
South Wales, both as a penal settlement and as a British colony*, vol. 2, Cochrane and McCrone, London,
1834, pp. 341-3.
Greenock in the *Stirling Castle* in June 1831.\(^{38}\) Lang rejoiced in the knowledge that ‘the colony will reap the permanent advantage of a very considerable increase to the most useful class of its population as well as of the practical establishment of a principle in regard to emigration.’\(^{39}\)

Over subsequent years, Lang advocated British migration to Australia with an almost missionary zeal. In numerous speeches, articles, pamphlets and books, he developed his ideas for the greater colonisation of the land by means of migration to the lasting benefit of the whole colony. Although the *Stirling Castle* emigrants were mechanics suited by their profession to the urban environment of Sydney, Lang generally believed, like the American President Andrew Jackson whom he sometimes quoted, that ‘the wealth and strength of a country are its population, and the best part of that population are cultivators of the soil.’\(^{40}\) After 1831, he promoted the migration of an ‘industrious and virtuous agricultural population’ to ‘settle all over the territory’ of New South Wales.\(^{41}\) His ideal community consisted of ‘a hundred families, with from fifty to one hundred children in all, including a minister and schoolmaster and … artisans as would be required for its comfortable subsistence.’\(^{42}\) Such a group could be brought out from Britain in a single vessel, he explained, and settled in such desirable regions as Port Phillip and Moreton Bay. From the late 1830s, he repeatedly suggested that the government carry out ‘free emigrants of the class of farm labourers, mechanics etc’ to settle in these specific districts.

\(^{38}\) John Dunmore Lang, *Account of the steps taken in England, with a view to the establishment of an Academical Institution or College in NSW; and to demonstrate the practicability of effecting an extensive migration of the industrious classes from the mother country to that colony*, Stephens and Stokes, Sydney, 1831; *Lang, Reminiscences of My Life and Times*, chapter five; Baker, *Days of Wrath*, chapter five.

\(^{39}\) *Lang, Account of the steps taken in England*, p.16.

\(^{40}\) ‘President Jackson’s Message for December, 1832,’ cited by Lang in *Historical and Statistical Account*, vol. 2 p. 400 and in *Lang, Colonization*, *The Colonist*, 3 September 1835.


\(^{42}\) *Lang, Historical and Statistical Account*, vol. 2 p. 431. The lecture was first published as the pamphlet *Emigration, considered chiefly in reference to the practicability and expediency of importing and of settling throughout the territory of NSW a numerous, industrious and virtuous agricultural population; being a lecture delivered in the temporary hall of the Australian College, Sydney. 9 May 1833* by John Dunmore Lang, D.D., E S Hall, Sydney, 1833.
on land already cleared by convicts and divided into small farms of perhaps twenty acres each. 43

Close rural settlement was an ideal Lang shared with high Anglicans as well as more conservative Presbyterians, but for which he had different reasons. First, his value for agricultural settlement was informed by the stadial theory of social development propagated by the leaders of the Scottish enlightenment. As Gregory Melleuish argued, he combined these enlightenment ideas with a literal reading of biblical history to view the evolutionary stages of development as the means by which the earth was settled after the Flood. In his vision, agriculturalists would ultimately spread to every ‘waste and uninhabited’ portion of the globe. 44 Secondly, Lang’s ideal of agricultural settlement was shaped by his Puritan inheritance and particularly its emphasis on independence and industry. The high Anglicans Wollaston and Broughton generally sought to re-create in the colonies the static rural society they had valued in England. The conservative Presbyterian William Hamilton who sided, unlike Lang, with the Established Church during the Disruption, was similarly preoccupied with considerations of respectability and class. 45 But Lang was not concerned to establish a hierarchical rural community whose members were knit together by relationships of obligation and patronage. He envisioned the agricultural settlement of the land by lower-class migrants who transformed themselves, by their own industry, into independent smallholders ‘to the unspeakable advantage of the whole colony.’ 46 He envisaged a rural community of Protestants whose virtues of ‘self-respect and self-reliance and patient and persevering industry’ ensured their successful agricultural settlement of the country. 47

The scriptural narrative of Israel’s exodus to the Promised Land proved useful to Lang as he recommended Australia as a destination for industrious Britons. The connection

43 For his advocacy of Moreton Bay, for example, see Lang, The Colonist, 17 and 24 December 1835; Lang, Transportation and Colonization, chapter 13; Lang, Cooksland.
45 On Hamilton see Lindsay Proudfoot, ‘Place and Presbyterian Discourse in Colonial Australia’ in Lindsay Proudfoot and Michael M. Roche, (Dis)placing Empire: renegotiating British colonial geographies, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2005, pp. 61-79
46 The Colonist, 15 January 1835, p. 18; Lang, Cooksland, p. 225.
47 Lang, British Banner, 25 October 1848; Lang, The Question of Questions!, pp. 15, 19.
between his use of biblical imagery and his efforts to encourage Protestant migration is evident in his different descriptions of the land for colonial and British audiences. In his Sydney-based journalism of the 1830s, Lang tended to describe the land and its produce in optimistic but ultimately realistic terms. In the pages of his first newspaper, *The Colonist*, founded in January 1835, he sometimes celebrated New South Wales as ‘a country of vast extent, high promise, [and] unlimited resources.’ On other occasions, though, he readily admitted that the colony was subject to drought and its crops to blight, that not all its soil was suited to agriculture, that its seasons were ‘precarious’. His descriptions of particular regions are similarly balanced. *The Colonist* presented the Bathurst district as an ‘interesting and beautiful portion of our territory,’ blessed with a salubrious climate, a great extent of naturally clear land and a respectable settler society. However, it was not ideal for all kinds of crops and maize, in particular, seemed unlikely ever to prosper ‘in this elevated part of the territory.’ The advantages of the district were further compromised, Lang admitted, by the poor state of the road from the Blue Mountains.

To primarily British audiences, Lang not only emphasised the colony’s advantages but anchored his account in the Christian scriptures. He wrote his first major book, *An Historical and Statistical Account of New South Wales*, in part to persuade potential emigrants of the opportunities awaiting them in New South Wales. Published in London in 1834 and extending to more than seven hundred pages, Lang’s *Account* provided a survey of the colony’s newer districts, a description of its present agricultural potential, and a discussion of the benefits of emigration for the mother country, the colony and for emigrants themselves. It presented eastern Australia as a good land and claimed divine support for that view. Its title page bore a quotation from Judges, the biblical book that recounts Israel’s settlement of Canaan: ‘We have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good.’

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48 *The Colonist*, 1 January 1835.
49 *The Colonist*, 3 September 1835 and 1 October 1835.
50 *The Colonist*, 1 January 1835 and 8 January 1835. For a similar description of Bathurst at a far later date, see John Dunmore Lang, *Notes of a trip to the Westward and Southward in the colony of New South Wales in the months of March and April 1862*, Hanson and Bennett, Sydney, 1862, p. 1.
51 Lang, *Historical and Statistical Account*, title page to both volumes, citing Judges chapter 18. Note also *British Banner*, 21 June 1848.
Throughout his *Account*, Lang underscored his positive presentation of the colony’s progress and future with quotations from the Old Testament. In describing the colony’s pastoral expansion, he reminded his readers that Abraham himself had ‘waxed great and went forward, and grew until he became very great, for he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants.’\(^{52}\) In referring to this Abrahamic precedent, Lang implied that the wool farmers of Australia would grow rich in a land abundantly suited to their needs. The clergyman was even more determined to claim a scriptural precedent for the development of agriculture, which he considered essential to the future prosperity of the colony. He wrote of ‘extensive plains, covered by the richest pasture’ and of ‘considerable tracts of alluvial land’ - and elevated his subject to new heights by presenting the colony as a Promised Land in the words of Deuteronomy:

‘The Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land – a land of wheat and barley, and vines and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil-olive and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness; thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.’\(^{53}\)

This image of Australia as an abundant promised land was reinforced by subsequent editions of the *Account*. Although each new edition involved substantial revisions or additions to the previous one, Lang was consistent in his choice of opening words – ‘we have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good’ – and in introducing the subject of colonial agriculture with a biblical description of the Promised Land.

In the years after the *Account’s* first publication, Lang’s efforts to promote migration became increasingly energetic and impassioned. Over the same period, his political views became increasingly radical. By 1847, when he sailed for England in the hope of impressing his ideas upon the Colonial Office and persuading thousands of industrious Protestants to participate in his schemes, he was a convinced voluntarist and republican.


The works Lang wrote during the voyage and his stay in Britain during 1848 and 1849 are heavy with biblical images of exodus and allusions to the Promised Land. In *Cooksland in North Eastern Australia*, the book he published upon arrival in London to help promote the greater colonisation of southern Queensland, he drew attention to the ‘millions of acres of land of the first quality for cultivation of any kind, quite close to water carriage’ in the region of Moreton Bay. He introduced his chapter on the area’s soil and climate and the various productions it could sustain with an excerpt from the biblical account of the Israelites’ discovery of Canaan’s pomegranates, grapes and figs. Lang took care, however, to point out that the goodness of the land was not merely a matter of rhetoric. ‘The climate and vegetation’ of Moreton Bay were in fact very well adapted to the bee, he explained, and honey farming might well be ‘a source of comfort and wealth to industrious emigrants of the humbler classes of society.’ Like the Israelites entering the Promised Land, British migrants to the region might also exclaim, ‘We came unto the land wither thou sentest us and surely it floweth with MILK and HONEY.’

Between March 1848 and October 1849, Lang published dozens of glowing accounts of eastern Australia in *The British Banner*, a radical Protestant weekly. Considerable tracts of colonial soil were ‘of the first quality for cultivation’ and ‘the highest fertility,’ with ‘inherent and extraordinary capabilities,’ Lang wrote effusively. Port Phillip, ‘in its soil and climate and range of productions … bears a resemblance to the land of Canaan to which Abraham was divinely commanded to emigrate.’ ‘No country ever came from the hands of its Creator more eminently qualified to be the abode of as thriving and numerous population’ than Cooksland, he declared. And ‘like the Holy Land, which it resembles very much in climate,’ eastern Australia was famous not only for its ‘milk and honey’ but also, ‘prospectively at least,’ for its wine and oil.

