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'language to save the innocent': Reverend L. Threlkeld's linguistic mission

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The European colonisation of New South Wales resulted in the destruction of many Aboriginal languages. Of these, the so-called Awabakal language – spoken by Aboriginal people who lived around the Lake Macquarie area, south of Newcastle – is singular in the degree to which it was studied and documented by Europeans. For this we are famously indebted to the Congregationalist missionary, Reverend Lancelot Edward Threlkeld (1788-1859) and his Aboriginal instructors, particularly his mentor and friend, Birabahn, or 'Johnny Magill'. Together they bequeathed an outstanding record of an ancient Australian language in the form of landmark publications, printed materials and bundles of unpublished manuscripts.

Translations of scripture, and the accumulation of word lists and grammars, were made by other Australian missionaries in the colonial period, including those active at the Church Missionary Society mission to the Wiradjuri people in Wellington Valley, and later William Ridley among the Kamilaroi, but these were, for the most part, unpublished and rudimentary. Among those who undertook the spiritual and scientific work of linguistic study in colonial New South Wales, Lancelot Threlkeld was both the earliest and one of the most accomplished. While the appeal and use of this work was limited at the time, it is recognised today as having been 'well in advance of much later work in Anstralia',² and its value now is inestimable.

The records of Threlkeld's career – which include a colossal body of private and public literature, detailing observations of Aboriginal culture and the nature of contact between whites and blacks during this period – have long been valued as a priceless mine of ethnographic, linguistic and historical information. His linguistic work was rescued from obscurity in 1892 when some of his key materials were drawn together, rearranged and re-edited by the Scottish-born ethnologist and linguist, Dr John Fraser, in his *An Australian Language as Spoken by the Awabakal, the People of Awaba or Lake Macquarie*.³ The use of Threlkeld's material by linguists has been extensive, but largely based on Fraser's substantially modified

republication of the original texts.⁴ There are, however, a number of manuscripts which were overlooked by Fraser, and by subsequent researchers, including a manuscript (c.1838) of a partial translation of the Gospel of St Mark.⁵

Threlkeld's broader documentary legacy has been well known since Neil Gunson's monumental publication, *Australian Reminiscences and Papers of L. E. Threlkeld* (1974) — an authoritative edition of Threlkeld's 'Reminiscences' (serialised in the colonial press during the early 1850s), his previously unpublished 'Memoranda Selected from Twenty Four Years of Missionary Engagements in the South Seas and Australia' (1838), and an almost exhaustive plethora of reports and correspondence relating to Threlkeld's career in New South Wales.⁶ Historians have made extensive use of the larger body of this material, but have tended to gloss over his linguistic works. They are seen obviously as highly unique and innovative, testimony to his extraordinary intelligence, perseverance, and determination to accomplish something that no other European achieved in early Australia. But their significance and their relevance have not been well understood by historians.

This article aims to redress that omission by examining the *history* of Threlkeld's linguistic work, exploring the climate in which this remarkable work was undertaken and placing it within the context of his career as a missionary and an advocate of the Aboriginal cause. In particular, it expands on the work of Anna Johnston who has written more broadly about the documents and texts produced by missionaries in Australia and the South Pacific during the nineteenth century. Her exploration of missionary texts considers the 'inherently political' aspect of missionary writing, or the ways in which missionaries strategically manipulated their writing to win public support and vindication for their own peculiar aims and actions. Threlkeld forms an important subject in her work, for he is an obvious and excellent example of the politicised missionary — outspoken and persistent in his advocacy on behalf of Aborigines, a serial controversialist and an implacable nuisance to the pastoralists of New South Wales. Johnston develops her discussion of Threlkeld's political agenda through consideration of his diaries, letters, and his advocacy as an interpreter for Aboriginal defendants in the New South Wales Supreme Court, but she sees his linguistic project as the 'least political part of his work', except as far as it was applied to his work in the courts, it being rather 'a kind of scholarly good-will'.⁷

I suggest that Threlkeld's work was also inherently political — that it was, in fact, a primary means through which he cultivated his own personal and political agendas. Threlkeld's linguistic works were construed and pursued as a means of establishing the intrinsic integrity and intelligence of Aboriginal society, his ultimate aim being to demonstrate their capacity for improvement and their worthiness for salvation. In a colony, and at a time, when missionary endeavours were regarded suspiciously and fared badly, the necessity and use of such a political stance was heightened.

* * *

Threlkeld's Lake Macquarie mission commenced in 1825 under the auspices of the interdenominational London Missionary Society (LMS), the most energetic and celebrated of the British missionary societies of the period. It was, however, the Society's only initiative in New South Wales during the early colonial period, and it was brief and embarrassing, unravelling amid acrimonious and damaging circumstances after only five years. Threlkeld worked for a further decade as an independent, drawing income from his own minor interests and coal-mining, and with some financial and in-kind support from the colonial government, as well as private donations.

Threlkeld's mission was one of a number of government backed civilising projects instigated in New South Wales during the 1820s. But it was singular (at that stage) in the degree to which it would rely on the missionary becoming fluent in the local language, with a specific view to reducing and converting that into written form so as to translate scriptures. Bible translation as an instrument of missionising had a long history,⁸ a world-wide project to which the LMS (from 1795) contributed significantly in the early nineteenth century (the models of Threlkeld's generation included Robert Morrison in China, William Carey in Serampore, India, and Robert Moffat in southern Africa). Having received valuable training in English grammar before leaving London, Threlkeld acquired serviceable experience as a linguist during six years in the LMS's oldest and most prestigious missionary field, Polynesia, where language acquisition and translation had been carried out for over twenty years, testing the talents of lowly educated men and provoking subtle fissures and insecurities within the missionary enterprise.⁹ But in Threlkeld's time, the linguistic endeavour was appearing outwardly successful, with notable work undertaken by John Davies, John M. Orsmond (1788-1856), and Henry Nott, whose *Te Evanelia na Luka* (the Gospel of Luke) was printed in 1818. The value of instructing primitive societies through the medium of their own language was certainly impressed on the delegation of two LMS emissaries, Daniel Tyerman and George Bennet, sent around the globe to investigate LMS enterprises between 1821-1829, who spent four years in Polynesia marvelling at the facility their missionaries had acquired in island languages and its apparent success in generating mass conversions.¹⁰ After the death of his wife in 1824, Threlkeld departed Polynesia with the LMS delegates, and sailed with them to New South Wales. Thus Threlkeld came to the least glamorous and most lethargic field of missionary endeavour, where the study and use of local languages lagged well behind the progress made in other corners of the globe.

