Early nineteenth-century British Methodist mission followed imperial trade routes and military expansion until it found itself ensconced in every major settlement of what James Belich has called the ‘Settler Revolution.’¹ In this way, transatlantic Methodism serviced and exploited ‘one of the most dramatic population movements in human history.’² The first Wesleyan Methodist minister to arrive in the colony of New South Wales (NSW), in 1815, was Samuel Leigh (1785–1852).³ He was not, however, the first Methodist to arrive in Sydney town, for as elsewhere in the British colonies and in America, Methodism had its origins, not in the direct missionary work of


². Hempton, Methodism, 153.

preachers, but in the hopes and wishes of the laity. The first Methodist class meeting in the colony, led by Thomas Bowden (a school teacher) who had arrived on 28 January 1812, was held on 6 March of that same year. A class leader in England, Bowden encouraged John Hosking, another Methodist school teacher, to follow his example and establish a class meeting in their location in the antipodes. At about the same time, Edward Eagar, a converted Irish ex-convict, established a class meeting in Windsor. On 3 April, the two groups combined to hold a Love Feast and from this meeting sent letters to the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in England requesting one or two missionaries for NSW. As a result, Samuel Leigh arrived on 10 August 1815 ready to begin what would turn out to be a gruelling ministry with little earthly reward.


Leigh was born in Milton, Staffordshire, on 1 September 1785 and became first a lay preacher with the Independent Church at Hanley, which had been founded by the Congregationalists in 1784. An enthusiastic worker, he divided his time over a five year period between the Independents and the Wesleyans, assisting and gaining the respect of both denominations. On the advice of friends he decided to enter David Bogue’s Congregational Seminary in Gosport. This school was founded in 1789 by a wealthy banker, George Welch, and included a three-year programme of study in the classics and theology with the expectation that the graduates would then enter evangelistic work. David Bogue, the scholarly minister of the Independent Church at Gosport, was chosen by Welch to serve as tutor. Bogue was a staunch Calvinist, and Leigh’s Arminian convictions led to his conclusion that he should quietly withdraw from the Seminary. After Leigh’s brother-in-law discussed his situation with the eminent Wesleyan minister, Joseph Sutcliffe, who recommended him to the Portsmouth Society, Leigh turned exclusively to Wesleyan work. Shortly thereafter, he was appointed to the Shaftesbury Circuit where he served for two years. Following a sense of calling to be a missionary, he prepared to move to Montreal, Canada, but the Wesleyan Missionary Committee decided he should instead be appointed to NSW.

Like most early nineteenth-century Methodist preachers, Leigh had very limited education. His manuscripts from his days at Bogue’s Seminary show little by way of advanced intellectual achievement. What he lacked in native intelligence he was to make up for in a strict application of Methodist polity and a vigorous approach to discipline.
It would certainly be appropriate to see in the work of the earlier lay preachers, the beginnings of Methodism in New South Wales. David Hempton rightly claims that ‘Methodist expansion was the result not of an evangelistic strategy concocted by elites but was carried primarily by a mobile laity.’\textsuperscript{12} Wright and Clancy argue that ‘given the primacy of the class meeting among Methodist institutions at that period’, the work of these earliest class leaders ‘must be seen as marking the real beginning of Wesleyan Methodism in the colony.’\textsuperscript{13} Daryl Lightfoot and Sue Pacey have recently argued that if Methodism is ‘marked by its two distinctive features of itinerant preaching and class meetings’, the appropriate date for bicentennial celebrations is 2011 in commemoration of Edward Eagar’s pioneer ministry in the Windsor district.\textsuperscript{14}