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54 Lang, *Cooksland*, p. 168.
55 Lang, *Cooksland*, p. 141 and Numbers 8:20-23.
56 Lang, *Cooksland*, pp. 129, 139-140 citing Numbers 8:17-27.
57 Lang, *British Banner*, 5 April 1848, 8 November 1848, 7 February 1849.
58 ‘Valedictory address to the emigrants per the Ship Travencore,’ *British Banner*, 11 July 1849.
59 Lang, ‘Cotton and sugar cultivation by means of European free labour in Australia,’ *British Banner*, 15 March 1848, pp. 206-207.
60 Lang, ‘Australian Colonization,’ *British Banner*, 17 October 1849. He also compared the climate of Cooksland to the climate of Palestine in ‘Colonization in Australia,’ *British Banner*, 21 June 1848.
In both his book *Cooksland* and particularly in the sympathetic pages of *The British Banner* Lang also sought to prompt migration by associating exodus to Australia with liberation from slavery. *The Banner* espoused interests and values close to Lang’s own heart: it took care to educate its readers in the principles of political economy, kept a sharp eye on the position of popery and reported regularly on events in France and the suffrage and chartist movements at home. Its editor, John Campbell, was one of several radicals with whom Lang was closely associated during his stay in Britain and gave him considerable space in which to expound his ideas. Appropriately to its radical Protestant readership, Lang brought the theme of liberation to the foreground of his discussion of migration and promoted exodus to Australia as a potentially decisive contribution to the anti-slavery cause.

In Lang’s vision for Australia’s greater colonisation, British migration to Moreton Bay and the cultivation of cotton there would deal a ‘death blow to the whole system of negro slavery all over the world.’ Slavery had been banned throughout the British empire in 1833, but it seemed to Lang, as to many other British humanitarians of the 1840s, that the practice would persist in North America and other parts of the world so long as there was a profitable market for slave-raised produce. It followed, in his mind, that abolition would only be achieved practically by undercutting the market with produce raised by free labour and destroying ‘the existing Slaveholding monopoly.’ To that end, he advocated the formation of ‘colonies of European freemen’ to cultivate by their own labour and industry those crops that were elsewhere cultivated by slaves. He promoted Moreton Bay as a region particularly well suited to the production of cotton and enthused that ‘the employment of British industry in so peculiarly favourable and inviting a field’ would ‘lead to the gradual abolition and extinction of negro slavery itself.’ It was a scheme grounded in both the economic principles of free trade and the idea that eastern Australia was a fertile place in which a cotton crop would thrive. It was a scheme in

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64 Lang, ‘Australian Colonization: the ship Lima,’ *British Banner*, 27 June 1849.
which he urged industrious British Protestants to participate by uprooting themselves, as Abraham did, and migrating to a new land. Their exodus to Australia, as he told the *Fortitude* group, would help ‘break every yoke throughout the civilized world and … let the oppressed go free.’  

Liberation from slavery was a distinctive element of the exodus narrative and the prominence of that theme in Lang’s promotion of British emigration to Australia confirms the important influence of the scriptural story on his thought. But at the same time as he proclaimed to departing migrants the importance of their exodus in terms of bringing an end to slavery, he departed significantly from the original narrative by suggesting that it would lead to the liberation of people other than those who undertook the exodus personally. Many of the Protestants who emigrated at his call were dissatisfied with aspects of British society. There were several known Chartists and other radicals, for example, among the *Fortitude* group. Lang hoped they would enjoy greater political freedoms in the colony, too. It is also likely that several of his emigrants saw similarities between their own journey and that of the Puritans who fled religious and political persecution for North America two centuries earlier. Lang certainly identified with the Puritans and referred frequently to their experience and example when outlining his migration schemes. But he nevertheless stopped short of presenting emigration to Australia as an opportunity for British evangelicals to escape oppression themselves. Instead, he emphasised the opportunity it presented to undermine the iniquitous system of black slavery.

The creativity and flexibility that marked Lang’s application of biblical ideas in relation to slavery highlights both the polemical purpose and the rhetorical limits of his various allusions to Israel’s journey to Canaan. He was neither so disciplined in his appropriation of the narrative nor so logical in the allusions he made to evoke a coherent picture of

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65 *‘Departure of the ship Fortitude’, British Banner*, 13 September 1848. He alludes in here to Isaiah 58:6

66 Lang cites the example of the Puritans in ‘Colonization in Australia’, *British Banner*, 22 March 1848; ‘Christian Colonization in Australia’, *British Banner*, 2 August 1848; ‘Australian Emigration Societies’, *British Banner*, 27 September 1848; ‘Australian Colonization: the Port Phillip Company,’ *British Banner*, 8 November 1848; ‘Australian Colonization; Port Phillip and the Present Crisis,’ *British Banner*, 20 June 1849; ‘Australian Colonization: what remains to be done for it both at home and abroad,’ *British Banner*, 12 September 1849.
migration to eastern Australia as an exodus to a promised land. The biblical narrative informed the structure of his thought and furnished him with ideas and images that he employed very frequently, but it did not constrain him from applying those ideas and images selectively or inexact to serve his goal of promoting migration to the colony. It did not constrain him, either, from drawing on both classical and romantic images and ideas: in *Cooksland* he opened his chapters with quotations from Virgil, Horace and Byron as well as the Old Testament.⁶⁷ Perhaps more importantly still, he was not so thoroughly absorbed by the idea of Australia as a promised land that he avoided associating exodus with entry into the wilderness. Although that idea threatened to complicate or even contradict his presentation of migration to Australia as a journey to a new Canaan, Lang referred to the colony as a wilderness with remarkable frequency.

Even in publications intended to promote British migration such as his *Historical and Statistical Account* and his contributions to *The British Banner*, Lang often referred to the colony as a wilderness. But while Wollaston often used wilderness language to express disappointment or despair, Lang usually employed it in the context of his most confident statements about the benefits of British migration and the goodness of the land. ‘The special work and duty assigned to Great Britain by Divine Providence’, as he put it in 1848, was ‘to make the wilderness and the solitary place rejoice with the habitations of intelligent, enterprising, virtuous and Christian men.’⁶⁸ And if a series of agricultural settlements were established ‘along the beautiful plains of Port Phillip,’ as he explained another time, then ‘the solitary place would then indeed be glad and the wilderness would blossom as the rose.’⁶⁹ Unlike Wollaston, who sometimes doubted whether the transformation he desired would actually occur, Lang was confident that the colonial wilderness would be agriculturally and morally improved.⁷⁰ Indeed, he judged that such improvement had begun by 1834: each new generation ‘goes forth with [an] axe into the vast forest to extend the limits of civilisation and to fill the wilderness and the solitary place with the habitation of men,’ as he put it in his *Account*.⁷¹ And with the introduction

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⁶⁷ See John Dunmore Lang, *Cooksland*, pp.11, 37, 60, 95, 141, 264.
⁶⁸ ‘Departure of the ship *Chaseley*,’ *British Banner*, 27 December 1848.
⁷¹ Lang, *An Historical and Statistical Account of New South Wales*, vol. 2, p. 36
of a ‘grand, national, systematic plan’ of British migration, as he explained in later years, ‘the wilderness might be filled with cities’ just as Isaiah prophesied.\textsuperscript{72}

The differences in their ideas of wilderness stemmed partly from the fact that Lang resided in an older and better established colony than Wollaston. During the 1830s and 1840s, New South Wales was far more thoroughly settled than the south west in social and physical terms. It was a less threatening wilderness which colonists had more effectively subdued. These important circumstantial differences were compounded by intellectual and religious ones. Like many other evangelicals of his time, Lang subscribed to the basic enlightenment view that ‘the world could be improved and human beings made better as the result of conscious human planning and disciplined endeavour.’\textsuperscript{73} He was confident of progress in social, moral and political terms, and articulated an idea of wilderness that had far more in common with the improvers than with Wollaston. He had none of Wollaston’s nostalgia for the pre-reform days of Anglican hegemony in church and state, none of that desire to recreate in the colonies the kind of church and society that was already passing from England. Lang held increasingly voluntarist, democratic opinions and looked for further political and religious reform. He understood the colony as a wilderness in light of what he hoped it would become, not as a wilderness in Wollaston’s sense of lacking what England once had. And so, although the idea of wilderness had the potential to undermine his presentation of the colony as a divinely blessed land, Lang discussed it in confidently positive terms and harnessed it to his overall purpose of promoting British migration to eastern Australia.

Biblical narratives of journeying to the Promised Land were prominent in Lang’s migration discourse. His application of other ideas and images to Australia to promote its greater colonisation may suggest, however, that his use of the bible was inconsistent at best and manipulative at worst. His frequent references to wilderness and his creative

\textsuperscript{72} ‘Departure of the ship \textit{Chaseley}, \textit{British Banner}, 27 December 1848. See also ‘Immigration’, \textit{The Colonist}, 9 July 1835.

application of the exodus narrative in relation to slavery indicate that his Promised Land rhetoric was less an expression of his actual understanding of eastern Australia as a new Canaan than a tool he used to encourage the migration of virtuous and industrious Protestants from Britain. He generally appropriated the biblical narrative to give weight to his schemes for migration and provide a deeply religious justification for colonisation, rather than to accurately convey the character of the land. His private allusions to Abraham’s journey in relation to his own migration and even his description of the opportunities for bee-keeping in the colony hints that, to some extent at least, he believed his own rhetoric. But his public use of Promised Land language is best explained by the fact that he understood migration as a profoundly religious task and felt justified in using religious language inexactively in order to promote it.