In Anstralia, British colonists showed remarkably little interest in Indigenous languages. There had been a brief 'golden age' around 1790, when early

administrators and Royal Marines of the First Fleet had expended great effort in capturing the 'expressive and sonorous' Sydney language.¹¹ Yet imperial orders regarding Aborigines were subsidiary and vague, demanding 'amity and kindness' and the extension of the principles of British justice, but not encouraging that 'intercourse' be furthered by language acquisition. It quickly transpired that Aborigines were more likely to learn English, and that the cultures would communicate through an emerging *lingua franca* – 'a mutilated and incorrect language, formed entirely on the imperfect knowledge and improper application ... of the native's words'. This in fact allowed Aborigines something of an 'advantage' over the newcomers, their aptitude and comprehension of English being clearly greater than the colonists' understanding of Aboriginal.¹²

While Europeans generally found Aboriginal languages too difficult, and easy to neglect, a facility in English became a means for Aboriginal people to explore, rationalise and adapt to a new social milieu.¹³ So the study of Aboriginal languages quickly waned, aside from the obligatory but desultory wordlists collected by colonial explorers and some public administrators on the remote settlements.¹⁴ Those most likely to acquaint themselves with Aboriginal languages did so for reasons that were pragmatic, rather than intellectual or spiritual, being for the most part convicts and other workers, or sometimes their employers, who might have acquired a limited facility from their close contact with Aborigines on the margins of colonial society. In Australia, as elsewhere, it was the missionaries who were most inclined to develop a disciplined interest in Aboriginal languages. The stunted history of Indigenous language acquisition in early Australia is owed, pre-eminently, to the absence and ambivalence of missionaries during the colony's first thirty years.

The LMS delegation which arrived in New South Wales in 1824, with Threlkeld in tow, found a society stirring with evangelical clergymen and sympathetic citizens, yet one virtually devoid of any meaningful, proactive missionary field work. Though the colony's Aboriginal populations seemed in desperate and urgent need of ministration, most local clergymen and administrators were extremely ambivalent and pessimistic about the prospect of civilising the Indigenes, while broader colonial opinion was openly hostile to it. Although the British occupation of Australia coincided with the ascendancy of evangelical humanitarianism, the Australian colonies were a conspicuously lesser field of missionary interest, and the contribution of evangelicals to the wider stratagems and struggles of colonial New South Wales, while considerable, was markedly weak in comparison to other spheres of Empire. Missionary projects in New South Wales were late, limited and easily retracted amid financial pressures and rapidly eroding prospects. They were underlined, and undone, by a tendency to imagine that Aborigines occupied the lower rungs of the world's racial hierarchy, and that they were, despite all good intentions and Biblical injunctions, something of a special case, almost incapable of

salvation.¹⁵ The prevailing view was notoriously epitomised, and enforced, by the colony's senior chaplain, Samuel Marsden, also the local agent for the LMS, who had, after an unsurpassable thirty years local experience, become fervently dismissive of the chances of improving Aborigines, to the point of effectively obstructing any meaningful extension of missionary resources to New South Wales Aborigines.¹⁶

Concomitantly, local opinion in New South Wales seemed opposed to the idea of obtaining local languages for missionary purposes. The prevailing judgment, encountered by the LMS delegation in 1824, was that obtaining local languages was an 'impracticable' method of missionising in New South Wales, presumably because of the extraordinary variety of regional languages and dialects and the alarming rate at which they were expected to disappear. Moreover, it was expected that Aboriginal languages would 'be found too poor to be of any use in the conveying of moral & religious ideas.'¹⁷ The Wesleyan Missionary Society – the only one to have established a local auxiliary by 1824 – *had* made a positive initiative by appointing the first missionary to the Australian Aborigines, Reverend William Walker. Yet Walker quickly came to the view that 'English is the medium ... through which the truths of religion must be conveyed.'¹⁸ The LMS delegates found that he had 'not got a fresh word of their language these two years past'.¹⁹ Instead, Walker sent an assistant, John Harper, to study the Wiradjuri language spoken around the remote convict settlement on the colony's western fringe at Wellington Valley, in what was effectively the first linguistically-orientated missionary project undertaken in New South Wales. After several months in the field, reports in the Sydney press of Harper's progress in mastering the regional language, apparently grossly exaggerated, aroused incredulity and indignation that led ultimately to the project being abandoned. This episode would impress upon Threlkeld the need for a careful and measured scholarship to counter the inherent scepticism of the colonial public. But also, the neglect of Aboriginal languages by missionaries could, in 1824, have been construed as a reason for the failure of previous and current attempts to impart European values. A mastery of an Aboriginal language by a suitably educated and experienced linguist could be instrumental to the task of instructing and enlightening the Aborigines, otherwise missionaries might forever be confined to under-funded and half-hearted experimental projects such as Walker's Native Institution at Black Town.

The circumstances surrounding the establishment of Threlkeld's mission have been adequately described elsewhere.²⁰ In short, the arrival of the LMS delegation in 1824 presented an opportunity for colonial administrators to do something magnanimous, and with relative spontaneity, in a manner that circumvented the entrenched prevarication and hindrance of the colony's evangelicals. A key motivator was the new Attorney-General, Saxe Bannister (1790-1877) who, though

not himself an evangelical, built his reputation and career on a moral and intellectual commitment to the welfare of the indigenous peoples of Empire, being a significant exponent of Britain's civilising mission in the colonies – of its duty to embrace and elevate Aboriginal populations through what Jane Samson has termed 'imperial benevolence' or 'protective supremacy'.²¹ The scheme won the support of the colony's soon to be outgoing Governor, Sir Thomas Brisbane, who pledged his interest probably out of a sense of his own public image, having done little else during his term to vindicate the hopes of colonial evangelicals that his appointment heralded a 'glorious epoch' for Australian missionaries.²²