While one does not want to diminish the importance of this early lay ministry, this article contends that the arrival of Samuel Leigh is a more appropriate event for commemoration. Early nineteenth-century Wesleyan Methodism was a movement dominated by clerical authority, so Leigh’s arrival signifies the beginnings of formal British-Conference-approved Methodism in the colony. Leigh’s work could not be described as a resounding success but he did establish the requisite Methodist discipline that provided a foundation for subsequent growth, something the earlier lay preachers had not been able to do. By the time of Leigh’s arrival, the three class meetings established in 1812 had dwindled to a single class with only six members. Within two weeks he established a second class in Sydney; shortly thereafter, classes were also operating in Parramatta, Windsor and Castlereagh. The six members had risen to forty-four.\textsuperscript{15} This good start augured well but the momentum was not sustained and Methodist membership in NSW would not climb beyond four hundred until 1836, after Leigh had left the colony.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{12} Hempton, Methodism, 30.
\textsuperscript{13} Wright and Clancy, The Methodists, 4.
\textsuperscript{15} Wright and Clancy, The Methodists, 4.
Norman Birtwhistle saw the home Church’s selection of Leigh in response to the need in NSW as a ‘splendid appointment.’ He is said to have encountered only ‘initial difficulties with the Governor’ and to have ‘laid the foundations of what became the great Methodist Church in Australia.’ This essay will argue that Leigh’s appointment was anything but splendid and that his ‘difficulties’ with Lachlan Macquarie were the least of his problems.

**Leigh and Governor Lachlan Macquarie**

Leigh arrived in the colony on *The Hebe* on 10 August 1815 and received a less than enthusiastic welcome from Edward Eagar. When Leigh introduced himself as a Wesleyan missionary, Eagar replied, ‘Indeed! I am sorry to inform you that it is now doubtful whether the Governor will allow you to remain in the country in that capacity.’ Staying overnight in the Eagar household, Leigh felt so despondent that he retired to his room after supper, overwhelmed by the uncertainty of his prospects.

The next day he presented himself to Governor Lachlan Macquarie, accompanied by Eagar. The fears expressed were not unfounded; the Governor informed Leigh, ‘I regret you have come here as a missionary, and feel sorry, and cannot give you any encouragement in that capacity.’ Leigh was told that he had ‘missed his way’ by not presenting proper letters of introduction from British government officials. The authorization papers Leigh had brought with him were of no use in this ‘strange country.’ Cautious about sectarian conflicts erupting in the colony, Macquarie referred to a recent rebellion ‘aggravated by the bitter hostility of both papists and Protestants,’ perhaps a reference to the Irish convict rebellion at Castle Hill in March 1804. Macquarie said, ‘I had rather you had come from any other Society than the Methodist. I profess to be a member of the Church of England and wish all to be of the same profession and therefore cannot encourage any parties.’ Leigh then assured Macquarie of his own churchmanship and of his desire

19. Ibid. 35.
20. Ibid. 36.
to remain closely attached to the Church of England.  

Macquarie offered Leigh a position in the government, through which Leigh was assured he would grow much more rich and comfortable than by going about preaching. Leigh turned down the offer insisting that he had come to the colony as a Wesleyan missionary and could act in no other capacity while he remained there.  

Before the interview had ended, however, Macquarie had given qualified approval to Leigh's itinerancy so long as he stuck to his own Wesleyan flock and expected no government funds. The Surveyor General's Office was instructed to provide Leigh with free passage throughout the colony. The Governor seems to have admired Leigh's character, but requested that in the future 'only regular and pious clergymen of the Church of England and not sectaries' should be sent to 'the new and rising colony.' Macquarie's initial scepticism toward the arrival of a Methodist preacher need not be read as a negative rebuff. It more than likely arose out of his conscientious sense of responsibility. According to his biographer John Ritchie, the Governor saw himself as a benevolent landlord; all of the citizens of the colony, from the lowest to the highest estate, including the Aborigines, were his personal responsibility. John Hirst notes that the reason Macquarie is so well remembered today is because 'he treated a ramshackle colony of 5000 people as if it were or could be a significant place.' The sudden arrival of a new religious sect imported from the home country had the potential to destabilise this development project.

The autocratic President of the British Wesleyan Conference, Jabez Bunting, wrote to assure Macquarie.

