

Chapter 1
Methodism in the Australian Colonies,
1811–1855

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Early nineteenth-century British Methodist expansion followed the imperial trade routes and military expansion of the 'Settler Revolution', servicing and exploiting every major population centre in the British dominions. The first Wesleyan Methodist minister to arrive in the colony of NSW, in 1815, was the Rev. Samuel Leigh (1785–1852).¹ He was not, however, the first Methodist to arrive in Sydney town, for, as elsewhere in the British colonies (and also in America), Methodism had its origins not in the direct missionary work of preachers but in the hopes, wishes and energetic work of a devout laity.

Early Lay Preaching

The earliest Methodist class meetings in the colony were those established in the Windsor district by Edward Eagar in 1811. Eagar, a convicted forger whose death sentence had been commuted to transportation, would eventually, in 1818, receive a pardon from the Governor, going on to become the first Circuit Steward in NSW. His assistance to the Rev. Richard Cartwright in reading the Anglican Prayer Book service in outlying areas is an indication of the initial friendly relations between Methodist preachers and the clergy of the Church of England.

The schoolteacher Thomas Bowden held a class meeting in Sydney on 6 March 1812. Bowden had been a class leader in England, and had served as Master of the Great Queen Street Charity School in London. After arriving in NSW with his wife and family aboard the *Graham* in January 1812, he was given charge of the Male Orphan Institute. Bowden encouraged John Hosking, another Methodist schoolteacher, to join him in establishing Methodism in the Antipodes.²

¹ Some of the material in this chapter relating to Samuel Leigh appeared previously in G. O'Brien, 'Not Radically a Dissenter: Samuel Leigh in the Colony of New South Wales', *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 4 (2012): 51–69.

² Early correspondence with the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) in London, Minutes and Leigh's journal are available on microfilm, Methodist Missionary Society Archives, London (IDC Microform Publishers, 1991), H-2720–H-2721 and at the

It would certainly be appropriate to see in the work of the earlier lay preachers and class leaders, in establishing the distinguishing features of the movement, the beginnings of Methodism in NSW. 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.'³ On 3 April 1812, the two class meetings 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. The Rev. Samuel Leigh arrived on 10 August 1815 ready to begin what would turn out to be a gruelling ministry with little earthly reward.

The Arrival of Samuel Leigh

One would not want to diminish the importance of this early lay ministry. However, the arrival of Samuel Leigh may also be legitimately perceived as a starting point, and he was usually seen as the pioneer in commemorative events organised by the clergy-centred Wesleyanism of a later period. More recent studies have helped restore the vital place of lay preachers as the authentic pioneers of Australian Methodism in every area to which it spread.⁴ Notwithstanding this important emphasis, nineteenth-century Wesleyan Methodism was a movement dominated by clerical authority, so Leigh's arrival may at least be seen as the beginnings of NSW Methodism as formally approved by the British Conference.

Leigh's work was in many respects a failure, 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 March 1816, Leigh had established Sunday Schools and the first Benevolent Society in NSW. Along with Hosking and Bowden he was involved in establishing branches of the Bible Society (1817) and the Australian Religious Tract Society. Leigh met John Lees, a farmer and former soldier, at Castlereagh on the Hawkesbury River where the first Methodist church was built, opening on 7 October 1817. Leigh's ministry as a circuit rider would take him on a regular 240 km (150 mile) circuit covering Parramatta, Liverpool, Windsor, Richmond, Castlereagh

Camden Theological Library in North Parramatta. Much valuable early correspondence is also available on microfilm in the Missionary Papers of the Bonwick Transcripts in the Mitchell Reading Room at the State Library of NSW, though these should be approached with some degree of caution as the original correspondence has been corrupted.

³ D. Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 30. See also D.I. Wright and E.G. Clancy, *The Methodists: A History of Methodism in New South Wales* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993), p. 4.

⁴ A good recent study of the Victorian situation is B.T. Brown, *William Witton (1811–1886): 'Almost Perpetual Curate'* (Melbourne: Barry T. Brown 2011).

and the Hawkesbury River district. Spending 10 days in Sydney, frequenting the convict enclave known as 'the Rocks', with its evident human need, then 10 or 11 days travelling his circuit, Leigh sought to establish a cause in the tried and true Methodist pattern, considering it his business to be constantly on the move rather than to loiter in one location. This good start augured well but the momentum was not sustained and Methodist membership in NSW would not climb beyond 400 until 1836, after Leigh had left the colony.