Importantly, it was a scheme hatched in the context of recent alarming and politically sensitive developments in colonial policy in Australia, Governor Brisbane having, on the advice of the Attorney General, taken the unprecedented and dubious step of placing the colony's western frontier under a state of martial law, legalising the violent suppression of Aboriginal attacks on European property and persons.²³ The episode, which presaged a growing state of conflict on the frontiers of settlement in New South Wales, brought the question of Aboriginal policy to the forefront of administrative and public opinion, generating a lively and divisive public debate over the appropriate measures needed to counteract this increasing dilemma. In this discussion, missionary voices came to the fore, and included the first clear calls for missionaries to employ the linguistic technique.²⁴ These developments, which began to feed into a broader imperial discourse over the treatment and fate of the Empire's Indigenous populations, would see the New South Wales authorities align themselves with evangelicals over the next fifteen years in a series of experimental attempts to counter the type of conflict that characterised pastoral expansion in New South Wales. In Threlkeld's case, it amounted to a reservation of 10,000 acres in trust for the use of the LMS on the coast at Reid's Mistake (now Swansea/Belmont), with a view to this becoming a formal grant, or else forfeited in the event of the project failing.²⁵ Threlkeld's brief was to instruct the Aborigines 'in the arts of reading, writing, &c', in order to communicate 'a knowledge of the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel, and the duties which they owe to the Government of this Country, and mankind in general.'²⁶

Thus, Threlkeld's religious instruction to Aborigines was to be imparted with the dual aim, in his own words, 'of their becoming Christians, and ultimately civilized subjects of the state',²⁷ though he and others were quickly disabused of any hope that either objective might be accomplished in the short term. His attempt to save Aboriginal souls was inextricably linked with the need of the colonial authorities to bring Aboriginal populations within the fold of European culture and authority. In the brief nexus between government and evangelicals during the 1820s and 1830s, the concepts of Christianising and civilising were thus enmeshed,²⁸ though they might be sometimes untangled in debate over the missionary method – whether it

was necessary first for Aborigines to become sedentary, clean and industrious in order to become receptive to Christian values, or if the dissemination of rightful religious principles would logically lead them to become civilised. Those who orchestrated and backed Threlkeld's project may not have fully accepted that Christian values could transcend language and lifestyle, but they were at least of the belief that Aborigines were capable of receiving God's message in their own language. It was after all a power vested in the Galileans to preach in foreign tongues.²⁹

In Australia, the approach could be crudely rationalised as the supposedly quickest option in what were dire and very urgent circumstances, because 'barbarians, of the lowest order of intelligence' could not possibly learn sufficient English to understand the higher concepts and 'hidden mysteries' of Christianity, while the local inter-cultural *lingua franca* was certainly deemed insufficient for the task. In the time it might take for them to develop the capacity to 'hear and receive the words of eternal life in any other audible sound than their own ... *the whole aboriginal stock may be exterminated*'. But there was also a conviction in the broader currency and transmissible nature of Indigenous translations, in that a single missionary, fluent in 'the language of one tribe' could 'preach the simple truths of salvation to hundreds and thousands, with whom he may come into contact, on his journeys of mercy'. This was assumed possible because 'the acquisition of one of the dialects would enable him, or his followers, to master all the rest.'³⁰ If this seemed overly ambitious, then it was heartening to know that Aboriginal peoples communicated new ideas and rituals across broad sweeps of territory, and across linguistic borders.³¹

But by seeking to capture the language in writing, and in instructing Aborigines to become literate, Threlkeld hoped to vest his missionary work with an immortal quality. It was, in his words, the only means by which to 'effectually produce in their minds and manners a *holy reform*, lasting as eternity.'³² His pioneering translations and conversions could be followed by others, as European and Aboriginal Christians cooperated to provide more informed and sophisticated translations to serve the new Christian communities of the future. Here his aims converged with the broader motivations of those who saw the capturing of native language as more than a pathway to religious conversion. For the philosophical but non-evangelical Attorney General, Saxe Bannister, a faith in the method to be pursued by Threlkeld arose from a conviction that education through literacy was the fundament of justice and social improvement – that an ability to read and write could restore the downtrodden. Aboriginal language might be studied and adopted by colonial administrators as a means of understanding, codifying and communicating the rights and customs of Aboriginal society, in order to elevate them into the framework of civilised British law.³³ On various levels, endowing an Aboriginal language with the legitimacy of the written form would confer a timeless tool through which its speakers could learn,

reflect and rationalise, and develop the self-esteem and sense of duty necessary to become wholesome Christians and compliant citizens of the Empire. These, then, were the political and ideological underpinnings of Reverend Threlkeld's linguistic mission.

* * *

From the outset, capturing the language was the principal and most prioritised aspect of Threlkeld's missionary work. From the moment he arrived at Newcastle he sought to get 'amongst the natives as much as possible', following them on their foraging expeditions and social engagements, armed with his pencil and alphabetically-paged notebook.³⁴ To overcome the exertions of itinerating through the bush, he set up a tent (a gift from Chief Justice Francis Forbes) from which he distributed tobacco and rations. The best rewards were gained when he acquired a boat, fishing providing the most agreeable means of making quality time.³⁵

From these earliest experiences, Threlkeld derived a number of pleasing and encouraging lessons. He quickly understood that Aborigines were eager to instruct him, and that they were extremely patient and persevering. They were also very particular about having him understand the correct meanings and pronunciations of phrases, so he was confident that his work would be accurate and authentic.³⁶ It was at times a humbling experience, laden with rich, self-effacing moments that unsettled his cultural assumptions, such as when they 'laughed at my stupidity in not understanding quickly'. At a time when much opinion was being aired about the supposed innate deficiency of the Aboriginal intellect, Threlkeld was moved to remark that his Aboriginal tutors thought him somewhat dim-witted in not being able to easily attain *their* native language.³⁷

Threlkeld also discovered that the acquisition of an Australian language would be 'attended with much greater difficulty' than he had experienced in the South Seas. Aside from the problems of existing among semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers, the language seemed much more complicated in its structure and peculiar in its rules.³⁸ This was an important discovery for Threlkeld, one that not only challenged and inspired him, but also went some way towards validating his project. This was because the language contained clear substantiation of complex ideas, abstract concepts, pensiveness and dignity. It afforded 'a convincing proof that they have an equal share of intellectual power with others of the human race.'³⁹