21. Samuel Leigh to WMMS, 6 March 1816, Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary 2:213–14, Box 50.
22. Strachan, Remarkable Incidents, 35.
23. Ibid. 36.
Our missionaries have been carefully instructed to honour the authorities of the country, to be obedient to the laws, and to confine themselves entirely to the duties of their Office. And any departure from a proper line of conduct on their part would be visited by the Society who has sent them out by its Displeasure, and removal.27

Macquarie seemed eventually to have warmed to the Methodists. In March 1816 he was happy to patronize Leigh’s benevolent society and in January 1819 the foundation stone of a Wesleyan chapel was laid in Macquarie Street on land donated by the Governor and Crown Solicitor Thomas Wylde. A plot of land was given for a chapel in Parramatta, and Macquarie undertook to provide further plots of land for the same purpose in ‘any or every settlement in the colony.’28

Following Macquarie’s years as Governor (1810–21), colonial Methodists enjoyed favourable relations with Governor Thomas Brisbane (1821–25) who considered them ‘a highly valuable and respectable body, who [did] much good.’29 Brisbane drew from both the public’s purse and his own to contribute to a Wesleyan chapel in Pennant Hills in 1825.30 In 1836 Governor Bourke proposed the so called ‘Irish system’ which put a secular system in place with allowance for separate religious instruction. This was deemed unacceptable by Protestants, including Wesleyans, who considered it a ploy to overthrow the Protestant ascendancy. The suggestion of providing equal levels of funding for both Protestant and Catholic schools was argued against, and resulted in all church schools being set adrift to fend for themselves.31 It should be noted that Methodist complaint during this controversy was in support of the Anglican Bishop’s concerns rather than self-originated.

30. Benjamin Carvosso to WMMS, April 1825, Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary Papers, 5:1480, Box 53.
Nonetheless, according to Bollen, ‘we may see in this a turning point, the beginnings of the self-confident, aggressive style of later nineteenth-century Methodism.’

Leigh and the Clergy of the Established Church

In requesting a minister, Bowden, Hosking and Eagar had made it clear that they wanted someone who was ‘not radically a Dissenter,’ but rather, one who could work with the Anglican chaplains, and not act independently of the Church of England. Thomas Bowden expressed a desire that whoever was sent should follow ‘the primitive way of Methodism, not in hostility against the church, but rather in unison with it, not so much as to make a party distinct from the church as to save souls in it.’ Lay Methodists in early NSW appear then to have been ‘Church Methodists’ rather than ‘Chapel Methodists,’ not thinking of themselves primarily as Dissenters but as allied closely with the Established Church. Eagar himself had read the Anglican service on behalf of Richard Cartwright, one of the colonial chaplains.

Leigh turned out to be just the man they wanted, and he quickly established good relations with the Anglican clergy and made it his business to cooperate fully with the Established Church, ensuring that Methodist activity would in no way interfere with the routines of Anglicanism. Leigh wrote home to the Wesleyan Missionary Society on 2 March 1816, informing its members that the Anglican clergy were entirely friendly toward him. Samuel Marsden who had himself been influenced by Yorkshire Methodism in his youth, donated land to the Methodists for a chapel in Windsor. The foundation stone was laid on 13 September 1818. Leigh was invited

33. Thomas Bowden to WMMS, 20 July 1812; Bowden and Hosking to WWMS, n.d. see James Colwell, The Illustrated History of Methodism (Sydney, 1904), 36–39.
34. Thomas Bowden, 30 July 1812, cited in Udy, Spark of Grace, 17.
36. Samuel Leigh to WWMS, 2 March 1816, cited in Wright and Clancy, The Methodists, 4. The same sentiment is expressed again in Leigh to Adam Clarke, 14 October 1817, Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary Papers 2:202, Box 50.
37. For a good biography of Marsden, see A. T. Yarwood, Samuel Marsden: The Great Survivor,
to Newcastle to preach by the Evangelical Anglican chaplain William Cowper. It was out of concern for Leigh’s health that Samuel Marsden invited Leigh to travel to New Zealand and scout out the possibility of establishing a mission there, hoping that the change would do him good. The first Christian mission in New Zealand had been established by Marsden in 1814. The Wesleyan Missionary Society was commenced by Leigh in 1818 on the first of several mission trips across the Tasman. These trips came to be resented by his colleagues in Sydney who tended to read such absences as a desertion of the field. When Leigh left for England in 1820, he received very friendly letters of support and encouragement from the colonial chaplains Cowper and Cartwright.