**POPULATING AND POSSESSING THE PROMISED LAND**

The possessive character of the biblical narrative of Israel’s entry into the Promised Land underpinned Lang’s understanding of New South Wales as a land to be occupied by British immigrants. It provided him with a model for how the migrants should relate to the land they journeyed towards and conduct themselves once they arrived. He made frequent reference to God’s call to Abraham to migrate from his homeland to the land divinely appointed for him. On several occasions he also quoted from the biblical account of the Israelites entering and settling in Canaan. He relied on the exodus narrative, as well as key passages in Isaiah and Genesis, to argue that the migration of God’s chosen people was the means by which grand providential purposes were achieved. Crucially for the relationship between Protestantism and the British possession of the land, Lang developed from these Old Testament passages and narratives an ideology of migration and colonisation for the nineteenth century. He interpreted biblical history typologically to affirm God’s election of Britain and to insist that migration was God’s call and command not only to Israel but to his own nation, too. He sometimes used Promised Land language indistinctly and occasionally even unconvincingly in presenting Australia as an abundant land. But he appropriated the exodus narrative typologically to advocate the population and possession of the country by British Protestants with all the confidence of someone who believed this to be God’s plan since at least biblical times.
The typological approach to scriptural history was a feature of Puritanism, from which evangelicalism was partially derived and to which Lang owed a considerable debt — though it was important in other strands of British Protestantism as well.\textsuperscript{74} For Lang, a typological understanding of the bible meant he not only justified his ideas with scriptural arguments but considered Israel’s experiences in some sense normative for the British nation in his own day. This perspective was important first in shaping his radical political views. As he put it himself in 1850, ‘my views on the three fundamental principles of government – universal male suffrage, perfect political equality and popular election … – have stemmed from the Word of God which endureth forever.’\textsuperscript{75} Specifically, he argued from the Old Testament books of Numbers, Leviticus and Joshua that those ‘three grand principles’ operated ‘under the Divine sanction and appointment in the commonwealth of ancient Israel.’\textsuperscript{76} A few historians have noticed these scriptural justifications for Lang’s political ideas, and even, in Elford’s case, that they related primarily to ‘the Jewish political organization of the Mosaic and immediate post-Mosaic period.’\textsuperscript{77} That is, it is worth observing, the biblical precedents he claimed for his political radicalism derived largely from the period of Israel’s exodus out of Egypt and entry into the Promised Land. The constitutive influence of this episode of biblical history on Lang’s thought is one reason why his religious beliefs had such different social and political consequences from Bishop Broughton’s. His Anglican contemporary, influenced by Tractarianism and buoyed by the revival of high churchmanship, tended to look to the example of the Primitive church and to assume that the Church was the institution absolutely necessary for a Christian society to succeed. Lang, on the other hand, looked to ancient Israel as the social and political type for a community of believers recently arrived in a new land.


\textsuperscript{75} John Dunmore Lang, \textit{The Coming Event; or. The United Provinces of Australia}, D. L. Welsh, Sydney, 1850, p.73.

\textsuperscript{76} Lang, \textit{Freedom and Independence}, pp. 65-71, with reference to Numbers 26: 1-4 and 51-56, Leviticus 25: 8-10, Joshua 8: 2-6 and also Deuteronomy 7: 14-20.

A typological reading of biblical history also provided an imaginative and intellectual anchor for Lang’s conviction that eastern Australia should be populated and possessed by the British. It fostered the confidence that its inhabitants would eventually emerge into an abundant promised land just as the Israelites who wandered the Sinai desert did. ‘The Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land’, as he declared in his Account with words from Deuteronomy. 78 ‘Be not slothful to go, and to enter to possess the land,’ he similarly urged prospective emigrants from the book of Judges. ‘When ye go, ye shall come unto a large land – a place where there is no want of any thing that is in the earth.’ 79 In their scriptural context, these passages enjoined the Israelites to respond in obedience to God and to the abundance of the Promised Land by entering and possessing the country. Lang quoted them at the outset of his chapters in a manner that implied not only that the colony was bountiful and good but that the British should similarly enter and occupy the land. His use of such biblical texts as epigraphs suggests his confidence that the Account’s readers, too, would see their implications for the British settlement of Australia.

In the biblical account of God’s instructions to Adam and Eve, Lang found further support for his view of colonisation as the grand purpose of God. As he reminded his audiences from the outset of his career as a migration advocate, God intended all humanity to ‘multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it.’ 80 Even at the outset of his migration activities, the contemporary meaning of the injunction first given to Adam and Eve was plainly apparent to him. ‘When translated into the language of political economy, it reads as follows’: ‘let there be no artificial check to the increase of population. Let marriage be encouraged by all means; and when the population in any country becomes excessive, let a portion of the inhabitants of that country emigrate to the waste and uninhabited lands in other parts of the world.’ 81 Lang was acquainted with Malthusian demographic theory and the principle of postponing marriage as a solution to

79 Lang, Historical and Statistical Account, vol. 2, p. 171
80 Genesis 1:28 cited in Lang, ‘Emigration; considered chiefly in reference to the practicability and expediency of importing and of settling throughout the territory of New South Wales an industrious and virtuous agricultural population; being a lecture delivered in the temporary hall of the Australian College, Sydney, 9 May 1833’, in An Historical and Statistical Account, vol. 2, p. 405. His emphasis.
81 Lang An Historical and Statistical Account, p. 405
Britain’s ‘population problem.’ In his view, though, emigration was the divine order of things. The human race was commanded to be fruitful and subdue the earth ‘even before the fall of Adam,’ as he observed to The Banner’s readers in 1848. Particularly in light of the destitution and distress suffered by so many thousands of the nation’s middle and humbler classes, he immediately went on, ‘Divine Providence is evidently saying … as was said to the patriarch Abraham of old, ‘Get ye up out of your country and from your kindred … to a land I will show you. And I will make of you there a great nation.”

It was remarkable to him ‘with what facility’ the Divine injunction to ‘replenish the earth and subdue it … can now be obeyed even in regard to the peopling of so remote a country as Australia.’ He cited Genesis chapter one to advocate migration and the mobility of peoples around the earth rather than the agricultural use of the land. The colonisation of eastern Australia was necessary, in his vision, for the fulfilment of God’s revealed purposes for all humanity.

The book of Isaiah contained words as precious to Lang as those from Deuteronomy and Genesis: ‘God that himself formed the earth … created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited.’ As early as 1833, he reasoned expansively that since ‘God made the earth to be inhabited,’ the British nation should adopt a ‘grand, national, systematic plan of emigration’ to benefit the mother country and populate her ‘vast island’ colony. As he involved himself directly in the business of chartering migrant ships, Lang became emphatic that ‘it could never have been the design of the Creator, who does nothing in vain,’ that such a ‘highly fertile but still waste and uninhabited’ land as Australia should remain unoccupied.

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83 Lang, ‘Colonization in Australia,’ British Banner, 22 March 1848, citing Genesis 12: 1-2.

84 Lang, ‘Colonization in Australia,’ British Banner, 21 June 1848.

85 Isaiah 45:18 (King James Version).

86 Lang, Historical and Statistical Account, vol. 2 p. 411; see also Lang, ‘Colonization in Australia,’ British Banner, 22 March 1848.

87 British Banner, 22 March and 5 April 1848, alluding to Isaiah 45:18.
1849, he confidently declared to those on board that God had in fact given Britain as a nation, beyond any other nation, ‘ships, colonies and commerce’ so that the ‘transcendently important object’ of inhabiting the earth would be carried out.\(^88\)

In his address to the *Travencore* migrants, Lang wove his various scriptural arguments together with the narrative of Abraham’s election by God and subsequent departure from his homeland towards the Promised Land. ‘Emigration … is an express ordinance of God himself for the peopling of the world,’ he explained. ‘The first commandment to the human race … was in these words: *Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it.* Yes, *God made the earth to be inhabited* and not to be waste.’ Emigration, he went on, has also been ‘the usual means of God’s appointment, from the earliest time, for the development of His great and glorious designs of mercy and grace towards any particular country or people.’ The calling of Abraham, ‘the father of the faithful,’ was proof of that fact. ‘*Get thee out of thy country … unto a land that I will show thee,*’ quoted Lang then, from Genesis chapter twelve, ‘*and I will bless thee and make thy name great and thou shalt be a blessing.*’\(^89\) Those words were as true of the Protestant migrants then gathered on the ship’s deck as of Abraham in ancient times, he said. ‘It is clear to me as daylight that Divine Providence has designs of mercy and grace, to be developed shortly, on these remote regions of the globe.’ Those departing for Australia were ‘true children of Israel,’ he asserted boldly. And like Abraham’s descendants they would become as ‘*numerous in these regions as the sands of the sea which cannot be measured or numbered, that in the place in which it hath been said ‘Ye are not my people’ it will yet be said ‘Ye are the sons of the living God.’*’\(^90\)

With astonishing confidence, Lang suggested that Britain had a ‘bounden duty’ to populate and possess the whole territory of New South Wales. The ‘extensive’ colonisation of Australia was a ‘divine ordinance, unquestionably binding upon the

\(^88\) ‘Departure of the ship *Larpent*, *British Banner*, 28 March 1849.


\(^90\) Lang, ‘Valedictory address to the emigrants per the ship Travencore,’ *British Banner* 11 July 1849. He is quoting here from Hosea 1:10– his emphasis. He cites that same text in ‘Australian colonization: what remains to be done for it both at home and abroad’, *British Banner*, 12 September 1849.
nation at large.' It was a position he reached in part upon reflection on the moral and social needs of the colony, the material circumstances of the ‘humbler classes’ of British society, and the apparent capacity of the British nation to carry out the task. Significantly, though, his view was also the outworking of a deeply religious sense of national election. Lang believed that the British nation had been specially chosen by God to do His work and be a blessing to the world just as Israel had been in biblical times. And like the Israelites in Canaan, the British would occupy their Promised Land of Australia. It was a belief rooted in his typological understanding of the Old Testament in general and of the exodus narrative specifically.

