

Quaker Missions in Launceston and Northern Tasmania

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There were no Pilgrim Fathers in 1788 nor in 1804. Few convicts brought much religious baggage with them to Botany Bay and Van Diemen's Land. Still, it should not be assumed that Christianity was destined to play a lesser role in Australia than in the USA. The Christian religion in the USA was in decline in the late 1780s: only 17% of the population were churchgoers.¹ In contrast, Britain was beginning to experience something of a religious revival that would have a significant impact on colonial Australia. The Church of England, hitherto in a state of torpor, showed new vigour as a bulwark against atheism and revolution and as a platform for evangelicalism activism. The spread of Methodism among the labouring classes harnessed new energies and helped to redefine the boundaries between conformity and nonconformity. The denominational landscape in England and Scotland became more variegated as congregations gathered and divided. Above all, there was a new intensity to personal religion among an influential minority and to the articulation of religious and moral concerns in public life. The Britons, both bond and free, who came to Australia in the 1830s had been raised in a culture with a rather different religious and moral tone from that which their counterparts left in the 1780s. They also came to colonies that, though still raw and brutalised, were undergoing a quiet transformation in which religion was playing an increasingly important role.² The great French historian of nineteenth-century England, Elie Halevy, wrote, "If we would study the social composition of a nation, we must begin by studying its religion."³ It is rather pertinent advice for historians of colonial Australia and Tasmania.⁴

This paper is concerned with the Quakers in Launceston and northern Tasmania. The Quakers, or more formally members of the Religious Society of Friends, belonged to a community that had emerged from the religious anarchy of the English Civil War. Their doctrine of the "inner light" and sense of God's working within them, and their rejection of structured modes of public worship and participation in meetings in which members "waited on the Lord", set them apart from other Christian groups. By the late eighteenth century the Friends generally were esteemed for their piety and philanthropy, their refusal to swear oaths and undertake civic duties grudgingly accepted, and the quaintness of their manner of speaking and dressing indulged.⁵ Still, the Quaker community was small and, unlike some of the other Non-Conformist denominations, did not actively seek new members. In colonial Tasmania it was always very small, though not without its influence.⁶ This paper draws mainly on the letters and journals of James Backhouse and George Washington, who arrived in Hobart in 1832, spent most of the next two years in Van Diemen's Land, and used Hobart as their base for their work in New South Wales in 1835-36. During this time they assisted in the establishment of Quakerism in southern Tasmania and spent many months in the north.⁷ It uses the archives of the Society of Friends to chart the emergence of a small group of Friends in Launceston, the institution of the Launceston Monthly Meeting in 1844, and the disintegration of the community in the late 1840s.⁸ It concludes with the observations of Frederick Mackie who, with his companion Robert Lindsey, visited Launceston in 1852.⁹ More generally, the letters, journals and records of the Quakers provide interesting insights into the conditions of life and the state of religion in northern Tasmania in the 1830s and the steady growth of Launceston.

James Backhouse (1794-1869) was the scion of a prolific northern family, with longstanding Quaker associations and wide ranging business interests. Though a Unitarian by background and Wesleyan by education, George Washington Walker (1800-1859) joined the Society of Friends as a young man.¹⁰ Backhouse was twenty-

one when he “was first impressed that it was the will of the Lord” that he “should go on a gospel errand in to Australia”. Inviting Walker as his companion, they arrived in Hobart in February 1832 and over the next eight years travelled extensively around the British colonies in Australia. Though they regarded themselves as “travellers under concern” rather than missionaries, they nonetheless sought opportunities to sow the seeds of their faith as well as to provide support to Friends and former Friends. A major aim of their mission, however, was to observe and report on conditions in the colonies, especially in relation to the Aborigines and convicts, and to promote measures to protect the former and encourage the reform and rehabilitation of the latter. Backhouse and Walker visited Launceston together on six occasions. Between October 1832 and December 1833, they were in the northern part of the island for eight out of fifteen months. Their last two visits to Launceston, in January 1836 and May 1837, were shorter, and the latter consciously valedictory, at least for Backhouse. By this stage Walker believed that it was God’s wish that he settle in Tasmania. After accompanying Backhouse on the mission to the Swan River settlements and the Cape Colony, he returned to Hobart to marry Sarah Benson Walker. The young couple visited Launceston immediately after their marriage in 1840 and might have considered settling in the town. Walker visited Launceston on at least one later occasion.