Threlkeld referred often to the prevailing view that 'the Blacks had no language at all but were only a race of the monkey tribe.' While views of the degeneracy and iniquitous nature of Aboriginal society had great biblical and cultural underpinnings for early Australian colonists, Threlkeld also recognised such beliefs as a convenient and crude rationalisation for dispossession, 'for if it could be proved that the Aborigines of New South Wales were only a species of wild beasts, there could be

no guilt attributed to those who shot them off or poisoned them as cumberers of the earth'.⁴⁰ His aim was to position the language as an irrefutable contradiction of this popular opinion. As he wrote some years later, 'What has hitherto been considered the mere chatter of baboons, is found to possess a completeness and extent, by the most simple combinations, that must eventually combat and defeat the bold yet groundless assertions of many who maintain "that the blacks of New South Wales are incapable of receiving instruction"'.⁴¹

In December 1825, while continuing preparations for his departure into the bush, Threlkeld offered his first publication of the local language: two 'Australian Aboriginal Songs', which he titled 'Immah, Immah Ya' and 'Yulo Burrah Mirre'. Appearing a few weeks later in the *Sydney Gazette*, with his customary apology for the 'exceeding scantiness of my knowledge of their language', the untranslated 'Songs' stand out starkly amidst the dense columns of colonial news.⁴² These, his very first examples of translation, lay bare the crux of the linguistic mission that nourished him for the next twenty years. His aim was to air an Aboriginal voice – to prove it capable of transcription, and to posit it as a form of poetic human creativity, constituting evidence of 'a refined' degree of cultural and intellectual accomplishment.⁴³

During his first two years, Threlkeld set about the task of not only familiarising himself with the sounds of the Aboriginal language, but actually representing those sounds in writing – of forming 'an Alphabet where none exists'.⁴⁴ He resolved to use Roman characters, rather than invented ones, and chose to employ the familiar Tahitian orthography, avoiding 'inconvenient' English sounds which 'caused an unnecessary lengthening of the word', spoiling the appearance of the written form and proving unwieldy to write and print.⁴⁵ In September 1825 he submitted to the Attorney General his first attempt at an 'Orthography and Orthepey of a Dialect of the Aborigines of New South Wales', as an early indication of his zeal and talent and as measure of his success after only four months in the field, though he did so apologetically, for Threlkeld was always very self-deprecating about the imperfect and deficient nature of his work.⁴⁶

Yet from the outset, Threlkeld's professionalism and academic rigour aroused scepticism and doubt. It was not the quantity or authenticity of his work that was questioned, but rather the quality or meticulous perfection of it. Threlkeld's immediate superior, Samuel Marsden, wanted Threlkeld to appropriate English sounds (as was being done in translations of Maori languages), because this would facilitate the learning of the language by Europeans, and because this was assumed to be a quicker method for enabling unsophisticated heathens to learn to read.⁴⁷ Similarly, the Attorney General, Saxe Bannister, who was one of Threlkeld's main allies, was surprised by the thoroughness and scholarly nature of Threlkeld's early work. Was it really necessary, Bannister asked, to 'apply the complications of

Grammar as established in books to the expression of a simple people'? Bannister suggested that all Threlkeld really needed to do was produce a simple 'examination of the mere actual modes of speech in use', sufficient to establish evidence of 'a very curious and instructive stage of the human mind' upon which a case could be made to attract more resources to the mission. Nevertheless, Bannister forwarded Threlkeld's early work to the authorities in London, using it to bolster the claim for more funds. Copies were also sent to the representatives of other missionary societies, to demonstrate that Threlkeld was not being factional or selfish, but rather was working for a wider, more noble cause.⁴⁸

As part of his mission to dispel what he called 'the gloomy clouds of ignorance' shrouding European perceptions of Aborigines,⁴⁹ Threlkeld also recorded many detailed observations of Aboriginal culture, emphasising their ingenuity and mastery of their environment, relating aspects of their customs, laws and rituals, and describing a number of religious 'beings'. Such observations were, like his linguistic works, tendered as evidence of Aboriginal intelligence and integrity, expected to gratify those who supported the cause and possibly to convert those who did not. He continued to make these sorts of observations throughout his career, but gradually his efforts became focused more squarely on unlocking the mysteries of the Aboriginal language to demonstrate their capacity for great material and spiritual achievement.

And it became increasingly necessary for him to prove this point. There were numerous circumstances spurring Threlkeld to greater effort and motivating him to ensure that his work was more widely appreciated. Almost as soon as he established his mission at Lake Macquarie, Threlkeld was assailed by 'artful intrigues', consequent on the departure in 1826 of his key backers, Saxe Banister and Governor Brisbane.⁵⁰ Almost immediately there were attempts to withdraw or hijack the mission, particularly by his supervisor, Reverend Marsden, who looked to replace Threlkeld and remove the Aborigines from the mission in order to set up a station for Maoris.⁵¹ Threlkeld was also drawn into dispute with the LMS over the establishment costs of the mission, after he incurred expenses that the Society refused to honour, resulting in his being temporarily imprisoned in Sydney for debt in 1827.⁵²

It was in this climate that Threlkeld, in early 1827, offered his first printed pamphlet, titled 'Specimens of a Dialect of the Aborigines of New South Wales: Being the first attempt to form their speech into a written language'.⁵³ It consisted of 27 pages of translation, mostly columns of 'interrogative' and 'imperative sentences' in Aboriginal, set next to the English translation, with an explanation of his orthography. It was accompanied by a summary of the state and prospects of his mission and the challenges facing it in the short term, in essence a plea for funds and patience. Almost 300 copies were printed, which were widely circulated among the

colonial public, with copies strategically distributed to various authorities and organisations including the British Foreign Bible Society.⁵⁴ Copies were given to influential supporters within the colonial administration, including Francis Forbes,⁵⁵ and Archdeacon T. H. Scott, who promised to send copies to 'our Universities and Publick Institutions' in England.⁵⁶ It was a well-timed and opportune publication in terms of his personal and professional circumstances. At a very pivotal moment it served to validate the views of several key supporters, while publicising his disgraceful treatment by his employers and promoting awareness of and optimism for his project.