On the day after his arrival, Leigh was accompanied by Edward Eagar to a meeting with Governor Lachlan Macquarie. The Governor reportedly informed Leigh, 'I regret you have come here as a missionary, and feel sorry, and cannot give you any encouragement in that capacity.'⁵ The Governor informed Leigh that he had 'missed his way' by not presenting proper letters of introduction from British government officials. Furthermore, '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.'⁶ Leigh assured Macquarie of his own desire to remain closely attached to the Church of England. The offer of a position in the government, through which Leigh was assured he would grow much more rich and comfortable than by going about preaching, was turned down, Leigh insisting that he had come to the colony as a Wesleyan missionary and could act in no other capacity while he remained there.⁷ Macquarie seemed eventually to have warmed to the Methodists. In March 1816 he was happy to patronise Leigh's Benevolent Society and in January 1819 the foundation stone of a Wesleyan chapel was laid in Macquarie Street, Sydney, on land donated by the Governor and by the Crown Solicitor Thomas Wylde. A plot of land was also 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'.⁸

Methodist Consolidation

After Macquarie's years as Governor (1810–21), colonial Methodists enjoyed favourable relations with Governor Thomas Brisbane (1821–25) who considered them a valuable body of people who did much good. Brisbane drew from both the public's purse and his own to contribute to a Wesleyan chapel in

⁵ A. Strachan, *Remarkable Incidents in the Life of the Rev. Samuel Leigh*, 2nd edn (London: James Nichols, 1855), p. 35.

⁶ S. Leigh to WMMS, 6 March 1816. Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary Papers, 2, pp. 213–14, Box 50.

⁷ Strachan, *Remarkable Incidents*, p. 35.

⁸ S. Leigh to WMMS, 24 Feb. 1819. Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary Papers, 2, pp. 412–13, Box 50.

Pennant Hills in 1825.⁹ In 1836 Governor Richard Bourke proposed the so-called Irish system, which put a secular system of education in place for children of all denominations with allowance for separate religious instruction. This was howled down by Protestants, led by Anglican Bishop William Broughton. The suggestion of providing equal levels of funding for both Protestant and Catholic schools was argued against, and the end result was that all church schools were set adrift to fend for themselves.¹⁰ Wesleyans objected to the Act because it did not give them denominational recognition, protested that the census forms did not reveal their true strength and claimed the financial support of the state for their ministers and schools. We see here the beginnings of the more confident and aggressive style that would typify later nineteenth-century Methodism. Eventually colonial Methodism would take its place alongside the Church of England, the Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church as one of the four major denominations in colonial Australia. By 1839 each of the handful of Methodist ministers in the colony was eligible to receive a government salary of £150–£200 per annum.¹¹ English Wesleyans suffered some disadvantage in their Dissenting status, but in the religious free market economy of the Australian colonies Methodists suffered no such restrictions, which contributed to their becoming a nineteenth-century religious success story.

Disputes over Relations with the Church of England

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.¹² 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. Leigh turned out to be just the man they wanted. He quickly established good relations with the Anglican clergy and made it his business to ensure that Methodist activity would in no way interfere with the routines of Anglicanism. Leigh

⁹ B. Carvosso to WMMS, April 1825. Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary Papers, 5, p. 1480, Box 53.

¹⁰ The details of this tumultuous period may be traced in J. Barrett, *That Better Country: The Religious Aspect of Life in Eastern Australia, 1835–1850* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1966), pp. 87–163.

¹¹ A District Meeting held in Sydney in September 1839 was attended by only seven ministers. J. Colwell, *The Illustrated History of Methodism. Australia: 1812 to 1855. New South Wales and Polynesia: 1856 to 1902* (Sydney: W. Brooks, 1904), p. 301.

¹² T. Bowden to WMMS, 20 July 1812; Bowden and Hosking to WWMS, n.d. in Colwell, *Illustrated History of Methodism*, pp. 36–9.

wrote home to the Wesleyan Missionary Society on 2 March 1816, assuring its members that the Anglican clergy were entirely friendly towards him.¹³ These friendly relations were aided by the fact that the early colonial clergy shared a similar evangelical piety and set of doctrinal emphases with the Methodists.