Not all colonial Methodists shared Leigh’s enthusiasm for the Anglican formularies; their differing attitudes toward the Church of England would become the locus of much of the conflict between Leigh and his colleagues. Joseph Orton, while Chairman of the Van Dieman’s Land District (now Tasmania), would encounter opposition in the 1830s to the use of the Anglican liturgy among Methodists in Launceston. The sacrament of Holy Communion does not seem to have figured prominently in the Methodist worship of the early Australian colonies. Benjamin Carvosso, who joined the Wesleyan mission in NSW in May 1820, following a brief stay in Hobart Town, Van Diemans Land, stated that he had never paid the rite much attention and that by the Wesleyan mission’s supporters ‘it was little understood or appreciated.’ Nonetheless, as was the case in America, Methodist administration of the sacraments quickly became a divisive issue. Leigh may have seen the Methodist mission as ancillary to the Church of England, but others did not share that opinion. In reality, Methodists functioned more often as an alternative to Anglican worship than a supplement to it. Dispute among Wesleyans over their relationship to the Church of Eng-

---

38. For a helpful general discussion of the earliest Wesleyan missionaries to New Zealand see Owens, ‘Wesleyan Missionaries to New Zealand.’
land would contribute to the earlier close relations between Wesleyans and the Church of England being disrupted; after the 1820s the two churches had little to do with one another, and when they did, they were not always friendly encounters. In any case, identification with the Established Church, if it had continued, may well have been a hindrance to Methodist growth, as the population was largely emancipist in sentiment and felt disenfranchised by Anglican exclusivity.

There were still, however, moments when Wesleyans took a posture of deference toward the Anglican hierarchy. After William Grant Broughton was appointed the first Anglican bishop of Australia in 1836, he received a somewhat obsequious greeting from ‘Ministers and Members of the Societies and Congregations in New South Wales of the people called Methodists, late in connexion with the Reverend John Wesley A.M., some time Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford.’

Firmly attached, as a body to the United Church of England and Ireland, as by law established, we cannot but rejoice in every measure which promises to extend the usefulness and to increase the prosperity of that venerable hierarchy. [We] are taught by the example of our Revered Founder, and by the oft-repeated declaration of our parent connexion, an Annual Conference assembled, not less than by our own honest conviction, that the Church [of England] has been the instrument, in the hands of Divine Providence, of preserving the British realm the blessings of Protestant Christianity, and of spreading far and wide the pure doctrines of our most holy faith.

Broughton’s reply was equally friendly but he privately expressed alarm that the Wesleyans would not be content to remain in a position of such deference. His disquiet was justified for they soon made it clear that they expected to be treated as the equal of other Churches. They objected to Governor Bourke’s legislation because it did not give them denominational recognition, protested that the census forms did not reveal their true strength, and

gained the financial support of the state for their ministers and schools.\textsuperscript{45} Eventually colonial Methodism took its place alongside of the Church of England, the Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church as one of the four major denominations in colonial Australia. By 1839, Methodist ministers were receiving government salaries of £150-£200 per annum.\textsuperscript{46} This newly gained status meant the end of deference towards the Established Church and the beginning of a confidence in its own self-sufficiency, and with good cause, for Leigh’s ‘day of small things’\textsuperscript{47} would ultimately be succeeded by colonial Methodism becoming perhaps the greatest religious success story in late nineteenth century NSW.

\textbf{Leigh and His Fellow Workers}

A letter to the Missionary Committee stating that Leigh should bring ‘house furniture’ with him had been misread as ‘horse furniture’ so that upon arrival he found himself with ‘an excellent second-hand saddle, bridle and all other requisites’ but no furniture.\textsuperscript{48} This turned out to be quite providential as his ministry as a circuit rider would take him on a regular 240km circuit covering Parramatta, Liverpool, Windsor, Richmond, Castlereagh, and the Hawkesbury River district. Spending ten days in Sydney, frequenting the crime-ridden area known as ‘the Rocks’ (by the harbour near what is now Circular Quay), with its evident human need, then ten or eleven days travelling his circuit, Leigh sought to establish a cause in the characteristic Methodist pattern.