Soon after their arrival, Backhouse and Walker met a number of people who had settled in northern Tasmania. One was Walker’s own cousin, George Robson, who had obtained land at Hampshire Hills on the north.¹¹ Still, the Quakers had been in Tasmania eight months before they visited Launceston. Even then the first visit was an unscheduled lay-over. They had taken passage with a cutter to visit the Aboriginal settlement on Flinders Island and the Van Diemen’s Land Company establishment at Circular Head. After visiting Flinders Island, the captain decided to call at Launceston. It proved a singularly happy occasion. The Quakers enjoyed the voyage up the Tamar, “the day being fine, & the banks of the river unusually winding & picturesque”.¹² As nightfall approached, they were becalmed and were rowed the last eight miles to the town. They made their way to the house of Isaac Sherwin, who some months before had invited them to stay with him, but who must have been surprised to find them at his doorstep at 10 o’clock at night. To add to the drama, he already had had houseguests, the newly-arrived Congregationalist minister Charles Price and his wife. It proved a pleasant and fondly remembered evening. The company was a congenial and quietly celebratory: the news had just arrived from England of the passing of the Reform Bill. After the hazards of the sea voyage and the exhilaration of the conversation, the Quakers slept comfortably on “a shakedown of rugs” on the floor under blankets and sheets from Sherwin’s store.¹³

Over the next two days they continued to warm to Launceston. Though it had only one church building, St John’s Anglican Church, there were many people seeking to add to its religious infrastructure. After a failed initiative in 1827, the Wesleyans were making progress in their plans for a chapel. Charles Price was holding services in the Court House and already his congregation was planning to build a chapel on Paterson Street. On the morning after their arrival, a Sunday, Backhouse and Walker attended Price’s service in the Court House. Price offered Backhouse his platform in the evening, and hurried publicity brought “an assemblage of well-dressed persons, amounting to perhaps 200”.¹⁴ If attendance at evensong at St John’s were down, it does not seem to have troubled Dr Brown, the Anglican minister. Meeting the Quakers the next day, he was all amiability and courtesy, discussing matters of common concern and inviting them to stay with him on their next visit. The previous afternoon Backhouse and Walker had visited the Sunday School. Though sponsored by the Church of England, it was supported by the other Protestant congregations. According to Walker, the attendance was not good. With over 100 scholars on the books, there were only 60 children present.¹⁵ Although for a town of 3000 people, overwhelmingly adults and convicts, it does not seem a bad showing.

There was a buzz about Launceston. Walker described it as “the capital of the Northern side” of Van Diemen’s Land.¹⁶ The expansion of agriculture and pastoralism in northern Tasmania already was increasing business opportunities and the volume of shipping. The Quakers saw the clear potential in the site, with its access to water, available land for industry, and its well laid out streets. Though most of the private dwellings were wooden, a number of stone buildings served to “increase the respectability of the place as a town”.¹⁷ They were particularly impressed by the natural beauty of the Tamar Gorge. To express his sentiments, Walker noted down some incompletely remembered lines from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

These are thy glorious works, Parent of good,
Almighty! Thine this universal frame,
Thus wonderous fair; Thyself how wonderous then!
Unspeakable, who sitst above these heavens
To us invisible, or dimly seen
In these thy lowest works; yet these declare
Thy goodness beyond thought, and power divine.¹⁸

After two months at Woolnorth, Backhouse and Walker returned to Launceston on 23 January 1833. Lodging with the Sherwins, they settled down to business, distributing religious tracts, visiting the prisoners in the penitentiary, and holding meetings, private as well as public. They used Launceston as a base for visiting the great houses and isolated cottages, creating what they termed “religious opportunities” with families and individuals. Though they had their disappointments, they clearly felt that their ministry was of service. According to their accounts, there was plenty of interest and goodwill: Andrew Gatenby was a bluff and canny Yorkshireman who always had held the Quakers in high regard.¹⁹ Even the road gangs were happy to give them a hearing, if only to give them a break from their arduous labour. As they travelled back south, they found fertile soil for their mission in Campbell Town and Ross. After less than three months in Hobart, however, they were heading northwards again, travelling by way of the east coast, where they visited the Cottons, a Quaker family living near Swanport. After exhilarating views of Ben Lomond, they overnighted with John Batman at Buffalo Plains, and walked into town along the newly macadamised road. They were based in Launceston from 13 May to 13 July and spent a further ten days there in December. Altogether, they spent almost as much time in 1833 in the north of the colony as in the south.