Leigh may have seen the Methodist mission as ancillary to the Church of England, but his colleagues in the Methodist ministry did not seem to share that opinion. In reality Methodists functioned more often as an alternative to Anglican worship than as a supplement to it. Disputes among Wesleyans over their relationship to the Church of England would contribute to the earlier close relations between Wesleyans and the Church of England being disrupted so that after the 1820s the two churches had little to do with one another and when they did, they were not always friendly encounters.

It soon became apparent that there was more work in the colony of NSW than a single Methodist preacher could handle. In 1817 Leigh began to request the Missionary Committee to forward a co-worker and Walter Lawry was appointed. Born on 3 August 1793, the Cornishman Lawry had been accepted as a candidate for the Wesleyan ministry in 1817. He arrived on the convict ship *Lady Castlereagh*, on which he had served as chaplain, on 1 May 1818. Lawry soon saw the need for even more helpers for the work, writing to his ministerial colleague the Rev. Joseph Sutcliffe in September that 'to ride 24 miles on a hot day and preach three times is no joke'.¹⁴

Initial relations between the two preachers were amicable but stresses in their relationship soon became apparent. Leigh had a serious, almost morose character, whereas Lawry had a warm personality, enjoyed company and was somewhat less driven than Leigh in his work ethic. 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ In the estimate of the preachers who would join them in the field in 1821, the two men were 'naturally unfitted for agreement in all the affairs of life'.¹⁷ Leigh had been 29 or 30 years old, Lawry 23, upon arriving in NSW. Most

¹³ S. Leigh to WWMS, 2 March 1816, cited in Wright and Clancy, *The Methodists*, p. 4. The same sentiment is expressed again in Leigh to Adam Clarke, 14 Oct. 1817, Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary Papers, 2, p. 202, Box 50.

¹⁴ J.D. Bollen, 'A Time of Small Things: The Methodist Mission in New South Wales, 1815–1836', *Journal of Religious History* 7, no. 3 (June 1973): 225–47, at p. 231.

¹⁵ Wright and Clancy, *The Methodists*, p. 6.

¹⁶ M. Reeson, *Currency Lass* (Sunderland, NSW: Albatross Books, 1985).

¹⁷ B. Carvosso, R. Mansfield and W. Walker, letter to WMMS, cited in G.S. Udy, *Spark of Grace: The Story of the Methodist Church in Parramatta and the Surrounding Region* (Parramatta: Epworth Press, 1977), pp. 58–9.

of the 25 ministers who followed them up to 1840 were under 30, reflecting the youthfulness of Methodist missionary work. Young and 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 spite of these personal difficulties, the Methodist cause showed some signs of going ahead. On 17 March 1819 the second chapel in NSW was opened on Prince's Street, due to the efforts of the layman John Scott. The third was opened at Windsor around the same time on the land that had been donated by Samuel Marsden in 1818. In mid-1821 the Macquarie Street chapel was officially opened. The mission borrowed £2,000 to complete this project, half from the government and half from Edward Eagar, who expected the Missionary Committee in London to repay his investment, which they did but only under sufferance and with considerable delay. The government loan would not be repaid until the 1830s. The method of fund-raising in this early period was unusual. Missionaries were sent goods which they were expected to sell at a profit to support their work. Book-keeping was inaccurate and by March 1819 the mission was £150 in debt.

Leigh sailed for England on 24 February 1820 where he would travel around 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.¹⁸ He seems to have exaggerated the strength of the work in the colony and this concerned his colleagues whose own estimates of gains were considerably more modest.¹⁹ By this time the Committee had already sent missionary reinforcements, including Benjamin Carvosso, Ralph Mansfield and George Erskine. These men did not share Leigh's outlook towards the Church of England, and thus the nature of colonial Methodism's connection to Anglicanism was destined to be at the centre of disputes between Leigh, his fellow missionaries and the Methodist leadership back in England. There were many accusations flung in both directions and much plotting and scheming. A situation soon developed in which Leigh, the colonial Anglican chaplains and the Missionary Committee in London on the one side were arrayed against every Methodist preacher in NSW on the other. The Missionary Committee sided with Leigh and the Anglican clergy on all the matters that came before them, writing to the colonial chaplains supporting them over against their fellow Methodists. They issued rebukes and warnings to each of the missionaries, threatening to withdraw them from the field if they persisted in

¹⁸ S. Leigh to WMMS, 22 June 1820. Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary Papers, 3, p. 676, Box 51.