These biblical narratives and ideas had significant implications for the question of the possession of the land in colonial Australia. In the first place, Lang applied verses that urged the inhabitation of the earth to the migration of colonists to eastern Australia in a way that rhetorically erased the presence of Aboriginal people. He drew on biblical passages to create an image of the continent as ‘waste and uninhabited.’ Secondly, by identifying the colonists’ migration to Australia so closely with the Israelites’ entry into the Promised Land, he grounded his ideas about colonisation in a biblical narrative that appeared to sanction the literal dispossession and erasure of a people from the land. When subjected to a ‘Canaanite’ reading rather than an Israeli one, suggested Edward Said, the exodus narrative is not a narrative of fulfilled promises or of homecoming. It is a narrative of the traumatic disruption and violent expulsion of the land’s original occupants. By the late 1840s, violence already characterised many encounters between Aborigines and colonists on the Australian frontier. In light of this, Lang’s promotion of extensive British migration in the terms of the exodus story had potentially catastrophic consequences for indigenous peoples already resisting the invasion of their homelands in eastern Australia.

Significantly, though, Lang often applied the exodus narrative to his own context with some creativity and interpreted its meaning in light of other scriptural narratives. The creation story of all humankind descending from Adam and Eve was significant too. Like

91 Lang, ‘Colonization in Australia,’ British Banner, 22 March and 27 December 1848.
many people of his time, he did not dispute the idea that indigenous Australians occupied ‘the very bottom of the scale of humanity.’ They apparently failed to cultivate the soil, to erect permanent dwellings and to worship a Supreme Being. Lang needed no further proof that they lived entirely ‘without civilisation’. It was obvious to him that the Aborigines were degraded to the point of savagery. What distinguished his view from those who insisted on the intractability of the Aborigines savagery was his notion that the evident degradation of the Aborigines could not be explained in essentialist racial terms. He explicitly denied ‘that this abject race cannot possibly be of that ‘one blood’’ from which, according to the Christian scriptures, all humanity derived. He rejected any suggestion that they were originally inferior to Europeans or somehow possessed of a greater capacity ‘for sinking in the scale of humanity than other tribes of men.’ Rather, he considered their condition ‘the natural result of their peculiar circumstances’ and historical experiences. Having migrated south east to Australia from the Indian archipelago, they had lost the arts of navigation and cultivation they must once have possessed. They had been isolated on a vast island continent without ‘fruits or roots to cultivate’ and gradually fallen from a state of civilisation into an ‘abject condition of intellectual and moral debasement,’ he explained. But they were nevertheless racial equals, ‘our brethren’, ‘formed originally after the image of God like ourselves.’ As a man who not only valued the bible as God’s Word but had political connections with anti-slavery activists that probably sensitised him to issues of injustice and race, Lang took the creation narrative and its idea of original equality very seriously indeed.

When combined with his idea of original equality, Lang’s low estimate of the Aborigines’ condition positively reinforced his view that Australia legitimately could be, and ideally should be, more extensively colonised. He explained many of his views in his book *Cooksland*, confident that his description of the Aborigines who already inhabited that land would do no harm to his general argument for increased migration to Moreton Bay. He admitted that Aboriginal people had managed to raise ‘infinite tribes and languages without the animals and grains upon which European civilisation depends,’ while many Englishmen who had recently wandered into the bush had starved to death.

94 Lang, *Cooksland*, p. 361.  
96 Lang, *Cooksland*, pp. 374-5
He also acknowledged that the Aborigines had developed a complex tribal system that governed the relationship of particular peoples to particular tracts of land. ‘There is no part of the available portion of the country to which some tribe or other does not lay claim,’ he added, and ‘every rock, river, creek, mountain, hill or plain has its native name.’ 97 He was not entirely ignorant of the significance to them of their land, but he did not regard their claim to possession to exclude that of industrious European agriculturalists. His account of the Aborigines served to confirm that the territory was not being effectively filled or subdued. To Lang they did not appear capable, in their present state, of properly fulfilling that divine command. In that sense he considered the continent still ‘waste and uninhabited.’

Lang’s notion that the Aborigines had fallen into savagery for historical rather than racial reasons gave him cause to believe that, under the positive influence of upright Europeans, they might return to a state of civilisation again. ‘I am confident,’ he declared in *Cooksland*, ‘that the sequel of this chapter will demonstrate that the idea of a radical inferiority of intellectual power … is gratuitous and unwarranted.’ 98 The Aborigines of Moreton Bay might learn from the virtuous and industrious Protestants he hoped to settle as independent farmers there. Their present degradation might be overcome and it was the colonists’ duty to actively encourage their progress in civilisation. 99 He also expected that the ‘speedy influx’ of a virtuous agricultural population from Britain would have the benefit of ameliorating the destructive effects of squatting, which had sometimes been ‘literally … tantamount to a sentence of confiscation, banishment and death.’ 100 Such migrants would encourage kindness between the races and seek the physical and spiritual good of their indigenous brethren. They would express their ‘abhorrence’ of the atrocities perpetrated by colonists as at Myall Creek, and ‘infallibly originate a healthy state of public opinion’ on race relations, he explained. 101 He anticipated that, in numerous ways, the mass exodus of humane and upright Protestants to the colony would benefit its original occupants. The principle of human equality that he extracted from the biblical

97 Lang, *Cooksland*, pp.392, 443
98 Lang, *Cooksland*, p. 348
99 See John Dunmore Lang to Thomas Fowell Buxton, 10 June 1834, in ‘Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements) together with Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index,’ *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1836 (538), vol. VII , pp. 682-684.
100 Lang, *Cooksland*, p. 469
creation account buttressed this view. Significantly, though, it did nothing to unsettle his conviction that the British nation had been specially blessed by God, or to dampen his strong sense of the wisdom of extensive colonisation. Both the migratory and possessive elements of the Promised Land narrative he applied to Australia remained firmly in place.

The conquest element of the exodus narrative caused Lang to proceed far more cautiously in applying biblical stories to the colony. The idea that the Canaanite tribes should be dispossessed, perhaps violently, from the land they occupied sat uneasily with his concern for the protection and civilisation of Aboriginal people. He did not avoid using exodus stories to describe the relationship between British migrants and the godless people who already inhabited the land, but he did so with considerable creativity. According to the ‘sacred narrative’, Lang told the emigrants on board the Travencore, ‘Abraham passed through the land unto the place of Sichem unto the plain of Moreh and the Canaanite was then in the land.’ That is, he explained, ‘he was surrounded by ungodly neighbours; and so will you, doubtless, in the land wither ye go.’ Lang did not consider the colony empty of wicked Canaanites, but it appears from his various writings that by ‘ungodly neighbours’ he meant convicts and non-Protestant settlers rather than Aboriginal people. In an anti-catholic pamphlet of 1841, he despaired that ‘Irish Roman Catholic convicts’ had spread their ‘ignorance and moral debasement’ over ‘the length and breadth of this good land.’ To The British Banner he explained that colonial Protestants also had many adversaries ‘among our Anglo-Catholic and Romish brethren.’ And significantly, he used the language of violent conquest to urge more Protestants to undertake an exodus to the colony: ‘Who will go up with us to Ramoth-Gilead to battle for the cause of God and of truth, against the Popery and Puseyism of the Southern Hemisphere’?

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102 Lang, ‘Valedictory Address to the Emigrants per the ship Travencore,’ British Banner, 11 July 1849 citing Genesis 12:6. His emphasis.
103 Lang, The Question of Questions, pp.15, 27
104 Lang, ‘Australian Colonization’, British Banner, 13 June 1849.
105 Lang, ‘Christian Colonization in Australia’, British Banner, 22 November 1848 citing 1 Kings 22:4. See also ‘Australian Colonization: What remains to be done for it both at home and abroad,’ British Banner, 12 September 1849.
On the one occasion that Lang did relate the Aborigines to the original inhabitants of the biblical Promised Land, he described them as Gibeonites. According to the Old Testament, Joshua made a peace treaty with that tribe when he led God’s people into Canaan and otherwise destroyed its prior inhabitants. When later generations of Israelites failed to honour the oath and attempted to slaughter the Gibeonites, they were severely punished by their God. In this relatively minor strand of the Promised Land narrative, Lang found a biblical precedent for condemning settler violence against the land’s indigenes. In a sermon expounding the colonists’ ‘social and public’ sins, preached on a day of fasting on account of the 1838 drought, he suggested that the colonists’ relationship with Aboriginal people, like Israel’s with the Gibeonites, was stained by ‘blood guiltiness.’ ‘Let us ask ourselves seriously and in earnest, whether, as the European colonists of this territory, we can lay our hands upon our hearts, and plead not guilty concerning the Gibeonites, I mean the wretched Aboriginal inhabitants of this land?’ To this challenging question, Lang offered a damning reply. Though Aboriginal people were ‘bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh’ and under the protection of God, ‘we despoiled them of their land and [gave] them in exchange European vice and European disease in every foul and fatal form.’ Not only that, ‘every district of this land of our adoption has been defiled with the blood of these innocents … [and] we have reason this day to humble ourselves mightily before the Lord our maker, as the sinful members of a sinful community.’

Lang deliberately avoided applying the Promised Land narrative to the colony in a way that sanctioned the violent dispossession of Aboriginal people. In his usage, it was not a narrative of conquest and extermination at the expense of the land’s prior inhabitants as Edward Said suggested. It was more a humanitarian narrative of benign colonisation. But Lang nevertheless drew on the biblical account of Israel’s exodus to the promised land in ways that gave both implicit and explicit encouragement to the colonial take-over of Aboriginal land. During the 1830s and 1840s, most free settlers arrived in New South Wales with government and bounty migration schemes. But Lang’s contribution was not inconsiderable. His promotion of migration and the territory’s greater colonisation

107 Lang, National Sins, pp. 13-14.
108 Lang, National Sins, p.15.
resulted in approximately 1,400 people departing Britain for Australia in one of his seven chartered ships. Many of these people settled on the land at Port Phillip or Moreton Bay. As many as 10,000 others may also have been influenced to migrate by Lang’s propaganda but travelled to the colony by different means.\footnote{Angus Edmonds, ‘Auld Lang Syne: Retrieving John Dunmore Lang from the Footnote of Australian History,’ \textit{Royal Historical Society of Queensland Journal}, vol.17 no.11 (2001) p. 438.} And it is probable that for at least some of these migrants – those from the evangelical readership of \textit{The Banner} most probably of all – the biblical basis upon which he promoted colonisation and the promised land imagery he employed were significant in prompting their decision and in shaping their expectations of the country they soon made their own. In a very concrete way, Lang’s promotion of eastern Australia as an ideal destination for migrants led to the more extensive settlement of Aboriginal land.