One reason for the shift of focus was perhaps a concern to follow more closely developments with respect to the Aborigines. Immediately prior to their arrival in Tasmania, the government had begun the removal of the groups of Aborigines to Flinders Island. Backhouse and Walker, who had visited them on the island, had been favourably impressed by them.²⁰ On their return to Hobart they reported positively on the progress of settlement and lent their voices to plans requiring greater expenditure, especially the provision of suitable accommodation on a healthier site. Meanwhile the rounding up of the Aboriginal survivors of disease and violence at the hands of the colonists was continuing. During their brief stay with John Batman on the foothills of Ben Lomond, they discussed the Black Wars, and the conciliation and resettlement process, in which Batman had been involved. They met Anthony Cottrell who was bringing in eight Aborigines from Macquarie Harbour. Backhouse recorded some positive and hopeful sentiments. Cottrell reported a friendly interview with the tribe near the Arthur River, and told how some Aboriginal women sought to assist white men who were drowning. When Batman showed them the grave of an Aboriginal child, who had died at his house, he related how the child’s mother had wept at the graveside. “Yet it is asserted by some,” wrote Backhouse, “that these people are without natural affection.”²¹ A letter from W. J. Darling awaited their arrival in Launceston. It informed them that the move had been made and the site renamed Wybalenna. “You would find a vast improvement among the people since your last

visit," he continued, "their habitations are in progress, four of them being nearly completed. I think you would approve of them ... By next spring there will not be a prettier, or more interesting place in the colony of Van Diemen's Land. The women now wash their clothes and those of their husbands, as well as white women. We are not now half so naked as when you were last here, but have neat and substantial clothing."²² Darling came to Launceston in July, bringing further reports, including news of some deaths.²³ Though Backhouse and Walker did not visit Flinders Island during their winter sojourn in Launceston, they did indeed do so in spring. Predictably enough, they again took the opportunity to visit Launceston prior to returning south.

Another reason for the move northwards was an awareness of the lack of religious provision in Launceston and the north midlands. Still, a number of initiatives were underway that would shape the ecclesiastical landscape decisively. An active group of Independents had invited Charles Price to minister to them.²⁴ The Wesleyans likewise were beginning to stir themselves again. Rev. Nathaniel Turner, the Wesleyan minister in Hobart, undertook preaching tours in the north in 1833 and 1834.²⁵ Backhouse and Walker were probably as concerned to support the broad evangelical enterprise as to win converts to their own society. They continued to report on the condition of the convicts and showed particular concern for their moral and spiritual regeneration. They made common cause with John Leach, a catechist with the road gangs. Accompanied by Ronald Gunn, the principal superintendent, they inspected the penitentiary and hospital in Launceston on 6 July, leaving a detailed account of the buildings and conditions inside.²⁶ Backhouse and Gunn shared a passion for botany, and also undertook field-trips together. The Quakers, however, spent a great deal of time ministering to the needs of many individuals in desperate circumstances. A major focus of concern was the baneful influence of hard liquor. Even before they left Britain, Backhouse and Walker had lent their support to the newly-established temperance movement; and all that they had seen and heard on the passage out and in the colony had confirmed them in their belief that liquor was a major cause of depravity and distress. Soon after their arrival the Quakers were active in seeking support for temperance societies and persuading people to take the pledge. On 4 June 1833 Backhouse organised a meeting in Launceston "for the purpose of conveying information to them on the object of Temperance Societies". The meeting was well attended and over the next weeks scores of people in the town and elsewhere in northern Tasmania took the pledge.²⁷

There was presumably some expectation that Quakerism would establish itself on the banks of the Tamar. In 1832 Launceston was growing rapidly. Between 1832 and 1835 its population doubled.²⁸ The Friends established a Monthly Meeting in Hobart in 1833, the first in Australia and the southern hemisphere. There was the possibility of a similar move in Launceston. In December 1833 Backhouse met with a few people "who have manifested an attachment to the principles of Friends, and three of whom have occasionally met on First-days, for the purpose of worshipping God unitedly".²⁹ They included Abraham Davy and David Hayes. A birthright Quaker, Davy was an ex-convict. He developed a lucrative sideline in making sausages. Entrusted with the Quaker stock of books, he built up the library in Launceston from three score to three hundred volumes.³⁰ A man of simple piety, Hayes lived in a humble cottage by the roadside in Perth and supported himself "by making coarse earthenware".³¹ In assessing the prospects in Launceston, Backhouse and Walker probably invested some hope in Isaac Sherwin. Like Robert Mather, a key convert in Hobart, Sherwin was a Wesleyan but probably still open to other influences. A successful merchant, he would have made a great catch.³² During their stay in the north in the summer of 1833-4, however, Backhouse and Walker probably came to realize that Sherwin was not about to join them. During 1834 they focused on consolidating their work in Hobart and planning their mission to New South Wales. Between December 1834 and March 1837 they were mainly in New South Wales. They visited Tasmania in the summer of 1835-