¹⁹ W. Lawry to Missionary Committee, 9 February 1821, cited in Udy, *Spark of Grace*, p. 51.

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.²⁰ Any refusal to obey this directive would be considered a dereliction of duty.²¹

The arrival of the Rev. 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'.²² For Erskine, the Wesleyan Methodist Church needed to show little deference to Anglicanism. 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'.²³ In this missionary pragmatism he was at one with the other preachers, pointing towards the self-sustaining and independent future of nineteenth-century Wesleyan Methodism, leaving Leigh looking backwards to the previous century. 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 on the progressive views of the more recently arrived missionaries.

Expansion under Joseph Orton

Erskine was physically unwell and until 1831, with the arrival of his replacement, the Rev. Joseph Orton, little further progress was made. 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'.²⁴ According to Orton, Richard Watson, Secretary of the WMMS,

²⁰ Committee Minute Book, 3 July 1822, cited in Wright and Clancy, *The Methodists*, pp. 10–11.

²¹ Udy, *Spark of Grace*, pp. 52–3.

²² G. Erskine to R. Watson, 19 Nov. 1822. Bonwick Transcripts, Missionary Papers, 4, p. 1,200, Box 52.

²³ G. Erskine to R. Watson, 19 Nov. 1822, p. 1,200, Box 52.

²⁴ Missionary Committee to Chairman of NSW District, 15 September 1832. Letter Book, pp. 352–5, cited in R.B. Walker, 'The Growth and Typology of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in New South Wales, 1812–1901', *Journal of Religious History* 6, no. 4 (1971): 331–47, at p. 331.

saw it as 'the only one of our Missions that had been a disgrace to us'.²⁵ Erskine, Carvosso, Lawry, Mansfield and Walker had by that time all withdrawn from their work in the colony. After more than 15 years Methodism could report only 112 members of the Society, 20 Sunday School teachers and 137 Sunday School students. Orton would trim these figures down even further to a more realistic 67 members and 12 Sunday School teachers.²⁶

After a brief stopover in Hobart Town, Joseph Orton, a veteran of the Jamaican mission field, arrived in Sydney on 11 January 1832, where for the next several years he would experience many 'trials' and 'racking anxieties' struggling to 'restore the fortunes of Wesleyanism', and not without success for within his first two years membership in Sydney had doubled.²⁷ While the turnaround in Methodist fortunes in the 1830s can partly be attributed to the superior leadership of Orton, migration was also a significant factor, as was recruitment 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, seemed eminently suited to the youthful exuberance of a growing colony.

Orton was interested in reaching settlers west of the Blue Mountains, as well as reaching the Indigenous population away from the more settled areas, and began by consolidating Methodism in Bathurst, undertaking three journeys there between 1832 and 1834. His experience follows the usual pattern of a minister receiving a request for assistance from a devout Methodist laity already hard at work. Bathurst at this time was a small village, including a few government buildings, a hospital and a convict settlement, though Orton travelled also to the scattered populations in the surrounding region, as well as preaching to the convict gangs assigned to road construction. The Rev. Frederick Lewis arrived in Bathurst on 21 May 1836, and on 8 July the first Quarterly Meeting was held at Orton Park, the homestead named by William Lane in honour of Joseph Orton. The first chapel was opened on 10 October 1837, and by 1850 the Bathurst Circuit had 18 preaching places. The discovery of gold in 1851 saw a large influx of people, many of whom became Methodist converts. The Rev. John McKenny worked to gain legal status for Methodists and their rites of marriage, as well as obtaining government financial support for Wesleyan day schools.

Everywhere chapels were built on land generously donated by Methodist lay people often originating in Sussex, Kent and Cornwall, who made important

²⁵ J. Orton, *Journal* (1832–39), 12 February 1839, cited in A. Tyrrell, *A Sphere of Benevolence: The Life of Joseph Orton, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary (1795–1842)* (Melbourne: State Library of Victoria, 1993), p. 88.

²⁶ Wesleyan District Minutes 22 March 1831, 10 January 1832, Minute Book of NSW District, vol. 3 Dixon Library, ms Q4, cited in Wright and Clancy, *The Methodists*, p. 16.

