

THRELKELD, LANCELOT EDWARD (1788-1859), missionary and Congregational minister, was born on 20 October 1788 in Southwark, London, the son of Samuel Joseph Threlkeld, a brushmaker, and his wife Mary. After serving a trade apprenticeship Threlkeld became an actor with the Royal Circus and later with the Royalty Theatre. He then engaged in business, and in 1808 at St George's Church, Southwark, he married Martha, née Goss, who bore him five children. Threlkeld moved to Hatherleigh, Devonshire, where he was influenced by the vicar, Cradock Glascott, and became one of his itinerant field preachers, assisting Rev. G. Moase, a Calvinistic Methodist. In 1814 he was accepted as a candidate by the (London) Missionary Society and received brief courses in theology and elementary medicine in London. On 8 November 1815 he was ordained at Mr Leitchfield's Chapel, Kensington, in company with William Ellis, with whom he left for the South Seas in the *Atlas* in January 1816.

His wife lost their first child and became so ill that Threlkeld was detained for a year at Rio de Janeiro, where he ministered

to the Protestant community. In January 1817 he joined another company of missionaries in the *Harriet* and went to Sydney, whence they sailed to the Society Islands in the *Active*, arriving at Moorea in November 1817. Threlkeld's independence brought him into conflict with the older missionaries, though he worked amicably with John Williams [q.v.] at Raiatea. When his wife died on 7 March 1824, Rev. Daniel Tyerman and a wealthy layman, George Bennet, were visiting the society's mission fields. Threlkeld accompanied them to Australia, intending to return to England. In Sydney the visitors proposed the establishment of a mission to the Aborigines. Governor Brisbane was agreeable; in January 1825 a site was fixed at Reid's Mistake (Belmont) on Lake Macquarie, and Threlkeld was appointed missionary.

On 20 October 1824 Threlkeld had married Sarah, daughter of Dr Thomas Arndell [q.v.] of Cattai Creek near Windsor; they had five children. Ten thousand acres were reserved in trust for the mission. Threlkeld settled at Newcastle in May 1825; in 1826 he moved to his station Bahtabah and began to instruct the Aborigines in simple agriculture. The apparently excessive expenditure at the mission soon brought him into dispute with Rev. S. Marsden [q.v.], the society's agent, and with the directors in London. The breach over financial matters widened, especially as Threlkeld resented the oversight of Marsden. In April 1828 the directors decided to abandon the mission and dismiss Threlkeld, offering to pay his passage to England.

Threlkeld, however, was able to secure a grant of land from Governor Darling in 1829, and in January 1831 the Executive Council confirmed him as missionary, and voted him a salary of £200 to replace the former stipend. Soon afterwards he moved to Ebenezer (Toronto) on the opposite side of the lake. In the next ten years he consolidated his work; with the assistance of the tribal leader, Biraban [q.v.], he mastered the dialect, acted as interpreter for Aborigines on trial in Sydney, and printed regular reports. His published language studies are now regarded as landmarks in Aboriginal studies. The station became a show place and was visited by the United States Exploring Expedition and the Quakers, J. Backhouse and G. W. Walker [qq.v.]. Threlkeld also formed an acquaintance with influential persons interested in Aboriginal welfare and later corresponded with Sir George Grey. Despite the support of such men Threlkeld was savagely criticized. In 1836 J. D. Lang [q.v.], who had cast aspersions

on the mission as early as March 1828, reviewed its history in the *Colonist*, 31 March 1836, to Threlkeld's disadvantage. He brought a libel case against Lang, and secured one farthing damages.

Although the mission had some success, Threlkeld regarded it as a failure because he made no apparent converts. By 1840 he reported that very few Aborigines were left at the station; Governor Gipps terminated government support and refused to sanction his employment at Newcastle. The mission was officially closed on 31 December 1841. Threlkeld continued to sit on committees for the welfare of the Aborigines and to attend the police courts on behalf of Aboriginal defendants.

As the mission had been costly, Threlkeld had to supplement his personal stipend by grazing stock and, in defiance of the monopoly of the Australian Agricultural Co., by developing the coal seams on his property. In 1840 he opened the first mine in the Lake Macquarie district and held it until January 1845.

In 1841 Threlkeld had moved to Sydney, and in 1842 became minister of the South Head Congregational Church which had been gathered by W. P. Crook [q.v.], and also conducted a day school. He relinquished this pastorate in 1845 when he was appointed chaplain of seamen by the Sydney Bethel Union. A substantial Mariners' Church was built chiefly through his exertions, and he regularly preached on shipboard and in hospitals.

In Sydney he was prominent in the public meetings that protested against the French intervention in the Society Islands, and his declaration, in conjunction with Rev. Robert Bourne, to the colonial secretary was used as evidence in securing the independence of the Leeward Islands. In his later years he contributed numerous articles to the religious press. As a champion of Protestantism, much of his writing was polemical and anti-Catholic. In 1851 he was appointed a member of the Ethnological Society, London, for his Aboriginal studies.

Threlkeld died suddenly on 10 October 1859. His wife had predeceased him on 20 December 1853. Threlkeld had tendencies to be theatrical, improvident and self-righteous, yet he was quick to champion the victims of discrimination, whether Dissenters or Aborigines. He was convinced that the intellectual capabilities of the Aborigines were equal to those of Europeans, though his approach to missionary work was coloured by his commitment to the Calvinistic doctrine of natural depravity. Lady Franklin described him in 1839 as a 'dingy elderly plain man'.

## Threlkeld

Though difficult, he was enterprising and energetic.

Threlkeld's principal publication was *An Australian Grammar . . . of the Language, as Spoken by the Aborigines . . . of Hunter's River*, published at Sydney in 1834 by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in conjunction with the colonial government. Besides his printed annual reports (1836-41) and statements, Threlkeld published in Sydney a number of works including *Aboriginal Mission, New South Wales* (1825); *Specimens of a Dialect, of the Aborigines of New South Wales, being the First Attempt to Form their Speech into a Written Language* (1827); *A Statement chiefly relating to The Formation and Abandonment of a Mission to the Aborigines* (1828); *An Australian Spelling Book, in the Language as Spoken by the Aborigines, in the vicinity of Hunter's River* (1836); and *A Key to the Structure of the Aboriginal Language* (1850). Threlkeld's main linguistic writings were rearranged and edited by Dr John Fraser in 1892. One at least of his polemical works was published in London: *An Appeal to common sense: being a comparison of Mohammed and the Pope with the Messiah: addressed to Christians* (1841).

J. Montgomery (ed), *Journal of voyages and travels by the Rev Daniel Tyerman and George Bennet*, 1-2 (Lond, 1831); S. Humphreys, *The faithful servant, and his reward. A funeral discourse* (Syd, 1859); J. Sibree (ed), *A register of missionaries, deputations . . . from 1796 to 1923*, London Missionary Society (Lond, 1923); L. E. Threlkeld, 'Reminiscences', *Christian Herald* (Syd, 1853-55); B. W. Champion, 'L. E. Threlkeld', *JRAHS*, 25 (1935); *Aust Home Companion and Band of Hope J* (Syd), 4 (1859); LMS archives (Westminster); Threlkeld papers (Camden College, Syd); MS cat under Threlkeld (ML).

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