6, however, to attend the Annual Meeting in Hobart and made a point of spending some time in Launceston. They stayed with the Sherwins who, as Backhouse, noted, "now make an open profession of religion, in connection with the Wesleyan Methodists."³³

The Wesleyans grew from strength to strength in Launceston in the mid-1830s.³⁴ Philip Oakden, who arrived late in 1832, combined success in business, organisational and networking skills, and a powerful sense of mission. In 1833 the Reverend Joseph Orton arrived in the colony to rebuild the Wesleyan church in Van Diemen's Land. Interestingly the lay members of the Wesleyan community, Isaac Sherwin among them, were already sufficiently confident to challenge his clerical leadership. During their stay in Launceston in January 1836, Backhouse and Walker saw that much had changed. Backhouse observed "a greatly increased attention to the claims of religion" in the town over the last few years, acknowledging "the consistent example of Philip Oakden, and the labours of other Wesleyans have, under the divine blessing, contributed to this improvement."³⁵ Walker recorded that "the Wesleyans have just completed the erection of a very substantial & commodious Chapel" to seat a thousand people. There were some misgivings. "The Wesleyans have raised a great excitement here," he wrote, "and many persons have been stirred up to religious reflection, and an amended course of life. We rejoice in the improvement, but cannot close our eyes to the superficialness of religious character, which the mixture of a large measure of mere excitement, with much that is good, occasions. We do not, however, feel that it is our place at present to say much on the subject, except occasionally in conversation with some leading individuals among them." The Quaker missionaries could still command a good audience. Two or three hundred people attended a meeting in the Wesleyan chapel, though a thunder and lightning storm "unsettled the meeting towards the Conclusion."³⁶

More generally, it was a period of rapid progress for Launceston. In their letters and journals, Backhouse and Walker record many changes. Their first visit to Launceston in 1832 coincided with the introduction of a regular carriage service from Hobart.³⁷ They reported on the newly-established Cataract Mill, the sealing of the road coming into Launceston, the building of the bridge across the North Esk, and the completion of the Wesleyan Chapel.³⁸ They observed the growth of population, the increasing number of buildings in stone and brick, and the improvement of morals. John Glover junior, who visited Launceston around 1840 after a long absence, expressed similar sentiments: "Its increase since we first landed there in 1831 is prodigious: it was then about three parts small detached wooden cottages in quarter acre English paled gardens; it is now a little London of grand and continuous shops, (or stores as they are here called) of brick; stone, or handsomely stuccoed, scarcely a quarter of the original cottages remaining."³⁹ There were the fixtures, not least the weather. In May 1833 Walker wrote: "Launceston is enveloped in dense fog in the early morning. The tops of the adjacent hills are often in clear sunshine, whilst the town below is concealed in a cloud, from which a steeple or windmill rears its head. These fogs rarely continue through the day. As soon as the sun is a little above the horizon, the mist begins to dissolve, and when once the sun begins to shine, whatever may have been the severity of the previous night, a pleasant warmth is infused into the atmosphere."⁴⁰

On their last trip north in 1837 they observed the effect of drought. "So little rain had fallen for several months, in this part of the country," Backhouse wrote, "that the water-mills were almost useless, and the cattle were distressed for want of grass: that which remained of the abundant growth of last spring, was dry upon the ground, and the ploughing and sowing of the land were much retarded." They noted other environmental changes: "Since the Aborigines were removed from Van Diemen's Land, the Opossums and Brush Kangaroos have increased in many districts, and are very troublesome to the agriculturist, making incursions on his grain and turnip-

crops.”⁴¹As they approached Launceston they observed the “gibbet, newly erected; on which the body of a prisoner who committed a murder near the spot, was suspended, with a view of deterring from crime.” They added with wry humour: “But so unsuccessful was this first experiment of the kind in Tasmania, that pocket-picking and drunkenness occurred among the crowd, who resorted thither to view the hideous spectacle. Popular feeling was so strong against the transfer of this political barbarism to the Australian regions, that it was officially resolved that this first experiment should be the last.”⁴² Still, they were favourably impressed with developments in Launceston itself. They noted the growth of population from around 3000 to 7,185. “Many good, brick houses have been erected, and several public buildings, as well as large meeting-houses, belonging the Wesleyans, Independents, and Presbyterians; and the place seems as much improved in morals as in other respects.”⁴³