²⁷ Orton, *Journal* (1832–39), 1 Feb. 1836, cited in Tyrrell, *A Sphere of Benevolence*, pp. 83, 95.

contributions. The Rev. W. Schofield visited Wollongong in 1839 and found a society already operating with 18 members at Dapto. A chapel with seating for 200 was built in 1842. Methodism also grew steadily in Goulburn from 1842 until the Rev. Daniel Draper visited and selected the Goldsmith Street site in 1846. The first ministerial appointment was the Rev. William Lightbody in 1847, and a chapel built on land donated by the government was opened on 23 April 1848. An important milestone was reached in 1839 when James Watsford of Parramatta was accepted as the first Australian-born candidate for the ministry. Centenary Chapel in York Street, Sydney, was opened in 1844. By that time there were 10 chapels in Sydney. Daniel Draper opened the first Methodist Church in Newcastle on 29 June 1845 and visited Port Macquarie in 1846. Membership in NSW increased from 121 in 1834 to 707 in 1841, and then to 2,209 in the 10 years between 1841 and 1851.²⁸

Spreading to Other Colonies

A District that encapsulated places as far apart as Parramatta, Melbourne, Adelaide and the Swan River Colony in Western Australia must have constituted some kind of record in geographical size. The Rev. William Binnington Boyce arrived in Sydney as General Superintendent in 1846 and presided over the annual meeting of the Australia District on 30 July. Boyce acted as a conciliatory voice between the missionaries and the British Conference. As editor and publisher of the weekly *The Gleaner*, he showed theological ability in defending the status of Methodism as a strong and vigorous church in its own right.

Methodist success in NSW was duplicated and in some areas exceeded in the other colonies. The first service in Van Diemen's Land was held by Benjamin Carvosso in 1820, and in 1836 it became a separate District. The first service in Melbourne was held in that same year. Methodist work began in the Swan River Colony, Western Australia, in 1838 and on Kangaroo Island, South Australia, in 1836. Moreton Bay (later Brisbane), Queensland, received its first Methodist preacher in 1847. Queensland was not a separate colony until 1859 and the Methodist circuits there were part of the Sydney District until 1863 when a separate District was established. It would not be until 1891 that the Queensland Conference was constituted.

More colonists attended Wesleyan services in Victoria and South Australia between 1850 and 1860 than attended any other religious body. We will focus here on South Australia where Methodist growth was particularly rapid and

²⁸ Walker, 'Growth and Typology', p. 333.

widespread.²⁹ Two brothers, sons of a former president of the British Wesleyan Conference, were prominent in the early years of the colony: Edward Stephens, first cashier and accountant of the South Australian Company and later manager of the Company's bank, and John Stephens, founder in 1843 of the weekly *Adelaide Observer* and then owner and editor of the *South Australian Register*. The first Methodist service in South Australia was conducted on Kangaroo Island on 13 November 1836 by a Wesleyan layman Samuel East. It was another local preacher, John Charles White, who led the first Methodist worship on the mainland, in Edwards Stephens' tent at Holdfast Bay, on 22 January 1837. The first Society was organised in May that year at Edward Stephens' home in North Terrace, Adelaide. The Society then raised money to build a chapel in Hindley Street, which was opened on 18 March 1838, the first church building in the colony of any denomination. John White preached the first sermon.

All of this was achieved by dedicated laypersons before the congregation received its first minister, William Longbottom, in August 1838. He had been shipwrecked in South Australia on his voyage from Van Diemen's Land to the Swan River Colony in Western Australia, and the Adelaide congregation grabbed the opportunity to have its own minister; in October its leaders requested the Wesleyan Missionary Committee in London to allow him to stay.

Under Longbottom's successor John Eggleston, a fiery advocate of Christian assurance and the experience of perfect love, Wesleyanism grew to four churches and 277 members by 1841. John Weatherstone's staunch application of Wesleyan polity upset some members and led ultimately to his being recalled from the field, though not dismissed from the ministry as the complainants had hoped.³⁰