It soon became apparent that there was more work in the colony of NSW than a single Methodist preacher could handle; in 1817 Leigh requested that the Committee forward a co-worker. Walter Lawry was appointed to this position. Born on 3 August 1793 in Rutheren near Bodmin, Cornwall, Lawry had been accepted as a candidate for the Wesleyan ministry in 1817. He arrived on the convict ship Castlereagh in May 1818, on which he had

\textsuperscript{45} Cable, ‘Protestant Problems in New South Wales’, 135.
\textsuperscript{46} Walker, ‘Growth and Typology’, 333.
\textsuperscript{47} One of Leigh’s favourite texts was Zechariah 4:10: ‘Despise not the day of small things.’
served as chaplain.\textsuperscript{49}

Initial relations between the two were amicable but stresses in their relationship soon became apparent. Wright and Clancy give the following character portraits:

Leigh was a humourless, intense, single-minded man, quite prepared to kill himself in the fulfillment of his mission; Lawry was warm, even emotional, found it difficult to remain serious in company for long and, while willing to work hard, placed rather more importance on his home comforts than did Leigh.\textsuperscript{50}

According to Bollen, Leigh’s manner was ‘heavy like his frame.’\textsuperscript{51} One might say he had a tendency to throw his weight around. It probably did not help that Lawry decided that he should ‘faithfully and affectionately’ apprise Leigh of the ‘most glaring deficiencies and inconsistencies’ he discovered in him.\textsuperscript{52} Nor would it have been taken kindly by Leigh that Lawry successfully won the hand of Mary Hassall, a young woman whom Leigh had earlier failed successfully to court. In the estimate of the preachers who would join them on the field in 1821, the two men were ‘naturally unfitted for agreement in all the affairs of life.’\textsuperscript{53}

Upon arriving in NSW, Leigh was around twenty-nine or thirty, and Lawry twenty-three. Most of the twenty-five who followed them up to 1840 were under thirty, reflecting the youthfulness of Methodist missionary work.\textsuperscript{54} Young, sometimes hot-headed men without the wisdom and restraint of age can often fail to see eye to eye and be unwilling to compromise.

In 1819, Lawry expressed his concern about the deteriorating relationship between Leigh and himself. ‘Mr. Leigh, with whom I wish the most intimate union, is of such a curious and eccentric manner that I find it most difficult to labour in unison with him. His preaching talent appears to be all


\textsuperscript{50} Wright and Clancy, \textit{The Methodists}, 6.


\textsuperscript{52} Wright and Clancy, \textit{The Methodists}, 6.


\textsuperscript{54} Bollen, ‘A Time of Small Things’, 228.
dwindled away. He is a most miserable speaker."  

From 1820 onwards, Leigh took frequent trips to New Zealand and to England, so that he was often absent from the colony. This was a frequent source of irritation to his colleagues, who felt they had to defer to the authority of one who was not as intimately acquainted as they with conditions on the field.  

Leigh sailed for England 24 February 1820 where he would travel to provincial cities such as Sheffield, Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol promoting the work in Australia and New Zealand. During this visit he also married Catherine Clewes and requested the Missionary Committee to supply at least three additional preachers for NSW. This led to the appointment of the Revds Benjamin Carvosso, Ralph Mansfield and George Erskine. In addition, the Revd William Walker was to serve as a missionary to the Aborigines, and the Revd William Horton would replace Lawry who was reassigned to Tonga (then known as ‘The Friendly Islands’).