When he returned to Lake Macquarie in 1828, these solicitations became even more imperative. In late 1828, Threlkeld learnt that he was to be sacked and sent home at the end of the year. At that point, resolving to resist defeat and defy his opponents, Threlkeld announced that he had begun work on a number of other projects, including what would become his most renowned linguistic effort – a translation of the Gospel of St Luke. The earliest extant version of this work is a small part of Chapter 7, Verses 11-16, enclosed in a report to the Directors of the LMS in October 1828, which was also printed in Sydney and circulated among his 'private friends'.⁵⁷ A year later, he began referring to 'St Luke' frequently, and somewhat tactically, in correspondence with his superiors. In declining an offer to pay his passage home, Threlkeld noted that a 'rough translation' of St Luke had progressed as far as Chapter 14, warning the LMS that public subscriptions raised for such exemplary fieldwork ought not be withheld from the 'decent support of Missionaries abroad'.⁵⁸ He implored the new Governor, Ralph Darling, to patronise his work by giving him a land grant to support his large family, again noting that he had reached Chapter 14 of St Luke.⁵⁹ Similarly, he informed Marsden that he could not possibly abandon his post, given how far he had progressed in his studies.⁶⁰ As he later put it, 'sooner than abandon an enterprise in which I have risked my all, and in which I am so deeply interested, I would rather go and herd with the blacks'.⁶¹

Of course, Threlkeld had no intention of going native, for he was, in fact, successful in convincing the colonial government to grant him 1,300 acres on the opposite side of Lake Macquarie, as well as a salary and some convict labour, for the purpose of continuing his missionary endeavours. The government's decision to support him as an independent missionary (that is, independent of the missionary societies) was based primarily on the strength of his remarkable and unprecedented success in studying the Aboriginal language.⁶² Timing and luck were on his side, because by the late 1820s the imperial authorities were increasingly inclined to back missionary enterprises, and this assistance was increasingly supplemented by private donations from those willing to support and maintain his linguistic project, in the belief that it was of the utmost interest and importance, in both scientific and religious terms.⁶³

Within four years, Threlkeld had cultivated his reputation and established the significance and legitimacy of his work, sufficiently to set himself up as the first non-aligned, state-funded missionary to the Aborigines of New South Wales. Thereafter, what was required of Threlkeld was continuing evidence of his success in attaining the Aboriginal language. Threlkeld had the progress of his linguistic work publicised in the colonial press, reporting his 'laudable anxiety' in 'studying that dialect which has hitherto baffled every European who has attempted it', and confirming that they were 'by no means the degraded, unintellectual beings they have been represented'.⁶⁴ From this point, the linguistic component subordinated all other aspects of his missionary endeavour. His translations become his primary non-secular preoccupation, and evidently the key element of his mission, though he was perpetually hampered by lack of facilities, and by the fact that Aborigines attended less frequently once his fishing boats became unserviceable.⁶⁵ Although he claimed (perhaps in response to criticisms of the pertinence of his work) that his translations remained 'the foundation of my oral instructions to them',⁶⁶ it appears that, at the very time he was beginning to master his rendition of the Aboriginal language, he largely gave up the prospect of teaching Aborigines to read.

Over the next decade Threlkeld was engaged principally in producing four related works – a translation of St Luke, A Selection of Prayers, a comprehensive Grammar, and a Spelling Book. He continued periodically to strategically submit excerpts of his works-in-progress to his backers, usually at the most opportune times. And yet, throughout the 1830s, his work continued to attract a mixture of admiration and scepticism. In ¹⁸³⁰June 1831, the New South Wales Archdeacon, William Grant Broughton, advised Governor Darling that despite Threlkeld's obvious 'industry and zeal', there was no evidence that he was 'competent to hold a lengthened conversation with the natives, even upon ordinary topics, in their own dialect'.⁶⁷ Three years later, when the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge allocated £150 for the publication of Threlkeld's Gospel of St Luke, Broughton advised against it, for though the work provided 'most gratifying proof of the industry and ingenuity of Mr Threlkeld', its accuracy could not be practically tested, and in any event Aborigines were not 'in a sufficient state of preparation and intelligence to read it'.⁶⁸

What is noticeable (at least to those not linguistically trained) is that Threlkeld did not cynically solicit support and admiration through the sheer quantity of his work, or the speed at which he produced it. Rather, he aimed to impress through quality. Each of his works was revised multiple times over the next several years, as he struggled to devise the best means of capturing and communicating the language in writing. In 1833, for example, eight years into his study, Threlkeld completely revised his orthography, believing that his previous work had become unnecessarily encumbered with the letter H.⁶⁹ The following year he found it necessary to construct

a new and entirely original grammar, 'formed on the natural principles of the language', because the peculiarities of this language did not lend themselves to the adoption of any previously known model.⁷⁰ His efforts suggest a pedantry and perfectionism that is testimony to the seriousness of his approach. Where he might have concocted or falsified his work, without anyone knowing any better, Threlkeld was determined to explore it with a thoroughness and depth that few felt was warranted.

Finally, in 1834, Threlkeld published his first major work – *An Australian Grammar* – a 131 page work, including 27 pages explaining his pronunciation and orthography, and 52 pages of vocabulary and 'Illustrations' of Aboriginal phrases and sentences literally rendered into English.⁷¹ Printed by Stephens and Stokes in Sydney, and dedicated to Archdeacon Broughton, it was sent around the world, with one copy gratefully received by the King. Immediately afterwards, Threlkeld noted that he was again unhappy with the orthography, and set about revising it, preparatory to the completion of his Gospel of St Luke. By 1835, St Luke had undergone three revisions, at which time Threlkeld was still not sufficiently satisfied to send it press. But in the following year he published a second major work, *An Australian Spelling Book*.⁷² Other, unpublished works from around this period include 'Evanelia Mark-úmba' (an incomplete translation of the Gospel of St Mark, held in the Mitchell Library in Sydney) and a translation of St Matthew to Chapter 5 (no longer extant).⁷³ In 1838, as controversy raged over the trial of the Myall Creek murderers, Threlkeld compiled his 'Memoranda' for Judge William Burton, in which he laid particular emphasis on the long history of atrocities committed against Aborigines during the previous decade. Shortly after, around late 1841, Threlkeld retired from his station at Lake Macquarie and moved to Sydney, being then around fifty years of age. He continued to work on his various projects but, especially after the death of Birabahn in April 1846, he was mostly concerned with perfecting his old research, rather than acquiring new material. In 1850 he released the third and last of his major publications, *A Key to the Structure of the Aboriginal Language*,⁷⁴ prefaced with a dedication to his late friend and mentor Birabahn. It was submitted for the Royal National Exhibition in London in 1851, and copies were sent by him personally to a host of Australian and international notables and institutions.⁷⁵