In relation to Quakerism, there was less to report. On their last visit, Backhouse and Walker had attracted a large congregation for a public meeting and had met with a small group of Friends in Abraham Davy’s lodgings. Walker described Abraham Davy, David Hayes and his wife, Thornton Bowden and Abraham Charles Flower as “the company that are likely to meet together henceforward”. Backhouse offered them “the language of encouragement to those who thus meet together to wait upon the Lord”.⁴⁴ This time there was no public meeting: Backhouse and Walker did not feel called to “seek any more public opportunity”. Furthermore, the small group that had met at Davy’s lodgings had not maintained itself. Davy had joined Backhouse in Sydney and Flower, another ex-convict, had moved away. Backhouse, Walker and Davy sat in silence with Hayes, seemingly the only remaining Quaker in the north.⁴⁵ Prior to leaving Tasmania, however, Walker did hear about another possible convert. His name was John Lawson. Born around 1795 he had a maritime background, and by the 1830s had settled at Cocked Hat Hill (Breadalbane), near Launceston. Married to a widow with five children, he and his wife had some eight children of their own. He addressed his application to Joseph Benson Mather, Walker’s future brother-in-law, stating that he had become interested in the principles of the Society of Friends by reading tracts borrowed from a poor man living locally in a hut by the roadside, apparently none other than Hayes.⁴⁶

Backhouse and Walker left Tasmania in November 1837, spending time in the new settlements in Melbourne, Adelaide and on the Swan River in Western Australia prior to their passage to Mauritius and Cape Colony. They continued to be especially concerned about the Aborigines, not least the lessons which settlers in the new colonies were taking from experiences in New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land. They retained their interest in their Launceston connections. During their time in Western Australia, Backhouse and Walker followed up on the sad case of Anna Dyer, whom they had met in the infirmary of the Female Factory in Launceston. She had been seduced and fallen pregnant to a man of some status at the Swan River settlement, and sent to Launceston, with the promise of an allowance, to have her child. She subsequently had a mental breakdown. Walker bearded the man concerned, Richard McBride Brown, brother to colonial secretary, extracted a commitment to provide the means to restore her to her family, and wrote to Isaac Sherwin in Launceston to assist with arrangements, assuming she had not already been committed to the asylum at New Norfolk.⁴⁷ Walker, of course, had another girl in Tasmania very much in mind. After farewelling Backhouse in Cape Town, he returned to Hobart and married Sarah Benson Mather on 15 December 1840.⁴⁸ Immediately afterwards the couple headed northwards. Accompanied by his brother-in-law, Walker called on John Lawson at Cocked Hat Hill and another applicant for membership Thomas Millington, an ex-convict, and was impressed by the depth of their commitment. The newly-weds stayed with the Sherwins who encouraged them to settle in Launceston. Facing the challenge of establishing a business, Walker doubtless believed that his prospects were better in Hobart with his wife’s family, a

robust Quaker community, and a larger network of contacts.

A leading light among the Quakers, Walker was close to the centre of a network that stretched across Van Diemen's Land and through all the British Empire. Many Quaker immigrants to the Australian colonies came with letters of introduction to Walker and made Hobart their first stop. A bounty immigrant, George Joseph Yates, arrived in Hobart in 1842 but moved to Launceston shortly afterwards. A miller by trade, he ran the lucrative Cataract Mill.⁴⁹ On Walker's recommendation, he took into the business another recent immigrant, Richard Smith Benson. A Friend by birthright, Benson had an impressive background in Quakerism. He was educated at Ackworth and was a member of the Swarthmoor meeting.⁵⁰ By the early 1840s there was an active group of Quakers in Launceston, including men of some financial substance like Lawson and Yates. In 1843 the Yearly Meeting in Hobart approved the establishment of a second Monthly Meeting. The Hobart Monthly Meeting had hitherto alternated between Hobart and Swanport. The decision now was to link the group in Swanport with the northerners to form the Launceston Monthly Meeting.

The records of the Launceston Monthly Meeting begin purposely enough in 1844.⁵¹ George Joseph Yates, the miller and probably the wealthiest of the group, acted as host. John Lawson, who most closely approximated a landed gentleman, was overseer. Richard Smith Benson, the best educated and with the strongest Quaker credentials, was clerk. Thomas Willington, a former convict and a widower with four children, proved the stalwart of northern Quakerism. For a time the group worked well. The early meetings set about fencing the Quaker burial ground and cataloguing the book collection.⁵² It is not known where the meetings for worship were held, but the growing size of the congregation required the purchase of a new set of chairs. There were a few applications for membership.⁵³ Abraham Charles Flower, who had been a member of the group in 1836, reappeared in Launceston. A former convict, Flower had failed in a business venture and came under a cloud.⁵⁴ Another new arrival was George Benson, presumably a relative of Richard Smith Benson. He came with a testimonial from Darlington, the home of the Backhouses, but the Launceston meeting had concerns about his intentions.⁵⁵