Between 1846 and 1855 the Rev. Daniel Draper's influence among South Australian Wesleyans was significant for he provided the kind of stable leadership that Joseph Orton had provided in NSW in the 1830s. The Pirie Street Wesleyan Church, built under Draper's leadership, rose up as a monument to the strength and influence of Wesleyan Methodism in the 1850s. It was regarded, along with Kent Town Church, as a 'cathedral' of South Australian Wesleyanism – a reputation that survived until the 1970s. Governor Robe's offer of state aid to churches in 1846 was supported by Draper who was glad to receive such funds in order to further Wesleyan work. Since this was a legal provision and Wesleyans, by policy, were not to enter into political debates, there was no reason in his view why such monies should not be received without dispute. However, there were some among the Wesleyan flock who took the stronger anti-state-aid position of the Dissenting tradition. Some such as Edward Stephens, Thomas Reynolds and

²⁹ A.D. Hunt, *This Side of Heaven: A History of Methodism in South Australia* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1985); R.B. Walker, 'Methodism in the Paradise of Dissent, 1837–1900', *Journal of Religious History* 5, no. 4 (1969): 331–47.

³⁰ Tyrrell, *A Sphere of Benevolence*, pp. 35–8.

George Marsden Waterhouse (later Premier of the colony) rejected government money as though a gospel principle were at stake, thus bringing them into open conflict with Draper.

The fact that the anti-state-aid agitator George William Cole was a Bible Christian before joining the Wesleyans is indicative of the political difference between the Wesleyans and the minor Methodists. The mother church was much more apolitical, respectful of existing structures of authority, and allied more closely with Anglicanism. The minor Methodists on the other hand were more often involved in political agitations and better represented in the newer, more politically radical, labour movements. To say, as did Cole and others, that Draper was acting as an autocratic 'pope' with dictatorial powers was only to say that he was acting in a typically Wesleyan way, more concerned for the maintenance of the tried-and-true Methodist polity than about any kind of broader political agitation. The funds received from state aid were relatively small amounts, and ended in 1851, but they contributed to the building of churches in new areas, subsidised minister's salaries and did not lead to any lessening of giving by the Methodist constituency itself. Not even the discovery of gold in Victoria and a consequent, though temporary, loss of members to that colony could put the brakes on Methodist growth in South Australia throughout the 1850s.

Methodism was often the only denomination in South Australia successfully to establish causes in outlying areas. As early as 1843 there were Sunday services and class meetings in at least 16 frontier homesteads and more than 30 preaching places received the regular ministrations of a Methodist preacher.³¹ In 1858 the various Methodist denominations in that colony provided seats for 11,000 people and Wesleyan Methodists alone made up 13 per cent of the population.³² Growth continued into the 1870s as the Wesleyan Home Mission and Contingent Fund enabled the settled areas in the southern part of the state to subsidise the establishment of new churches in the northern agricultural districts.

Growth was aided by immigration, as up until 1840 immigrants to South Australia were drawn mostly from the south of England, 15 per cent from Cornwall, Devon and Somerset where Methodism was strong.³³ Of the smaller Methodist bodies, the Bible Christians, who commenced work in 1849, were the most successful. New Connexion Methodists began work in 1840 but could not sustain a cause for very long, eventually merging with the Bible Christians in 1888. Primitive Methodism was also established in 1840 and saw only slight progress in its first decade, reaching only a tenth of Wesleyan membership, though much greater success was experienced in the 1860s under the leadership

³¹ Douglas Pike, *Paradise of Dissent: South Australia 1829–1857* (London: Longmans, Green, 1957), pp. 249–50.

³² Walker, 'Methodism in the Paradise of Dissent', pp. 333–4.

³³ Walker, 'Methodism in the Paradise of Dissent', pp. 331–2.

of Henry Cole, John Gibbon Wright and others. The Bible Christian Church was strengthened by Cornish copper miners (as well as farmers) of devout faith and seemingly boundless energy, in places like Burra and Kapunda. The local preacher James Blatchford established a Bible Christian congregation in Burra in 1849, building a chapel in Paxton Square and filling it with 50 people at the opening service. Back in Shebbear in north Devon, the founding place of the Bible Christians, the Conference of 1850, responding to an appeal from the 'saints' at Burra, established a South Australian Mission, appointing James Way as Superintendent, to be accompanied by James Rowe. South Australia seems to have had strong pulling-power for Bible Christians, with 14 missionary families arriving by 1856. Samuel Keen, arriving in 1853, further extended Bible Christian witness into the Gawler Plains. Methodism flourished in working-class areas such as Port Adelaide and Moonta.