The underlying tragedy of Threlkeld's work is that, at the very time he was perfecting his written studies, the number of people who actually spoke the language was in rapid decline. As he prepared to leave Lake Macquarie, he despaired that 'unless a Special Providence interfere, there will not be an Aborigine left in these districts, in the course of a few years, acquainted with the language which has cost me so much anxiety, and so many years of my life to obtain a knowledge thereof'. After the publication of *A Key* in 1850, Threlkeld appears to have partially discarded his project, turning instead to his 'Reminiscences' and ministerial duties in Sydney,

though he now began to receive recognition as ‘the Father of discovery in reference to the Languages of Australia’,⁷⁶ including the acknowledgement of the Ethnological Society in London, which elected him Corresponding Member in 1854.⁷⁷

In 1857 he was spurred back into action by Sir George Grey – the former Governor of South Australia, and New Zealand, now in South Africa, who was diligently cataloguing and publishing Indigenous language materials and had long been familiar with Threlkeld’s work. Grey urged, and offered to fund Threlkeld, to finally complete his translation of the Gospel of St Luke.⁷⁸ Threlkeld agreed, undertaking yet another revision, and commencing a Lexicon to accompany it. He wrestled with the Lexicon, with characteristic pedantry and frustration, and in fact it remained unfinished when he died in Sydney in October 1859. But St Luke, which may be regarded as his masterpiece and crowning glory, was finalised in 1857. Bemoaning the ‘little encouragement for such things in this Colony’, he forwarded the manuscript to Grey in July the following year.⁷⁹ But he did so in the painful knowledge that it was submitted as an historical document – ‘a work of curiosity, a record of the language of the tribe that once existed and would have, otherwise, been numbered with those nations and their forgotten languages and peoples with their unknown tongues who have passed away from this globe and are buried in oblivion.’⁸⁰

* * *

This short history of Threlkeld’s linguistic project has placed it in the context of his career as a missionary and an advocate of Aboriginal causes. I have endeavoured to understand the extent to which it was, in the early stages particularly, a partially political exercise, designed to prove that Aborigines were more sophisticated and intelligent than was commonly imagined, and therefore worthy of the funding of missionary enterprises such as his own. On a more personal level, his own energies and scholarship were necessary to bolster *his* particular claims for funding and support, at times when powerful forces were arraigned against him.

This is not to undervalue the higher purposes which informed his linguistic mission. Threlkeld was moved by various concerns. He genuinely believed that codifying the Aboriginal language and teaching them, and Europeans, to read it, was fundamental to bringing Aborigines into the light of God, and to bringing the races together into a shared, civilised community. As time went by, he, like most missionaries of the colonial period, encountered a sense of helplessness and disillusionment, as Aboriginal populations resisted the measures designed to improve them, and as their numbers appeared to recede inexorably towards extinction. Ultimately, Threlkeld’s studies became an end in themselves – pursued tenaciously, for the sake of perfection and preservation, long after Awabakal had practically ceased to be a living language. It became a labour of love, and a matter of knowledge.

However, Threlkeld continued to believe (or so he said) that his work was merely a foundation for more sophisticated translations by succeeding scholars, and that the structures and principles he laid out could be made applicable to other Australian languages elsewhere around the continent (though this did not really prove to be the case, notwithstanding the admiration and gratitude expressed by many of those who followed in his footsteps).⁸¹ But he was saved from a sense of complete futility by a belief that his linguistic mission served a higher and more timeless purpose than the salvation of those who traditionally spoke the language. And in a sense he was right. The comprehensive and meticulous nature of his work is such that today the revitalisation of the Awabakal language is a very real possibility.⁸² Threlkeld was unable to 'save the innocent' Aborigines of the Lake Macquarie district, but he saved their language for eternity.

Notes

- 1 'Happy shall I be to be able by the knowledge of the language to save the innocent'. Threlkeld, LMS Report, 21 June 1826, in Neil Gunson (ed.), *Australian reminiscences & papers of L. E. Threlkeld, missionary to the Aborigines, 1824-1859*, vol. 2, Canberra, 1974, p. 209.
- 2 A. Capell 'Language in Aboriginal Australia', in *Aboriginal Man in Australia: essays in honour of Emeritus Professor A. P. Elkin*, R. Berndt and C. Berndt (eds), Sydney, 1965, p. 101. For the broader context of missionary linguistics in colonial Australia, refer to Hilary M. Carey, 'Lancelot Threlkeld and Missionary Linguistics in Australia to 1850', in Otto Zwartjes and Even Hovdhaugen (eds), *Missionary Linguistics: Selected Papers from the First International Conference on Missionary Linguistics*, Oslo, 2004, pp. 253-76.
- 3 John Fraser, (ed.), *An Australian language as spoken by the Awabakal, the people of Awaba or Lake Macquarie (near Newcastle, New South Wales) being an account of their language, traditions and customs, by L. E. Threlkeld; re-arranged, condensed and edited with an appendix by John Fraser*, Sydney, 1892. It includes versions of Threlkeld's 'Specimens of a Dialect' (1827), *An Australian Grammar* (1834), 'A Selection of Prayers' (1834), *A Key* (1850), *Gospel of Luke* (1891), *Lexicon to Gospel of Luke* (1892). With the exception of the 'Selection of Prayers', and *Specimens* (which was slightly amended), all texts were substantially redone by Fraser.
- 4 For example, Amanda Lissarrague, *A Salvage Grammar and Wordlist of the Language from the Hunter River and Lake Macquarie*, Nambucca Heads, 2006; Mandy Oppliger, 'The phonology and morphology of Awabakal: a reconstitution from early written sources', B. A. (Hons.) Thesis, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1984; Arthur Capell, 'The affix-transferring languages of Australia', *Linguistics*, no. 87, 1972, pp. 5-36.
- 5 The manuscript of Threlkeld's 'Evanelia Mark-úmba' is now held in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, at ML.MSS 211 1/2. It had been transferred from the Royal Australian Historical Society.
- 6 Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vols 1 and 2.
- 7 Anna Johnson, *Missionary Writing and Empire*, Cambridge, 2003, p. 184.
- 8 Eric Fenn, 'The Bible and the Missionary', in S. L. Greenslade (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, Cambridge, 1963, pp. 383-406.
- 9 Johnson, *Missionary Writing and Empire*, pp. 129-35; 'Antipodean heathens: the London Missionary Society in Polynesia and Australia, 1800-50', in Lynette Russell (ed.), *Colonial Frontiers: Indigenous-European Encounters in Settler Societies*, Manchester, 2001, pp. 68-81.