Out of deference to the Church of England, Leigh’s practice was to hold services at 9 a.m. and 7 p.m. so as not to clash with church hours. In 1821, however, his fellow Wesleyan missionaries established an 11 a.m. service in Sydney which clashed with Church hours, and held Communion services there as well as at Parramatta and Windsor. Benjamin Carvosso may have been the chief belligerent in the bitter dispute that ensued. In justifying the 11 a.m. service, he made it clear that ‘scarcely an individual of those who attend our morning worship was accustomed to attend the Estab-

55. Walter Lawry to WMMS, 11 August 1819, cited in Udy, Spark of Grace, 43.
56. During Lawry’s three years in the colony, Leigh was present for only two short periods totaling nine months. Udy, Spark of Grace, 44–45.
57. Strachan, Remarkable Incidents, 99–100.
58. Samuel Leigh to WMMS, 22 June 1820, Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary 3:676, Box 51.
59. Lawry made the needs of the Friendly Islands known to the Committee and they seem to have taken this as an offer on Lawry’s part to volunteer to go. In 1822, along with his wife and two lay helpers, he set sail for Tonga under the Committee’s direction (though this was probably not his intention when he wrote to London).
60. Walter Lawry was the first assistant to Leigh, arriving in 1818, followed in 1820 by Benjamin Carvosso, Ralph Mansfield and George Erskine. We shall see that Leigh was to come into considerable conflict with these reinforcements.
lished Church at the disputed hour,' a practice that conflicted with Leigh's preferences. The Committee reinforced, in January 1821, its earlier insistence that the utmost deference be shown to the Anglican clergy and both the Committee and Leigh wrote to the colonial chaplains supporting them over against their fellow Methodists who seemed deliberately to be working against the clergy. A situation soon developed in which Leigh, the colonial Anglican chaplains, and the Missionary Committee in London were arrayed against every Methodist preacher in NSW.

This first crop of Methodist missionary reinforcements, like Lawry, did not share Leigh's outlook toward the Church of England, so that the nature of colonial Methodism's connection to Anglicanism was destined to be at the centre of disputes between Leigh, his fellow missionaries, and Methodist leadership back in England. There were many accusations flung in both directions and much behind-closed-door plotting and scheming.

Lawry considered the Anglican chaplains to be doctrinaire Calvinists who did not welcome Methodists or their Arminian theology. Carvosso seemed to hold the same view and Mansfield was said to have delivered a series of Wednesday evening lectures with the express purpose of contradicting what the Anglican minister had said the previous Sunday, though he denied that this had been his purpose. Lawry, who reckoned that there were nine Calvinists to every Arminian in Parramatta, opened a chapel there on 20 June 1821, built partly 'to forestall the preaching of Calvinist doctrine.'

Marsden and Lawry disputed over the fact that the latter's Sunday School was run in competition with the Anglican school and had drawn away some of its students. Leigh, who took Marsden's side in this debate,

63. For a detailed discussion of the various disputes leading to this division see Udy, *Spark of Grace*, 47–76.
64. For a detailed discussion of this dispute see Udy, *Spark of Grace*, 43–61.
68. Samuel Marsden to Walter Lawry, 21 May 1821, Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary Papers, 3:805–07; Walter Lawry to Samuel Marsden, 25 May 1821; Walter Lawry to WMMS, 24 May
also accused his fellow missionaries of extravagance when they asked the Missionary Committee for a rise in their stipend to meet the higher cost of living in the colony. Lawry wrote to the Committee on 9 February 1821 claiming that the figures reported in the Missionary Magazine, presumably by Leigh, were greatly inflated. Where the magazine claimed eighty-three persons in society at the time of Lawry’s arrival, the real figure, according to Lawry, was closer to twenty. Carvosso, Lawry and Mansfield reported gross inaccuracies in Leigh’s statistical reporting. A ‘sixth well-appointed chapel’ is said to have existed ‘no where but in the sanguine conceptions of brother Leigh.’ Leigh protested that he was an honest man and his reports had been accurate. The Missionary Committee seems to have accepted his protestations.

The London Committee sided with Leigh and the Anglican clergy on all the matters that came before them. They issued rebukes and warnings to each of the missionaries, threatening to withdraw them from the field if they persisted in their actions. The towns were to be left to the Established Church; the Methodist preachers were to confine themselves to the scattered population in the bush. Any refusal to obey this directive would be considered a dereliction of duty.