Lang’s promotion of migration provided not only for the introduction of a free population to occupy and possess the land, but a moral, religious and intellectual justification for the British appropriation of eastern Australia. From his first accounts of his own emigration, Lang used biblical language to evoke an image of Australia as a blessed and bountiful land. When he went public with his ideas to promote its more extensive colonisation, he emphasised that free British migrants journeyed there like Abraham and thus encouraged them to see themselves as divinely chosen and the land as legitimately their own. And although he recognised certain limits to his presentation of eastern Australia as a promised land, such as the persistence of its wilderness characteristics, this did not dissuade him from advancing a biblically based argument for the importance – indeed the moral necessity – of the population and possession of eastern Australia by the British. The typological interpretation Lang placed on the biblical narrative of exodus to the Promised Land and the particular manner in which he applied it provided an ideological foundation for the British colonisation of the land. From the biblical narrative of exodus to the Promised Land, he developed a program for the expanding colonial settlement of eastern Australia. The narrative was foundational to his argument for greater colonisation. It was the basis of his personal contribution to the ideological infrastructure supporting the colonial take over of land and the practical dispossession of its Aborigines.
CONCLUSION

‘Such Spiritual Acres’
Protestantism, the land and the colonisation of Australia 1788 - 1850

In no less formal a document than the Official Instructions to the incoming Governor of New South Wales in 1825, there is a startlingly unconventional phrase. It was the King’s pleasure, Governor Darling was told, that he assign to the colonial chaplains ‘such Spiritual Acres’ as the Anglican Archdeacon may advise.¹ Such evocative words to describe the scope of the clergy’s responsibilities. So expansive and undefined in comparison to the traditional parish. Appearing in a passage that followed far more extensive directions concerning the division of the colony into counties, hundreds and parishes, the disposal of crown land and the creation of the short-lived Clergy and Schools estates, the phrase suggests that the British did not understand the Australian environment in merely material terms. They approached and administered colonial land primarily as a material resource, but the colonists occupied ‘Spiritual Acres’ as well as physical ones. It implies their colonial surrounds could have a religious character and significance. The specifically biblical meanings that early Protestant colonists ascribed to the land and the religious values that informed their impressions of their surrounds have been primary concerns of this thesis.

The phrase ‘such Spiritual Acres’ also gestures towards issues of adaptation and appropriation in the transmission of religion from Britain to its Australian colonies. It contains an implicit acknowledgement that the parish structure of church life in England had not been thoroughly re-established in the young colony by 1825, that it was not always possible for the clergy to reside in defined parishes and conduct a settled ministry. The phrase itself evokes the vastness of the territory they occupied and to which, to some extent, they adapted their old world habits and ideas. The Protestant churches, their ministers and adherents confronted unfamiliar circumstances and often related to their surrounds differently from their counterparts in Britain. At the same time, though, the phrase suggests the colonists’ efforts to impose order upon on the land and reshape it

¹ Governor Darling’s instructions, 17 July 1825, HRA series 1 vol.12 p. 125.
according to their own needs and ideals, not least by dividing it into acres. It hints that they altered it, even appropriated it, in the course of founding their colonies. This thesis has explored the particular contribution of Protestantism to ways in which early colonists engaged with their surrounds and its consequences for the British colonisation of the land.

Three questions were posed at the outset. The first concerned their use of scripture and their allusions to its images of place. How did colonists draw on biblical narratives to make sense of the land they encountered and their own relationship to it? The accounts of Adam and Eve’s exile from Eden to a thorny and toilsome land, of passing through an uncultivated wilderness and of the exodus of God’s chosen nation into an abundant Promised Land were all applied by Protestant clergymen to the early Australian colonies. These narratives also had some influence on the ideas of non-clerical colonists: several convicts described themselves as exiles and free people as different as Elizabeth Bussell and William Wentworth referred to their surrounds as a wilderness. The judge Barron Field and the pastoralist William Brodribb were among those who effusively described Australia as a land of promise. Others like Alexander Harris and Thomas Mitchell evoked an image of Australia as an Edenic paradise, and in the beginning Worgan likened his voyage to that of Noah’s ark. Colonists unburdened by particular theological learning probably alluded to an even wider range of biblical images and did so more freely than Protestant clergy with an overt commitment to the bible’s authority.

Non-clerical colonists often made scriptural references in describing their new surrounds in a casual or passing manner that did not necessarily express particular religiosity. They sometimes made biblical allusions to convey enlightenment or romantic ideas, as their various descriptions of the colony as a wilderness suggest. But their scriptural references are an important indication of their comfortable familiarity with biblical stories and ideas. Their references to the bible in their personal letters as well as public accounts of the colony suggest that it was an essential part of the cultural framework they shared with their friends and compatriots at home. The King James text provided them with a reference point in interpreting an unfamiliar world and a vocabulary for communicating their impressions and experiences to people without personal knowledge of Australia.
Their religious language indicates that biblical ideas and assumptions shaped their imaginations and infused the other cultural and intellectual traditions according to which they interpreted their surrounds. It adds weight to the recent historiographical emphasis on the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a period more religious than secular in both Britain and its Australian colonies.

The Protestant clergy applied biblical images and narratives to the colony in complex and perhaps distinctive ways. Their uses of scripture could overlap with those of other colonists: Wollaston was not the only person who referred to wilderness to suggest the uncultivated colony’s need for transformation, nor was Johnson alone in feeling exiled from his home to a barren and hostile land. But their uses of biblical narratives could diverge from those of their contemporaries in important respects. While some early colonists recognised a relationship between banishment and punishment for sin, for example, Johnson’s experience of exile was heightened by his specifically evangelical Protestant ideas about true religiosity and his impression of the convicts’ persistent refusal to turn from sin. The kind of transformation Wollaston envisaged for the colonial environment was not that of the improvers, but one informed by a particularly Anglican notion of order. And Lang understood eastern Australia as a Promised Land not only in the sense that it was a land of abundance in which the colonists would enjoy prosperity. In his Puritan-influenced vision, it was also the destination for an exodus undertaken in fulfilment of God’s plans. Their particular Protestant influences and ideas shaped their application of biblical narratives to the Australian environment.

Clergymen often drew upon biblical narratives and images to convey their ideas in ways that reflected the condition and temper of the specific form of Protestantism with which they identified. Both Johnson and Wollaston resorted to negative biblical imagery to describe their situation at times when their particular form of belief faced considerable challenges. Evangelical Anglicanism was regarded with suspicion by some leaders of the religious and political establishment during the anxious decade of the 1790s, and tellingly Johnson wrote most vividly of his sense of isolation and exile as he struggled to overcome the accusations made against him by Major Grose. Wollaston’s account of his surrounds as a disorderly wilderness was pervaded by a sense that the colonists indulged
in the colony the bad habits they had acquired at home, where the Georgian religious and social order he valued was under threat from various changes including reform. And thirdly, Lang’s extraordinary confidence that God intended the British to migrate to Australia and populate its vast territory can be explained in part by the position that evangelical Protestantism had achieved in Britain by the middle of the nineteenth century. The progress of political and social reform and especially the success of the campaign to abolish slavery buoyed evangelical confidence in the effectiveness of their efforts to solve human problems and reshape the world.

The private allusions they made to biblical images of place reveal that, on a personal level, the early Protestant clergy had a deeply religious understanding of the land. Johnson’s evocation of Adam and Eve’s exile from Eden in his letters from the new camp at Sydney convey his sense of struggle and isolation and his impression of his fellow colonists as a thoroughly sinful community. But they also emphasise the barren character of the country as a site of divine punishment: the ground was dry due to the judgement of God. By alluding to biblical notions of exile, he ascribed to the colonial environment very negative theological meanings indeed. Wollaston, more hopefully, used Isaianic language to describe the south west as a wilderness during the second decade of British settlement. It was a place in dire need of redemption, but it might yet be transformed into a garden of the Lord. In the older eastern colony, the stridently optimistic Lang presented his ‘adopted country’ as a place blessed by God from the time of his own arrival in the early the 1820s. The land was not just a neutral backdrop to the grand plans of Providence but a divinely appointed home. Such references in their diaries and personal letters indicate that their biblical language was more than mere rhetoric. It was an important means by which they made sense of their new environment and negotiated their dislocation from Britain.

The early clergy ascribed scriptural meanings to the land in the public as well as the private sphere. In doing so, they may have stirred some of their hearers to the remembrance and worship of the biblical God in the colony. More certainly, their language contributed to the creation of the continent’s popular image in keeping with their particular visions of colonial society. During the first decades of penal settlement, as
Richard White and Ross Gibson have shown, Australia was widely seen as a hell on
earth. Johnson’s account of exile reinforced this not only to his English evangelical
friends but to prominent figures including John Newton and Joseph Banks to whom he
also addressed himself. Particularly once migration agents and colonial employers
undertook to attract free Britons to the settlements, though, its negative image was
gradually overtaken by the idea of a working man’s paradise. Lang actively helped to
redefine the colony’s image for sections of the British reading public by publicising
eastern Australia as a Land of Plenty and an ideal destination for an exodus throughout
the 1830s and 1840s. The idea of an abundant Promised Land directly served his
particular social and political goals concerning greater Protestant migration to the colony.
His biblical descriptions were more exaggerated than insincere, but he nevertheless
stands out for his extensive use of such language as a rhetorical tool.