10 Daniel Tyerman and George Bennett, *Voyages and Travels Round the World: By the Rev. Daniel Tyerman and George Bennet*, London, 1841.

11 Jakelin Troy, 'The Sydney language notebooks and responses to language contact in early colonial NSW', *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, vol. 12, 1992, pp. 145-70; David Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, 2nd ed., London, 1804, p. 393. See also Jakelin Troy, *Australian Aboriginal contact with the English language in New South Wales: 1788 to 1845*, Canberra, 1990, for discussion of the 'Sydney Language Notebooks' (three manuscripts in the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London) and the first tentative steps to understand the language of the inner Sydney region.

12 Collins, *An Account of the English Colony*, p. 167. See also p. 351, 'the natives have the advantage; comprehending, with much greater aptness than the English could pretend to, every thing they heard them say'.

13 Troy, *Australian Aboriginal*, p. 15.

14 For example, Oxley; also note MacDonald at Port Macquarie. For some lesser known examples of explorer-linguistics, see the vocabularies of Allan Cunningham, 'A vocabulary of the language of Macquarie Harbour tribe', 25 January 1819, State Records of New South Wales (SRNSW), SZ7 p. xxxiv; 'A vocabulary of the language of Endeavour River tribe', 30 July 1820, SRNSW, SZ8 p.122; 'Comparative table of languages spoken by Aborigines at different parts of the coast', 6 January 1822, SRNSW SZ8, pp. 215-7.

15 J. D. Bollen, 'English missionary societies and the Australian Aborigines', *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1977, pp. 263-91; John Ferry, 'The Failure of the NSW missions to the Aborigines before 1845', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 3, 1979, pp. 25-36.

16 N. Gunson, 'Introduction', in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 1, pp. 10-11; A. T. Yarwood, *Samuel Marsden: The Great Survivor*, Melbourne, 1977.

17 LMS Deputation, cited in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, fn. p. 307.

18 Walker to Watson, 21 October 1822, Bonwick Transcripts: Missionary, Box 52, p. 1185.

19 Tyerman and Bennet, 30 October 1824, cited in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, fn. p. 307.

20 B. W. Champion, 'Lancelot Edward Threlkeld: his life and work, 1788-1859', *Royal Australian Historical Society, Journal and Proceedings*, vol. 25, pt. 4, 1939, pp. 279-329; and pt. 5, 1939, pp. 341-411; Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vols 1 and 2.

21 Jane Samson, *Imperial Benevolence: Making British Authority in the Pacific Islands*, Honolulu, 1998; 'British Voices and Indigenous Rights: debating Aboriginal legal Status in nineteenth-century Australia and Canada', *Cultures of the Commonwealth*, vol. 2, 1997, pp. 5-16.

22 Lawry to WMS, 19 November 1821, Bonwick Transcripts, Box 52, pp. 1014-5.

23 D. A. Roberts, 'Bells Falls Massacre and Bathurst's history of violence: local tradition and Australian historiography', *Australian Historical Studies* vol. 26, no. 105, October 1995, pp. 615-33. For somewhat contrary opinions on the ideology and legal principles underlining this decision, see Alan Atkinson, *Europeans in Australia, volume 2, Democracy*, New York, 2004, and D. A. Roberts, "'They Would Speedily Abandon the Country to the New Comers": The Denial of Aboriginal Rights', in M. Crotty and D. A. Roberts (eds), *The Great Mistakes of Australian History*, Sydney, 2006, pp. 14-31.

24 For example, see the editorial in the *Sydney Gazette*, 14 October 1824, p. 2, in which the author used the analogy of a 'stranger' arriving in Great Britain 'with a view of informing the inhabitants of that blest Island of some important intelligence', but insisting that the British learn the stranger's language in order to receive the promised benefits 'Let the Gospel be preached to them in their own tongue'.

- 25 Brisbane to Bathurst, 8 February 1825, enclosing a 'Deed of Trust to Aboriginal Mission', *Historical Records of Australia*, I, vol. 11, pp. 512-5.
- 26 Tyerman and Bennett to Threlkeld, 24 February 1825, Threlkeld Papers, 1815-1862, Mitchell Library, A382, p. 20.
- 27 Threlkeld to Bourke, 7 November 1834, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 119.
- 28 Jean Woolmington, 'The civilisation/Christianisation debate and the Australian Aborigines', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1986, pp. 90-98.
- 29 Acts Chapter 2: 'the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language / And they were all amazed and marvelled' (verses 6-7).
- 30 Tyerman and Bennet, *Voyages and Travels Round the World*, p. 188.
- 31 The LMS delegates were heartened by reports that 'prophetic visions' received by Aborigines in their dreams became the basis of 'chants' and rituals that spread long distances across linguistic boundaries. Tyerman and Bennet, *Voyages and Travels Round the World*, p. 195. Refer to Hilary Carey and David Roberts on travelling cults and religious change in the wake of colonisation, 'Smallpox and the Baiame Waganna of Wellington Valley, New South Wales 1829-40: the earliest nativist movement in Aboriginal Australia?', *Ethnohistory*, vol. 49, no. 4, November 2002, pp. 821-69.
- 32 Threlkeld, 'Reminiscences', p. 42.
- 33 Atkinson, *Europeans in Australia*, vol. 2, pp. 37-44.
- 34 Threlkeld, 'Reminiscences', in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 46.
- 35 Threlkeld, LMS Report, 21 June 1826, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, p. 208.
- 36 Threlkeld, 'Reminiscences', p. 46. See also Threlkeld to Bannister, 27 September 1825, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, p. 187; Threlkeld, LMS Report, 21 June 1826, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, p. 209.
- 37 Threlkeld to Bannister, 27 September 1825, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, p. 187.
- 38 It possessed 'more extensive dual numbers, and conjoint dual cases of the nominative and accusative cases, expressed in one pronoun ... [and] a number of declensions, and cases indefinite and definite, tenses, &c., together with various conjugations of the verbs'. 'Reminiscences', p. 42. See also Threlkeld, LMS Report, 21 June 1826, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, p. 208 on some of the practical difficulties he faced.
- 39 Threlkeld, LMS Report, December 1825, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, p. 190.
- 40 Threlkeld, 'Reminiscences', p. 46.
- 41 Threlkeld, 'Reminiscences', p. 42.
- 42 *Sydney Gazette*, 5 January 1826.
- 43 See also Threlkeld's letter in the *Sydney Gazette*, 27 September 1826, regarding an Aboriginal funeral, including a record and translation of the poetic words spoken on the occasion.
- 44 Threlkeld, 'Reminiscences', p. 46.
- 45 Threlkeld, 'Reminiscences', p. 46.
- 46 'The Orthography and Orthepey of a Dialect of the Aborigines of New South Wales', unpublished manuscript, Newcastle, September 1825, referred to in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 74. A printed version, titled 'Part 1 Elements of Grammar of a dialect of the Aborigines of New South Wales' was sent to LMS in London shortly after. Threlkeld to Burder and Hankey, 13 October 1825, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, pp. 187, 307.
- 47 Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 1, fn. p. 74.
- 48 Threlkeld, LMS Report, 21 June 1826, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, p. 209-10.
- 49 Threlkeld, LMS Report, December 1825, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, p. 189.
- 50 Threlkeld to Burder and Hankey, 1825, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, p. 188.