During Leigh’s eighteen-month absence from the colony, he did not correspond with the newly appointed missionaries. When he returned on 16 September 1821, with his new wife and William Walker, he called a District Meeting, at which strong directives were issued: Leigh’s original plan should be followed, the work of the Anglican clergy was not to be interfered with, services were not to be held in church hours, and all controversial sermons

1821, 3:808–11, Box 51.

69. Benjamin Carvosso, Walter Lawry and Ralph Mansfield to WMMS, 30 July 1821, Bonwick Transcripts, 51:835–40, Box 51; Samuel Leigh to WMMS, 16 November 1821; Finance Sub-Committee Minutes, Committee Minute Book 3 July 1822, cited in Wright and Clancy, The Methodists, 12.


71. Benjamin Carvosso, Walter Lawry and Ralph Mansfield to WMMS, August 1821, Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary Papers 3:842, Box 51.

72. Samuel Leigh to Secretary, WMMS, 24 October 1821, Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary Papers, 4:959, Box 52.


74. Udy, Spark of Grace, 52–53.
should be avoided.\textsuperscript{75}

Without showing a copy of the letter to his colleagues, Leigh wrote to the Committee in October 1821 laying the bad conduct of his fellow preachers toward the Church of England clergy squarely at the feet of Lawry and his ‘unfriendly spirit.’ He had, charged Leigh, ‘used every means to disturb and annoy the clergy in the colony and . . . encouraged the brethren to act upon the same principle.’\textsuperscript{76} The situation was worsened by a letter from Samuel Marsden to the London Committee, accusing the Methodist preachers of acting improperly by living in ease and at expense, neglecting the work of seeking the lost sheep of Christ in the remote places, and instead setting themselves up ‘in opposition to the Established church.’ The preachers were accused of refusing to obey the directions of the London Committee, preferring to see them only as words of advice which could easily be set aside.\textsuperscript{77} William Cowper wrote to Leigh complaining that the Methodist preachers had interfered with the work of the Established Church.\textsuperscript{78}

It is possible, though it cannot be stated with certainty, that Leigh may have asked his friends among the clergy to write these letters of complaint. This is suggested in Leigh’s 23 October Report to the Committee in which he states, ‘I have conversed with the clergy and they wish, with myself, to refer the whole matter to you, and will be perfectly satisfied with your conclusion.’\textsuperscript{79}

The arrival of George Erskine to serve as Superintendent and later District Chairman, on 4 November 1822, only further isolated the already besieged Leigh. The conflict between Leigh and his fellow preachers, Erskine considered ‘an exceedingly unpleasant affair.’\textsuperscript{80} For Erskine, the Wesleyan Methodist Church needed to show little deference to the Established Church.

\textsuperscript{75} The London Committee’s recommendations are given in Udy, \textit{Spark of Grace}, 52–53.
\textsuperscript{76} Samuel Leigh to WMMS, 23 October 1821, Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary Papers, 4:957, Box 52.
\textsuperscript{77} Samuel Marsden, 19 November 1821, cited in Udy, \textit{Spark of Grace}, 55; Samuel Leigh to WMMS, 23 October 1821, Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary Papers, 4:957, Box 52.
\textsuperscript{78} William Cowper to Samuel Leigh, 8 November 1821, Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary Papers, 4:987–90, Box 52.
\textsuperscript{79} Samuel Leigh to WMMS, 23 October 1821, Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary Papers, 4:957, Box 52.
\textsuperscript{80} George Erskine to R. Watson, 19 November 1822, Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary Papers, 4:1200, Box 52.
Church. It was its own ecclesial body with its own doctrine and discipline. To be stationed at so far a distance from England required the granting of a discretionary power to act in accordance with local circumstances, and to have liberty to embrace with prudence every opening of usefulness.\textsuperscript{81} In this missional pragmatism he was at one with the other preachers, pointing toward the self-sustaining and independent future of nineteenth-century Wesleyan Methodism, leaving Leigh looking backward to the previous century. But Erskine was not a well man physically and he lacked the drive and energy to offer strong leadership.