British colonists employed biblical narratives of place in ways ranging from the personal
to the public, from the casual to the self-conscious. They also applied those narratives to
the colonies in flexible and even creative ways. There was a freedom to many non-
clerical colonists’ use of scriptural imagery as well as clear slippages in some of the
clergy’s usages. Alexander Harris associated Eden with wilderness despite the
incongruity of those terms in a strictly biblical sense, for example, and Lang promoted an
exodus that would liberate people other than those who undertook the journey. These
flexible, even idiosyncratic interpretations of biblical images and narratives indicate that
while the bible informed colonists’ outlook it did not simply provide them with a sacred
script to act out in the colonies. It was a text they drew upon for their own rhetorical
purposes and that even the Protestant clergy interpreted according to their circumstances
and context. Their flexibility and freedom of interpretation was fostered by Protestantism
itself. The liberty of the individual to interpret and act upon God’s Word according to the
dictates of personal conscience distinguishes that tradition of belief. And in the context of
a newly-established settler colony, this aspect of Protestantism had particular
significance. Freedom of interpretation and flexibility of application facilitated the
colonists’ use of familiar language to describe unfamiliar surrounds. It meant that the

2 Richard White, Inventing Australia, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1981, chapters one and two; Ross Gibson,
The Diminishing Paradise: Changing Literary Perceptions of Australia, Sirius Books, 1984, chapters 2
and 3.
religious vocabulary they brought with them from Britain was not a ‘prison’ for the clergy and other biblically literate colonists as the poetic vocabulary was for the convict artist Thomas Watling.\(^3\) Perhaps the relative ease with which they applied the language of their own religious tradition to the colony meant they were more likely to assume the continued relevance of their religious values than to recognise their ethnocentricities.

The second question animating this thesis concerned the impact of the Australian environment on the colonists’ old world beliefs. How did Protestants adapt their religious faith and practice in response to their new surrounds? Unlike their North American counterparts, the early British colonists of Australia tended not to establish new kinds of churches and propose new versions of Christianity.\(^4\) Unlike the pilgrim fathers, they had not set out with the intention to act upon their religious convictions in ways they could not in Britain. Nor did many clergy other than Lang invest the early colonists’ actions with covenantal significance or draw on their Protestant tradition to articulate a new national myth. But this does not mean that their ideas were unchanging or that they made no significant response to their new surroundings. As people professionally responsible for the introduction of Protestantism to the colonies, the early clergy faced the challenge of negotiating the disruption not only of their personal circumstances but those of their churches too. Those possessed of a pragmatic and expansionist evangelical faith made concessions to their new circumstances fairly readily. But even those clergymen most firmly committed to replicating the structures and practices with which they had been familiar in Britain had to come to terms with changed conditions and find ways of doing so in new environment. Some accommodation of behaviour and even adaptation of belief could occur in this process.

The Anglicans John Wollaston and Bishop Broughton were promoters of what Russel Ward called ‘relatively unadulterated British values’ in early colonial Australia.\(^5\) They carried a particular Protestant tradition to the colonies that, in England, had been closely

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identified with a particular social and political form. To a far greater extent than, say, evangelicalism, their tradition valued particular local spaces as holy to the Lord and was deeply embedded in rural English life. Both clerics were determined to re-establish Anglican structures and recreate Anglican spaces in the colonies. Their efforts were very largely concerned with avoiding alterations to the system to which they were committed. As they saw it, social, political and religious change was undermining Anglicanism in England. But a close examination of their responses to their physical surrounds reveals that they nevertheless made some concessions to their new circumstances as a matter of necessity. They altered their behaviour in response to their colonial conditions, some of which suggest they may also have made adjustments of belief.

Wollaston made numerous adjustments to his personal and clerical conduct as he negotiated the differences between closely settled rural Cambridgeshire and the physical and social conditions of the colony. Life on the land required him to radically adapt his diet to the point that, although usually observant, he determined it unnecessary to fast for Lent. It also meant that he and Mary could not provide meals of the standard they felt appropriate for their more distinguished guests. The unsettled state of Swan River society sometimes prevented them from observing the class distinctions they considered important to social order and honouring to God. In the absence of domestic help Wollaston even assisted his wife with loads of washing, despite the affront to his masculinity and gentility. And in the absence of a closely settled community more generally, he travelled considerable distances to conduct baptisms and weddings on whatever day of the week suited people best and held the Sunday service as late as noon ‘to give time for the gathering of settlers from a distance.’\(^6\) His colonial experiences probably confirmed his commitment to the re-establishment of hierarchical social order and closely settled rural communities. But the lightness and even faint amusement with which he sometimes related his more unusual activities suggests that he relaxed his initial idea of the necessity of social order, and specifically gentility, to the observance of his form of Protestantism.

William Grant Broughton’s responses to the land were more dramatic. Although initially reluctant to undertake numerous or extensive journeys, the vastness of his area of responsibility required him to conduct tours of visitation that sometimes lasted several months. The dispersed state of the colonising population prompted him to assign clergy to widely extended districts in which they were to combine their parish duties with occasional tours to the more distant establishments. To the rapidly expanding pastoral districts beyond the official boundaries, he eventually assigned entirely itinerant missionaries. For these areas he advocated mission over parish and itinerancy over incumbency as a temporary strategy for preserving the people in religion until the church could arrive. He judged that adaptation to colonial conditions was essential for there to be any possibility of his ideals being realised. He did not abandon his commitment to the parish structure of Anglican religion or his campaign for religious buildings; nor did he alter his vision for a closely settled society. But his essentially practical response to his surrounds was accompanied by his acceptance of a broader notion of appropriate religious observance than he had brought with him to the colony. His notion of faithful and effective ministry expanded from the model of the settled parish minister to include missionary itinerancy. It is significant that itinerancy was a strategy that had itself been introduced from Britain, rather than developed in the unique circumstances of the colony. But Broughton’s embrace of it was nevertheless a considerable concession, amounting to the exchange of settled ministry for constant mobility. It is also significant that both Broughton and Wollaston adapted their particular form of Protestantism in ways directly concerned with the land. They made concessions to their colonial circumstances that involved relating to their physical environment differently.

For the evangelical clergy, adaptation to the colonial environment was less a matter of strategic necessity than a consequence of their particular form of Protestant faith. Throughout the early period of Australia’s colonisation by the British, evangelicalism was tied less tightly to a particular social and political form than non-evangelical Anglicanism and especially its high church variety. Within Britain, it flourished in changing areas and among transient populations that presented serious challenges to the established churches, and it was perhaps more readily transferable to contexts beyond Britain in which that social and political form was absent too. Secondly, the evangelical movement transcended denominational boundaries and identified less closely with a
particular ecclesiology. Its success was less dependent on the existence of formal church structures, which may have meant it was better suited than Episcopal Protestantism to conditions in a newly-established settler colony. Thirdly, although the first evangelical clergy in Australia were profoundly shaped by the national culture from which they had come, their particular religious tradition had also been shaped by the Great Awakening across the Atlantic and continental pietism - under wider influences than Anglicanism. Finally, evangelicalism’s characteristic emphasis on mission made its transmission to different contexts, even beyond the British empire, positively desirable. These broad features of the movement, combined with its typically pragmatic, even utilitarian temper meant its adherents were generally more ready to experiment with adaptation to new contexts than other Protestants.

From the foundation of the first British camp at Sydney, evangelical clergy adapted their conduct and sometimes also their convictions according to the physical conditions they encountered in the colony. Johnson invested time and effort into the cultivation of his garden and eventually accepted agricultural work as part of his calling, despite his acute awareness of his obligation to tend ‘other ground.’ Marsden similarly, though with more gusto and to a far greater extent, redefined his clerical labours to include farming because of the particular material circumstances of the colonising community. Both men had inherited from Puritanism a high value for worldly work, but in early New South Wales they reconceptualised their clerical vocation in response to the need to grow their own food and engaged bodily with the ground. Marsden also went several steps further - he articulated a deeply religious agricultural vision for colonial society, embraced improvement as one of his primarily pursuits, and became personally very rich. He came to view diligent agricultural labour as the key to the convicts’ reform and the civilisation of Aboriginal people. In the particular conditions of New South Wales, the work ethic acquired a distinctive character and a new importance in Marsden’s thought and ministry.

Lang did not farm land or raise sheep and stock like Marsden did, but he was actively committed to filling and subduing the earth. He took some account of colonial conditions as he articulated his vision, such as by adding to his argument for greater Protestant migration the claim that the introduction of such a population would raise the tone of
public opinion and improve relations between colonists and Aborigines. His impressions of the uncultivated character of the land and the improvement gradually effected by colonists ‘going forth with their axes’ may have sharpened his sense of the possibilities for social and political progress too. But it was the colony’s apparent ‘newness’ that had particular importance to Lang. Its lack of entrenched traditions and interests seemed to present an opportunity for the realisation of his grand ideas. Historians such as John Gascoigne have suggested that this feature of the colony meant the improving ethos of the enlightenment took stronger hold and had more wide-ranging effects than it did in the old world. It may also have had the subtle but significant effect of deepening the relationship between evangelicalism and the enlightenment. Evangelical clergy like Marsden and Lang may have developed a deeper commitment to improvement and incorporated it more thoroughly into their religious visions because they lived and ministered in a ‘new world’ colony.

One further feature of colonial life prompted leading Protestants to re-evaluate their religious behaviour and ideas: contact with Aboriginal people. The cultural gulf between the new arrivals and the people who belonged to the land prompted such colonists as William Dawes and Lancelot Threlkeld to attempt to discern the nature of the indigenes’ spirituality. Although there is scant evidence that either these investigations or contact with Aboriginal people more generally provoked Protestant leaders to substantially adapt their own religious culture and faith, they apparently tended to intensify and extend their existing values and ideas. Johnson’s personal interaction with Booron sharpened his missionary vision of the whole world being brought to Christ. Broughton’s vivid impressions of the degraded state of the Sydney Aborigines and the fatal violence of frontier life in the southern colony strengthened his resolve to extend the civilising influence of the church among the British colonists, that they might have a less harmful and more beneficial impact on the indigenes. And Lang’s horror at colonists’ casual tolerance of the murder of Aboriginal people spurred his efforts to promote the migration of Britons who held more humanitarian views and maintained a higher standard of morality. In a period when the character of British colonialism was a subject of public reflection and debate, he concluded that Christianity was indeed essential to civilised society because other colonists, whom he assumed not to possess an active or observant
Protestant faith, had proven prone to deplorable barbarity. It was a position many Protestants in Britain had reached by the late 1830s.