Arnold Hunt traced a pattern in South Australian Methodism which saw migrants from the minor Methodist bodies worshipping at first with Wesleyans, in the absence of churches of their own. With a population of 63,000 in 1851, the colony was small enough that a single Wesleyan Methodism might have been sufficient to meet the needs. However, the bitter disputes among the competing Methodist bodies in Britain ensured that the minor Methodist leaders were not willing to entrust their migrating flocks to the Wesleyans, and so ensured that they replicated themselves in the Antipodes. Furthermore, the state aid question saw the Wesleyans and the minor Methodists on opposite sides of the debate, the former seeing no problem with accepting government money for the Lord's work, the latter steadfastly refusing such funds. This competition led to a rather wasteful use of resources and the unfortunate situation of the smaller Methodist bodies often struggling to keep their causes operating in near proximity to one another. The level of duplication is graphically illustrated in a photograph from 1870 of Franklin Street, Adelaide, reproduced in *This Side of Heaven*, which shows the Wesleyan, Primitive, New Connexion and Bible Christian churches all close enough together to be captured by the same camera lens.³⁴

The Official Formation of an Australasian Connexion

To return finally to NSW and the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion where, in 1853, the Rev. Robert Young arrived in Sydney via Albany (Western Australia), Adelaide and Melbourne. Young had been sent by the British Conference on a deputation to present proposals for establishing the mission as a self-governing connexion. At an evening tea meeting on Friday 24 June 1853, with about 500 people present, William Boyce assured Young and the assembled crowd that the

³⁴ Hunt, *This Side of Heaven*, p. 89.

proposed Australasian Connexion, 'while enjoying greater freedom of action', would remain united in doctrine and discipline with the British Connexion. Young was glad to hear that 'they did not desire any mutilated or new form of Methodism among them' but that 'provision would be made for the continued maintenance of Methodism in all its essential, doctrinal and disciplinary principles'.³⁵

The Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Connexion (or Church) was officially convened in the York Street Chapel in Sydney on 18 January 1855. The fact that there was hesitation at this early stage over whether to be officially known as a 'Church' or a 'Connexion' perhaps reflects the ambiguity Methodists felt about their relationship to 'the Church'. Were they to consider themselves a Society designed to renew the Church of England or were they a Church in their own right? The latter view would win out in the nineteenth century.³⁶ Forty ministers attended and William Boyce was appointed President by the British Conference. By this stage, Methodism in NSW alone could boast a constituency of more than 15,000 worshippers.³⁷ Young was told during his reception in Melbourne that the infant Methodist Church had been built on a foundation which, it was hoped, would be 'the means of the conversion of multitudes'.³⁸ This hope would be partially fulfilled in the following half century, when Methodism in all the Australian colonies would grow from 5 per cent to 11 per cent of the population. Its glory days would be seen in the period immediately following its obtaining independence from the British Conference. During these middle decades of the nineteenth century, Methodist strength and influence in the dominions grew rapidly, far exceeding that of its mother church in Britain.

³⁵ R. Young, *The Southern World: Journal of a Deputation from the Wesleyan Conferences to Australia and Polynesia: Including Notices of a Visit to the Gold Fields* (London: Hamilton, Adams, 1854), pp. 96–8.

³⁶ A similar hesitancy was expressed by the abolitionists Orange Scott and Luther Lee when in 1843 they formed 'The Wesleyan Methodist Connexion (or Church) of America' in Utica, New York. Not until 1947 was the word 'Connexion' dropped. I.F. McLeister, *History of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of America* (Syracuse, NY: Wesleyan Methodist Publishing Association, 1934).

³⁷ The General Returns of November 1854 listed 76 chapels, 109 preaching places, 31 ministers, 18 day school teachers, two catechists, 523 Sunday School teachers, 113 local preachers, 170 class leaders, 2,456 church members, 237 on trial, 66 Sunday Schools, 4,929 scholars, 12 day schools, 1,295 day scholars and 15,650 at worship. K. Whitby and E.G. Clancy, *Great the Heritage: The Story of Methodism in N.S.W. 1812–1975* (Sydney: The Division of Interpretation and Communication of the N.S.W. Methodist Conference, 1975), p. 11. The 1851 census of NSW showed 10,008 identifying as 'Wesleyan Methodist'. Young, *Southern World*, p. 116.

³⁸ Young, *Southern World*, p. 73.