- 51 Marsden to Bickersteth, 12 November 1827, Bonwick Transcripts: Missionary, Box 53, pp. 1779-80; Hill to CMS, 8 November 1827, CMS CN/02.
- 52 Correspondence surrounding this is in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, pp. 228-240.
- 53 Threlkeld, L. E., 'Specimens of a Dialect of the Aborigines of New South Wales: Being the first attempt to form their speech into a written language', Sydney, 1827.
- 54 Hill to Threlkeld, 2 November 1826, Threlkeld Papers, 1815-1862, Mitchell Library, A382, pp. 26-7; Threlkeld to Burder and Hankey, 1 May 1827, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, p. 228; Threlkeld to Brandram, 16 May 1827 in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, p. 228.
- 55 Forbes to Threlkeld, 23 June 1827, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, p. 229.
- 56 Scott to Threlkeld, 17 May 1827, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, p. 229.
- 57 A copy of the report included in Memoranda, 1838, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, Vol. 1, pp. 97-100.
- 58 Hankey and Orme to Threlkeld, 23 April 1829, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 106; Threlkeld to Hankey and Orme, 29 October 1829, Threlkeld Papers, 1817-1871, Mitchell Library MSS 2111/1, p. 29.
- 59 Threlkeld to Darling, 26 October 1829, SRNSW 29/8689; Threlkeld to McLeay, 13 July 1829, SRNSW 29/5712, and 13 July 1829, SRNSW 29/6313.
- 60 Threlkeld to Marsden, 26 October 1829, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 1, pp. 106-7.
- 61 *Sydney Herald*, 28 March 1836.
- 62 *Sydney Herald*, 28 March 1836.
- 63 *Sydney Gazette*, 12 January 1830.
- 64 *Sydney Gazette*, 19 July 1826; *Monitor*, 30 March 1827.
- 65 Threlkeld, LMS Report, 7 November 1834, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 120; Threlkeld to Broughton, 28 December 1833, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 1, pp. 118-9.
- 66 Threlkeld to Darling, 26 October 1829, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 1, pp. 107-8.
- 67 Broughton to Darling, 14 June 1831, in Minutes of Evidence before the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements), 1836, *British Parliamentary Papers: Anthropology, Aborigines I*, Shannon, 1968, pp. 21-2.
- 68 Broughton, December 1834, cited in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 1, fn. p. 172.
- 69 In his 'Memoranda' (1838), Threlkeld compared an example of the early orthography (1828) against his updated one: Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 101.
- 70 Threlkeld, *Grammar*, 1834, p. x.
- 71 *An Australian Grammar: comprehending the principles and natural rules of the language, as spoken by the Aborigines in the vicinity of Hunter's River, Lake Macquarie &c., New South Wales*, Sydney, 1834. The copy currently held by the Auchmuty Library, University of Newcastle, formerly belonged to the Chichester Literary Society and Mechanics Institute.
- 72 *An Australian Spelling Book, in the Language as spoken by the Aborigines, in the vicinity of Hunter's River, Lake Macquarie, New South Wales*. Sydney, 1836.
- 73 Threlkeld, Annual Report of the Mission to the Aborigines, 1838, Threlkeld Papers, 1815-1862, Mitchell Library, A382, p. 155.
- 74 *A Key to the Structure of the Aboriginal Language; being an analysis of the particles used as affixes, to form the various modifications of the verbs; shewing the essential powers, abstract roots, and other peculiarities of the language spoken by the Aborigines in the vicinity of Hunter River, Lake Macquarie, etc., New South Wales: together with comparisons of Polynesian and other dialects*, Sydney, 1850.

75 See the various letters of thanks sent to Threlkeld by, for example, including Sir William Dennison, Sir Everard Home, Edward Deas Thomson, the Australian Museum and the Australian Subscription Library in Sydney, in Threlkeld Papers, 1815-1862, Mitchell Library, A382.

76 Grey to Threlkeld, 10 July 1857, Threlkeld Papers, 1815-1862, Mitchell Library, A382, pp. 95-8.

77 Cull to Threlkeld, 31 July 1854, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, p. 298.

78 Grey to Threlkeld, 15 February 1857, Threlkeld Papers, 1815-1862, Mitchell Library, A382, pp. 91-4.

79 Threlkeld to Grey, 10 March 1858, and 8 July 1858, in Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, vol. 2, pp. 304, 305.

80 Preface to Threlkeld's Gospel of St Luke, 15 August 1857.

81 Carey, 'Threlkeld and Missionary Linguistics', pp. 264-70.

82 Lissarrague, *A Salvage Grammar*.