Contact with Aboriginal people led Marsden to articulate a very different conclusion indeed. His interactions with indigenous New Zealanders and Australians appears to have had a dramatic impact on his religious beliefs about humanity. His experiences as a colonist sharpened his ideas about industry and idleness and underpinned his unusually dismissive attitude towards missionary work among Aboriginal people. Specifically, the failure of his personal attempts to ‘civilise’ Tristan and other children, combined with the value for diligent labour he refined in the particular material circumstances of the colony, led to the hardening of his ideas about race. He never explicitly denied the power of the Christian gospel to transform even the most ‘savage’ life and he never categorically declared Aboriginal people beyond all hope of civilisation and salvation. Such statements would have been impossible in letters to evangelical friends and in correspondence with missionary societies. But he frequently expressed grave doubt about the likelihood of missionary success and from about the time of Tristan’s departure displayed a marked lack of interest in their material and spiritual welfare relative to his exertions for the Maori. This suggests a revision of his basic religious beliefs about the capacity of utterly ‘savage’ people to embrace the gospel, and helps explain his emphasis on civilisation before Christianity. The decisive significance of Marsden’s colonial circumstances in shaping his views is clear in the stark contrast they present to the missionary-minded humanitarianism of his British evangelical correspondents.

In the decades prior to 1850, the most prominent colonial Protestants did not articulate new forms of belief or develop dramatically Australian ways of expressing their convictions or conducting their ministries. In that sense, Manning Clark was right to stress the connections between Protestantism and Britishness. But his eventual dismissal of Protestantism as an intransigent and inflexible faith carries the point too far. Although the leading Protestant clergy did not develop a distinctively Australian spirituality in response to the land, they adapted to their colonial surrounds to a greater extent than has been generally recognised. They made numerous alterations to their behaviour, several of which suggest important changes of belief. They did so, furthermore, in ways that shaped
the development of early colonial Protestantism. This is perhaps especially true in the case of Broughton’s turn to itinerancy, Marsden and Lang’s embrace of enlightenment values of progress and improvement, and Marsden’s refusal to actively support missionary work among Aboriginal people. Importantly, the colonial clergy made concessions to their colonial environment that had significant consequences for their engagement with the land. They invested their labour more readily in cultivating it, travelled more widely over it, and were sometimes more emphatic in asserting their colonial interest in it at the expense of its indigenous inhabitants.

The third question posed by this thesis concerned the colonists’ attitudes and conduct towards their surrounds and its first occupants. How did Protestants’ religious ideas and values inform their behaviour in relation to the land and the Aboriginal people who belonged to it? Such a question directs attention to the several Protestant values that shaped colonists’ engagement with their surrounds - including industry, order, mission and biblicism. The preceding portraits reveal that the ways in which early colonial Protestants applied such values in responding to their surrounds were partially contingent upon their individual circumstances and personality. But a strength of serial biography as a method of historical enquiry is that it illuminates what is common to its subjects. In the field of intellectual history, it exposes the shared features and implications of its subjects’ ideas. The salient feature here is that prominent Protestants applied their religious values to Australia in ways that tended to assist, legitimate or even necessitate the British appropriation of the land.

Leading Protestants asserted and acted upon their religious values in ways that contributed to the transformation of the land. This was one of the primary means by which they assisted its appropriation by the British, though they did not always conceive of their actions in those terms. Like many new arrivals, the first chaplains personally cleared and cultivated the ground as a matter of necessity. But their religious values directly informed their attitudes and their conduct of the work. They embraced the puritan notion that worldly toil had a sacramental quality when performed in a spirit of worship to God. And their idea of industriousness as a positive virtue sprang from the heart of the Protestant tradition and helped define the culture of both its puritan and
evangelical forms. Marsden, in particular, laboured enthusiastically on his estates and urged the extensive employment of convicts in various agricultural pursuits. The physical labour such Protestants promoted for others and performed themselves wrought considerable change on the environment. It enabled agricultural settlement and made it easier for the colonists to inhabit the land on their own cultural and physical terms. At the same time such labour undermined Aboriginal people’s use of the land, as Marsden, at least, was aware. It prevented their access to customary resources and physically disrupted their ancient home.

Industrious labour also assisted the British colonisation of the territory by providing legal and moral legitimacy to it. According to Lockean principles and the European law of nations in the eighteenth century, it strengthened the colonists’ claim to ownership of the land. At the same time, the unfavourable measure of Aboriginal people against a strict standard of industry provided a basis upon which some colonists dismissed their proprietary interest in the land. As Marsden put it explicitly, there was no point setting land aside for Aboriginal people because ownership was only meaningful if the land was put to use. This argument for occupation and ownership on the basis of use had deep roots in Christian thought. It expressed an idea of the virtue of diligent work and reached back to the biblical injunction to ‘fill and subdue the earth.’ Europeans often interpreted this description of humanity’s task in agricultural terms, but it was sometimes invoked to serve other causes too. To Lang, whose vision of humanity was characterised by mobility more than stasis, it seemed to refer primarily to the migration of peoples to all habitable parts of the globe. But a value for industry is prominent even in his schemes. His ideal migrants were ‘virtuous and industrious’ people and he envisaged their settlement as cotton growers and small farmers over the face of the country. Whether Protestant work values were combined with humanitarianism as in Lang’s case or contrary to it as in Marsden’s, they were applied in ways that aided the British appropriation of the land. Ideals of virtuous industry informed schemes to populate the country with Europeans and were sometimes invoked to legitimate the dispossession of Aboriginal people from their land.

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Protestants’ value for order led to the further transformation of Aboriginal land in material and non-material terms. Like a value for industry, it underpinned the cultivation of the ground especially for clergymen-farmers like Johnson and Wollaston. It also inspired the Anglican clergy’s exertions to build churches in which divine service could be conducted with convenience and appropriate reverence. Their efforts led to the transformation of the land in physical ways: Johnson and Wollaston gathered materials for their churches from the surrounding bush and Broughton arranged for the construction of religious buildings throughout the most populous districts of the colonies. Their exertions also expressed a particularly Anglican value for orderly worship at the centre of a closely settled community. In Broughton’s case, that value also underpinned the alteration of the landscape in less tangible, more spiritual ways. By dedicating churches and church yards as holy to the Lord, Broughton gave exclusively Anglican meanings to particular tracts of land. Like the buildings themselves, the rite of consecration suggested the permanence of the colonists’ presence and, by erasing the spiritual presence of Aboriginal people, perhaps made it easier for the British to inhabit it as a home. Although consecrated churches and burial grounds were not ‘inspired’ places in Peter Read’s sense of the term, they were nevertheless explicitly religious spaces that expressed the deep importance of locality to the Anglican tradition of belief.

Even more deeply than they valued order and diligent work, Protestants valued the bible as God’s Word about Himself, the world and humanity. Their commitment to the Word of God was important to their engagement with their surrounds not least because it provided a foundation for other religious values they expressed in the colonies. The importance of order, the virtue of industry and the value of worldly toil were ideas the clergy emphasised in their particular cultural context and interpreted within their particular tradition of faith, but such values initially derived from the biblical text. ‘Let all things be done decently and in order,’ repeated Wollaston after Paul. ‘He who shall not work shall not eat,’ insisted both Governor Phillip and Marsden with the apostle’s memorable phrase. ‘Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God,’ Newton reminded Johnson from Corinthians as he considered agricultural work. Such injunctions not only directed colonial Protestants’ exertions but imbued them with a godly quality. They gave moral weight and even spiritual significance to ultimately...
appropriate activities such as the cultivation of the ground and the orderly worship of God in church.

Biblicism was also at the heart of the Protestant clergy’s value for mission. It involved them in the extension of British power over the land and its indigenous people sometimes in unexpected ways. Johnson’s personal commitment to scripture led him to instruct Booron in English and thus to equip her with linguistic skills that made her politically useful to the officers in their attempts to conciliate the Sydney tribes. The relationship he developed with her also led him to become personally involved in the officers’ interactions with Bennelong, and ultimately to act as a hostage and thus facilitate the colonists’ political goals concerning the land. One effect of his missionary efforts to share the Word of God with her was thus to provide direct practical and political support to the British colonisation of the territory. In later years, a value for the bible expressed in submission to its authority led Broughton to advocate the persistent proclamation of Christianity to Aboriginal people in exchange for their land. It was the bible’s ‘plain command’ to ‘preach the Gospel to every creature,’ he reminded his fellow Anglican clergy in the late 1820s. ‘As a believer in the Scriptures which assure us that ‘out of every nation and kindred and tongue and people’ the worshippers of the Lamb shall proceed,’ he was confident that at least some would turn to the Christian God. His Protestant value for the bible underpinned his argument that religion was the spiritual good the colonists exchanged for the Aborigines’ temporal things - an argument that legitimated the colonists’ incursion onto Aboriginal land.

Protestants’ commitment to the Word of God had further implications for their engagement with the land and the Aboriginal people who belonged to it. Not only did the bible lie at the root of their religious attitudes and direct their behaviour in a prescriptive sense. It also supplied them with narratives and images that shaped the ways they imagined themselves and their surrounds. The importance early colonial Protestants ascribed to scriptural stories - and indeed the value they placed on the bible as revelatory

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8 William Grant Broughton, A Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of New South Wales: at the Primary Visitation, holden at Sydney in the Church of St James on Thursday the 3rd December 1829, Sydney, 1830, pp.31-32, citing Matthew 28:18 and Revelation 14:6.
and authoritative in their own day - is suggested by the ways in which they read and applied them in the Australian colonies. They turned to the bible for the words to articulate their impressions of the land and to ascribe particular religious meanings to their environment. They also drew on biblical narratives and images to locate themselves and make sense of their experiences inhabiting an unfamiliar land. Significantly, they made use of the bible in complex ways that tended to infuse their own situation and activities with the appearance of divine significance. They drew parallels between its stories and their own experiences and identified closely with its contents, sometimes to the point of reading its narratives typologically. Their value for scripture and their methods of applying it in their colonial context gave rise to a sense of entitlement to the land and provided an ideological justification for colonising the territory.