Early in 1846 the Launceston Monthly Meeting made provision for more seats 'in consequence of the increased attendance' at meetings for worship.⁵⁶ The leadership group, however, was beginning to fall apart. John Lawson was found to be lax in his attendance in August 1845 and was suspended as overseer two months later.⁵⁷ Richard Smith Benson ceased to attend the Monthly Meetings at the end of 1845 and moved to Port Philip. He married a non-Quaker in March 1847 and subsequently was disowned.⁵⁸ Abraham Charles Flower achieved prominence for a time but his activities were the cause of some concern. In addition to his slowness in clearing his debts, he was involving himself with a secret society, the Order of Rechabites. Founded in 1835, the Rechabites was a respectable Friendly Society with a commitment to Teetotalism. Launceston was an early centre of the movement. In 1842 the Rechabites figured prominently in the temperance parades in the town. Flower's association with them was considered at the Monthly Meeting. In March 1847, it ruled that the Rechabites, like the Freemasons, "fall under definition of secret societies, that "the adoption of badges, insignia and passwords and signs" was "inconsistent with Christian simplicity and gravity", that time spent in meetings and the like was "misspent time", and that coffee houses were public houses.⁵⁹ The Meeting made representations to Flower. When he persisted in his Rechabite activities, the meeting disowned him. Flower lodged an appeal that was upheld by the Yearly Meeting in Hobart. The Launceston Monthly Meeting minuted its dissent, stated its belief that the decision was "calculated to destroy the usefulness of the Monthly Meeting and to paralyze its exertions in dealing with future delinquents".⁶⁰ A crisis loomed.

In the summer of 1848 George Washington Walker travelled to Launceston to help the northern Friends sort out their affairs. The Monthly Meeting convened, as usual, at the house of George Joseph Yates, and ran over a number of days. The minutes record some routine items of business on 3 February and then, reflecting some unminuted and presumably unpleasant disclosure and discussion in the interval, a letter of resignation from Yates dated 5 February. The minutes then state that “for a long period he [Yates] has brought reproach on the Society by his inconsistent walk in life — and that his conduct latterly has been marked by so much double dealing that we believe it right for the Society to mark their disapprobation thereof.” They continue that his “improprieties have assumed so marked a character that one of the principal objects of the deputation was to assist the monthly meeting in bringing him under dealing”. They report the Meeting’s approval of the deputation’s advice “not only to remove the place of meeting at once from his house, but for the present to discontinue the meetings for worship held in Launceston.” They add that “whilst the deputation was in Launceston, an act of palpable deviation from Christian integrity of a very flagrant character was unexpectedly discovered which has induced the meeting to forego the usual course adopted towards delinquents and to accept his resignation of membership”.⁶¹ It is not known what “improprieties” Yates had committed, and what “act of palpable deviation from Christian integrity” had been revealed unexpectedly.

The Launceston Monthly Meeting continued to operate for a while, alternating between John Lawson’s house at Cocked Hat Hill near Launceston and Francis Cotton’s house at Kelvedon on the east coast. Lawson provided a home for the Quaker book collection but Millington, the ex-convict, was the only other member of the Launceston group who remained active. The community at Kelvedon consisted almost exclusively of the Cottons and their household, notably the physician Dr Storey. The declining membership base was acknowledged and the Launceston Monthly Meeting came to an end in July 1851.⁶² When Robert Lindsey and Frederick Mackie, two British Quakers following in the footsteps of Backhouse and Walker, visited northern Tasmania in December 1852 they found that Quakerism was all but dead. They visited John Lawson at Cocked Hat Hill, “now the only Friend in this place or in Launceston”, who told them that the northerners “never had a meeting house when their numbers were more numerous but were in the habit of meeting at the house of an individual who has since become a reproach to a religious community.”⁶³ Curiously enough, Mackie next records being shown around Launceston by the man himself, George Joseph Yates. He describes him as a miller, “clearing no less than a £100 a week.” Mackie notes that he was “formerly in membership with us” but refrains from further comment.⁶⁴