Leigh travelled again to New Zealand to establish a mission at Whangaroa in 1822, before returning to Sydney in 1823. His wife Catherine died there on 15 May 1831, in the midst of an epidemic. Leigh finally retired from the field and returned to England the following year broken in spirit and in health. Remarrying in 1842 he continued for a time in circuit work, until finally suffering a stroke while addressing a Missionary Meeting in 1851. He died the following year.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In 1832 the Missionary Committee considered NSW to be ‘the most unproductive of all its stations throughout the world owing to the “unfaithfulness” of several of its missionaries.’\textsuperscript{82} Erskine, Carvosso, Lawry, Mansfield and Walker, had by that time all withdrawn from their work in the colony. After more than fifteen years Methodism could report only 112 members of the Society, twenty Sunday School teachers and 137 Sunday School students. Joseph Orton trimmed these figures down even further to a more realistic sixty-seven members and twelve Sunday School teachers.\textsuperscript{83}

Methodists were not alone in their struggle to establish a thriving religious community. To some extent all the other denominations faced similar difficulties. The inhabitants of early NSW whether convicts, free settlers,
military officers or civil servants, were not a particularly religiously inclined group of people. But surely the constant bickering between Leigh and his colleagues over the nature of Methodism’s relationship to the Established Church was a major contributing factor in the lack of success. Leigh was a hard worker, but he worked too hard, so hard that his health broke down, and he was warned by the Missionary Committee against killing himself with too much hard work. Owens suggests that Leigh was not only stressed but showed signs of mental illness. His colleagues accused him of being ‘mentally unbalanced; and although colleagues are not always charitable in their judgments, it is hard to believe they were wrong [about Leigh]. Robert Howe, editor of the Sydney Gazette, considered Leigh ‘diseased in the mind,’ though it is hard to know how seriously to take Howe’s opinion. In any case he was not a team player, he lacked tact and administrative skill and he systematically worked against his own closest colleagues in a situation of extreme physical isolation where unity was an all the more valuable commodity.

Methodism’s glory days would be seen from the mid-nineteenth century when Methodist strength and influence in the dominions would far exceed that of its Mother Church in Britain. In the fifty years between 1851 and 1901, Methodism in all the Australian colonies saw tremendous growth, from 5% to 11% of the population. Membership in NSW increased from 121 in 1834 to 707 in 1841, and then to 2,209 in the ten years between 1841 and 1851.

The turnaround beginning in the 1830s can partly be attributed to the superior leadership of Joseph Orton, but migration also was a significant factor, as was proselytizing from other churches. The unique machinery of Methodism with the voluntarism of its classes, circuits and lay preachers, as well as its simplicity of doctrine and emotional directness, were eminently

85. Robert Howe to Wesleyan Missionary Committee, 20 February 1824, Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary Papers, 5:1391, Box 53.
suited to the youthful exuberance of a growing colony.\textsuperscript{91} This success was duplicated and in some areas exceeded in the other colonies, and in New Zealand. Methodist growth in South Australia was particularly rapid and widespread. By 1858 the three Methodist denominations in that colony provided seats for 11,000 people and Wesleyans alone made up 13\% of the population.\textsuperscript{92} In 1854 the entire work in all colonies became independent of the Missionary Committee and the Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Connexion (or Church) was convened in Sydney in January 1855.

The fact that Leigh was ‘not radically a Dissenter,’ a quality admired by the lay preachers who first requested a missionary, kept him tied to an earlier phase of Methodist development. Lawry, Carvosso, and Mansfield were the wave of the future with their vision of Methodism as a strong, independent Dissenting body, holding its own distinctive doctrines and discipline, albeit with Anglican origins. Leigh was a man who belonged more naturally to the eighteenth-century status of Methodism as closely aligned to the Church of England, and thus was a constant drag to the progressive views of the more recently arrived missionaries. He may for these reasons be remembered as a pioneer but not as a builder of Australian Methodism.

\textsuperscript{91} Cable, ‘Protestant Problems in New South Wales’, 125–26