Early colonial clergymen used biblical narratives including exile from Eden, wandering in the wilderness and exodus to an abundant promised land in ways that legitimated the British appropriation of the territory. But they did not always do so in the ways the existing literature suggests. A number of scholars including Ann Curthoys and Mark McKenna have shown that narratives of exile and suffering provided a mythic foundation for a national culture of victimhood and a sense of white Australian entitlement to the land, especially during the late twentieth century. During the very early colonial period, though, the idea and experience of exile could have very different effects. At its most acute, their condition of exile prevented them from working and thus undercut their efforts to establish the colony. Their situation seemed so hopeless in that dry and barren land that Johnson suggested the government evacuate the settlement entirely. At that early stage, the experience of exile did not give rise to a sense of entitlement to the land. Its significance to the early British colonisation of the land lay instead in the effect of the exiles’ hard labour, when they were able to perform it, in transforming the land. It wrought a physical alteration to the environment that made Aboriginal people exiles in their own country.

Prominent Protestants resorted to the scriptural narrative of exodus to the Promised Land, rather than exile to a barren and thorny place, to affirm the legitimacy, even the necessity of the British appropriation of the land. It was a narrative that had the colonisation of an
occupied country at its heart. And as several scholars including Edward Said and Michael Prior have noted in relation to places such as Israel and North America, it was a narrative that has often been invoked by aggressors to justify or even to motivate the imperial conquest of a territory. Lang applied it in a way that elevated migration to a task God had given to Britain; in a way that not only encouraged the further population of eastern Australia but presented greater colonisation as a divinely ordained necessity. His value for scripture and his typological reading of Israel’s biblical history led him to advance an ideology of colonisation as the express intention of God. He refused to apply the narrative in a manner that sanctioned the violent destruction of the indigenous inhabitants, a significant indication of the freedom with which he interpreted and applied the narrative according to his particular values and context. But Lang’s use of the bible nevertheless legitimated the British population and possession of the territory as a profoundly godly activity. It suggests that Protestants made a far more significant contribution to the British appropriation of the land when they applied positive biblical narratives of place than negative narratives of suffering.

By delineating the significance of Protestantism to colonists’ impressions of their environment and responses to the land, this thesis affirms that religion indeed mattered in the early colonies. It confirms the trend of much recent British and Australian historiography towards a more religious understanding of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Historians of popular religion have shown that many British arrivals were not devoutly religious in an orthodox Christian sense, but many nevertheless brought deeply religious ideas with them to the Australian colonies. Upon arrival, colonists drew on biblical images and Protestant ideas as they made sense of their new surrounds. The practice was pronounced among the clergy but by no means limited to them. Colonists resorted to biblical narratives in both personal and public accounts of the colony in ways that indicate the persistent importance of scriptural Christianity to their understanding of themselves and the world. Furthermore, the often creative and contextualised manner in which they applied scriptural ideas suggests that they made use of the bible in a distinctly Protestant way.
Protestantism mattered, specifically, to new arrivals’ sense of place. Hugh Jackson’s speculation that the colonists’ religious feeling suffered in consequence of their ‘alienation from nature’ does not adequately describe the nature of the relationship between colonial Protestantism and the land. Colonists did not necessarily find the country devoid of spiritual significance. Throughout the first decades of British settlement, prominent clergy and other colonists readily ascribed a range of religious meanings to the environment. Some fostered a sense of belonging to the land: images of Australia as a destination for an exodus or a landing place for Noah’s ark encouraged an idea of the colony as a home. More negative ideas of exile and wilderness stressed the colonists’ uneasy and uncomfortable occupation of the country. But even these images could form the basis of a relationship to place, and necessitate such transformative actions as consecration and cultivation. Such transformative responses to the land eventually enabled its inhabitation by Britons on familiar physical and cultural terms.

Colonial Protestants responded to their new environment in a variety of ways but their application of religious language and values to the land tended to assist and legitimate its British colonisation. The close examination of their ideas of place casts new light on the relationship between Protestantism and colonialism by expanding the discussion beyond the question of missionary complicity in colonialism to the question of Protestantism’s cultural and intellectual contribution to colonisation more generally. Historians have stressed the role of the Anglican church and its leaders in the political life and development of the early colonies. The relationship between church and state has been a prominent theme of religious histories written in this country. But in other terms, too, Protestant religion was important in early colonial society, as some of the most insightful recent works on the period by Alan Atkinson and John Gascoigne have recognised. This thesis has argued that it helped lay the foundation for colonial society by encouraging the transformation of the environment according to the colonists’ values and needs, and by providing ideological support for the British use and occupation of the territory. Even when expressed largely within the colonising community, biblical narratives and Protestant values could extend and strengthen British colonial power at the expense of Aboriginal people and their occupation of the land.

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While Protestantism was important to Britons’ sense of place, as this thesis has shown, place was important to their Protestantism. From high Anglican to radical evangelical, the colonial clergy responded to their dislocation from Britain by affirming the omnipresence of God, the universal relevance of the gospel and the colonists’ ongoing obligation to godly lives, even on the other side of the world. As Alan Atkinson suggested, the universal claims of orthodox Christianity informed their outlook and ministries. Importantly, though, the colonial clergy also had a role in re-articulating the relationship of their religious values and institutions to a new environment. In this sense, ‘provincialising God’ was one of their key tasks as professional transmitters of Protestantism to the early colonies. ‘Provincialising Europe’ was Dipesh Chakrabarty’s post-colonialist task, but for the early Protestant clergy, ‘provincialising God’ had appropriative effects. In private and in public, they negotiated the differences between Britain and Australia in ways that tended to assist the colonisation of the land. While the study of both popular religion and the experiences of lay people are welcome developments in the field of religious history, this thesis suggests the importance of paying continued attention to the clergy and their contribution to colonial life.

Place was central to the King James Bible, the key text of their faith. It contained several ideas of location that defined colonists’ visions of their Australian environment. Images of the wilderness, the promised land and the barren and thorny site of exile were as important as the bible’s more prescriptive elements in shaping colonists’ sense of their context and their responses to their surrounds. These features of the biblical tradition ensured that many colonists’ ideas about their location had a religious quality. The biblicism of British Protestantism ensured it was not a placeless tradition. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it assisted colonists’ articulation of their relationship to the land.

Place was important to colonial Protestantism for historical and circumstantial reasons, as well as textual ones. Broughton and Wollaston came from an Anglican tradition

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intimately associated with a particular social and political form, as historians including Michael Roe and Marian Quartly recognised. But their form of Protestantism was also deeply informed by ideas of locality. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Church of England was closely identified with close rural settlement. Its clergy were supported by tithes and glebe lands, and its parish churches were central spaces in religious and community life. Locality remained important to Anglicanism even as agrarian revolution unsettled the countryside. The English Church responded to the population shifts occasioned by urbanisation and industrialisation by such means as creating new parishes and erecting new buildings. The extent to which Anglicanism was a place-based tradition has attracted attention from English historians, but has not been fully acknowledged in the colonies. As the ministries of Broughton and Wollaston’s indicate, though, place was important to early Anglicanism in Australia. Their religious exertions encompassed the physical transformation of the land in ways that encouraged the development of a civilised, settled and properly Christian society. They established physical order and introduced what McKenna called the ‘architecture of grace.’ But the Bishop also set about consecrating churches and thus transforming the colonists’ environment in a way that made it their spiritual possession as Anglicans.

Historically, British evangelicalism was less concerned with place. Some evangelicals conducted their ministries within the parish structure of the English or Scottish church, but a great number of lay people and other ministers embraced itinerancy. The movement enjoyed success among less settled sections of the British population and in industrialising centres and trading towns. In general terms, the evangelical tradition was tied less tightly to the soil and less embedded in settled rural communities. This may help explain why evangelicalism, rather than non-evangelical Anglicanism, was the Protestant success story of the early Australian colonies. In the particular context of the initial foundation of British settlements, though, evangelical leaders articulated ideals that were often intimately concerned with the occupation and improvement of the land. Marsden’s ideas about agricultural labour and the colony’s progress in material and spiritual

prosperity, as well as Lang’s vision for the Protestant colonisation of the land are exemplary. The evangelical strand of Protestantism was probably more concerned with its physical surrounds in the early colonies than in Britain. Its leaders’ exertions in relation to the land and their pronouncements on its use assisted and legitimated the British colonisation of the territory.

Whether evangelical or high Anglican, Protestantism in this period was central to the ways in which British colonists related to the land. It had significant repercussions over the next two hundred years. By the late twentieth century, originally biblical notions of exile, toil and suffering had become central to white Australian myths of victimhood and entitlement to the land. In that sense, the Protestant tradition had become a potent source for nationalist feeling. It contributed to a distinctively Australian ‘identity and conscience,’ as Manning Clark had desired, but with less liberating and more oppressive effects than he had anticipated. At the same time, though, Protestantism came to influence the relationship of non-indigenous people to the land in very different ways. From the 1970s, religious groups and individuals, many of whom were associated with a uniquely Australian denomination, the Uniting Church, involved themselves in Aboriginal land rights campaigns. At Noonkanbah and elsewhere, Christian activists recognised the sacredness of the land in non-Christian terms. They advocated its return to the Aboriginal people to whom they said it had been originally given by God. Protestantism apparently remains a complex influence on the ways in which Australians relate to their environment. Its adherents continue to apply their religious values to their surrounds with considerable flexibility. An appreciation of the Protestant tradition should inform the discussion of Australia’s colonial past and postcolonial future in the early twenty first century.

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