The fruits of the Quaker missions in northern Tasmania were limited. Backhouse and Walker bore witness to the shameful treatment of the Aborigines and the abuses of the convict system, and their reports had some influence in shaping public attitudes and policy in Britain. Their ministry presumably gave hope to many individuals, both fettered and free, and assisted the efforts of others in the transformation of a penal colony into a civil society. The Society of Friends took root in Hobart, where Lindsey and Mackie found some twenty members at the Monthly Meeting in 1852.⁶⁵ The achievement was more limited in Launceston. Backhouse and Walker were clearly impressive: hundreds of Launcestonians heard them speak. They were key players, too, in the establishment of the temperance movement. They were no match for the Independents, Wesleyans and Presbyterians, who built large followings among enterprising settlers and ex-convicts bent on improvement and seeking religious moorings and useful networks. Still, along with the other Non-Conformist denominations, Quakerism played its part in laying the infrastructure and raising the moral tone of Launceston. The hopes of Backhouse and Walker might not have been realised, but so many of the aspirations for Tasmania in the 1830s proved hollow. The convict system was double-edged: it had provided the labour and investment for its

rapid development, but it left its own baneful legacy. A further factor was the restlessness of the population. When Lindsey and Mackie arrived in Launceston in 1852, it was difficult for them to find accommodation because of the large number of prospective 'gold diggers' awaiting ships to Melbourne.⁶⁶ It is a coincidence, but nonetheless a significant one, that last Launceston Monthly Meeting coincided with the discovery of gold in Victoria.

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- ¹ Gary Willis, *Head and Heart: A History of Christianity in America*, New York, 2007, pp. 7-8. The proportion of churchgoers in the USA increased steadily during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
 - ² Many visitors and new arrivals in the penal colonies commented on the irreligion and depravity of the convicts and their keepers: Allan M Grocott, *Convicts, Clergymen and the Churches. Attitudes of Convicts and Ex-Convicts towards the Churches and Clergy in New South Wales from 1788 to 1851*, Sydney University Press, 1980. It is necessary to distinguish between conditions in the first decades of settlement and in the 1830s, and to acknowledge the higher expectations in the later period. Arguably, it is the progress of Christianity in the second quarter of the nineteenth century that is most remarkable. As Grocott observed, the population of New South Wales grew one and half times between 1836 and 1851, but "church accommodation increased almost five times." In Sydney 10,000 people, about 20% of the total population, claimed to regular church-goers in 1845: *Convicts, Clergymen and the Churches*, pp. 100, 291.
 - ³ The epigraph is from Grocott, p. xiv. Elie Halevy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century. Vol. 1. England in 1815*, second edition, Ernest Benn, London, 1949, Part III. I. 'Religion', provides a useful survey of the religious scene.
 - ⁴ The importance of religion in the development of Launceston in the second quarter of the nineteenth century is well recognised in Patricia Fitzgerald Ratcliff, *The Usefulness of John West: Dissent and Difference in the Australian Colonies*, The Albernian Press, Launceston, 2003; and Anne Valeria Bailey, 'Launceston Wesleyan Methodists 1832-1849: Contributions, Commerce, Conscience,' University of Tasmania, Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2008.
 - ⁵ For a good discussion of the development of Quakerism in the eighteenth century, see James Walvin, *The Quakers: Money and Morals*, John Murray, London, 1997.
 - ⁶ Michael Bennett, *Quaker Life in Tasmania: The First Hundred Years*, University of Tasmania, Hobart, 2007; William Nicolle Oats, 'Quakers in Australia in the Nineteenth Century,' University of Tasmania, Unpublished PhD Thesis, 1982.
 - ⁷ James Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies*, Adams and Co., Hamilton, 1843; James Backhouse and Charles Tylor, *The Life and Labours of George Washington Walker, of Hobart Town, Tasmania*, A W Bennett, London, 1862.
 - ⁸ Launceston Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1844-51, Society of Friends, S. 1/A.3, University of Tasmania Library Special and Rare Materials Collection.
 - ⁹ *Traveller under Concern: The Quaker Journals of Frederick Mackie on his Tour of the Australian Colonies 1852-1855*, Mary Nicholls (ed.), Launceston, 1973, pp. 58-60.
 - ¹⁰ William Nicolle Oats, *Backhouse and Walker. A Quaker View of the Australian Colonies*, Blubber Head Press, Sandy Bay, 1981.
 - ¹¹ Backhouse and Tylor, *Life and Labours of George Washington Walker*, p. 35.
 - ¹² Journal of George Washington Walker [written in instalments], 20 October 1832, p. 147. ML B 727. State Library of New South Wales.
 - ¹³ Journal of G W Walker, 20-21 October 1832, p. 147.
 - ¹⁴ Journal of G W Walker, 21 October 1832, p. 148.
 - ¹⁵ Journal of G W Walker, 21 October 1832, p. 148.
 - ¹⁶ The phrase is Walker's: Journal of G W Walker, 21 October 1832, p. 149.
 - ¹⁷ Journal of G W Walker, 22 October 1832, p. 149.
 - ¹⁸ Journal of G W Walker, 22 October 1832, p. 149; John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book 5, Lines 153-9.
 - ¹⁹ Backhouse, *Narrative of Visit to Australian Colonies*, pp. 477-8.
 - ²⁰ According to Backhouse, the Aborigines on Flinders Island did "not exhibit either the degradation of physical or intellectual power which has been attributed to them." In regard to their attacks on the houses of settlers, he wrote: "The whites had taken possession of their country, without their consent, and in many instances had taken away their women, or

violated them, and killed the men. They therefore watched their opportunities to retaliate, and (as is common in the wars of white people) they did not distinguish betwixt the more peaceable settlers and those who had used them brutally, and they looked upon the most peaceable as intruders upon their territory." N J B Plomley, *Weep in Silence: A History of the Flinders Island Aboriginal Settlement*, Blubber Head Press, Hobart, 1987, pp. 228-9.

- ²¹ Backhouse, *Narrative of Visit to Australian Colonies*, p. 147.
- ²² Backhouse, *Narrative of Visit to Australian Colonies*, pp. 147-8.
- ²³ Journal of G. W. Walker, 6 July 1833, p. 256.
- ²⁴ Ratcliff, *Usefulness of John West*, ch. 3.
- ²⁵ Bailey, 'Launceston Wesleyan Methodists', p. 157.
- ²⁶ Journal of G W Walker, 5 July 1833, p. 256.
- ²⁷ Journal of G W Walker, 28 October 1832, p. 150.
- ²⁸ Alex Tyrell, *A Sphere of Benevolence: The Life of Joseph Orton, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary (1795-1842)*, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, 1993, p. 115.
- ²⁹ Backhouse, *Narrative of Visit to Australian Colonies*, p. 177.
- ³⁰ Journal of G W Walker, 4 January 1836, p. 566.
- ³¹ James Backhouse, *Extracts from the Letters of James Backhouse, whilst Engaged in a Religious Visit to Van Dieman's Land, New South Wales, and South Africa, accompanied by George Washington Walker*, London, 1841, Fourth Part, p. 47.
- ³² Born in Burslem, England, he was involved in trade, and during his first residence in Hobart in the mid-1820s he served as secretary to the Sunday School. After returning to Van Diemen's Land in 1829, he set himself up as a General Merchant in Charles St, Launceston in 1831: Bailey, 'Launceston Wesleyan Methodists', p. 131.
- ³³ Backhouse, *Extracts from the Letters of James Backhouse*, Fourth Part, pp. 41-2.
- ³⁴ Bailey, 'Launceston Wesleyan Methodists', ch. 3.
- ³⁵ Backhouse, *Extracts from the Letters of James Backhouse*, Fourth Part, p. 42.
- ³⁶ Journal of G W Walker, 4 January 1836, p. 566.
- ³⁷ "... an open four-wheeled carriage performed the journey of 120 miles, in two days, not running at night, the fare was £5": Backhouse, *Narrative of Visit to Australian Colonies*, p. 136.
- ³⁸ In May 1833 they found that 'much' of the road into Launceston had been "macadamised": Backhouse, *Extracts from the Letters of James Backhouse*, First Part, p. 78. In December they found the bridge across North Esk was "in a considerable state of advancement": Backhouse, *Narrative of Visit to Australian Colonies*, p. 176.
- ³⁹ John Glover Jnr to Mary Bowles, 13 December 1840. ML Ag. 35/9. State Library of New South Wales. I am grateful to Dr Keith Adkins for this reference.
- ⁴⁰ Backhouse and Tylor, *Life and Labours of George Washington Walker*, p. 184
- ⁴¹ Backhouse, *Narrative of Visit to Australian Colonies*, p. 476.
- ⁴² Backhouse, *Narrative of Visit to Australian Colonies*, pp. 475-6.
- ⁴³ Backhouse, *Narrative of Visit to Australian Colonies*, p. 477.
- ⁴⁴ Journal of G W Walker, 3 January 1836, p. 565.
- ⁴⁵ *Extracts from the Letters of James Backhouse*, Fourth Part, p. 47.
- ⁴⁶ *Extracts from the Letters of James Backhouse*, Fourth Part, p. 69.
- ⁴⁷ Walker to Richard McBride Brown, January 1838; Walker to Isaac Sherwin, 3 February 1838. George Washington Walker's Letter Book, 1836-8. W9/A1/27. Walker Family Papers. University of Tasmania Library Special and Rare Materials Collection.
- ⁴⁸ Backhouse and Tylor, *Life and Labours of George Washington Walker*, p. 508.
- ⁴⁹ *Traveller under Concern*, Nicholls (ed.), p. 316.
- ⁵⁰ A certificate on his behalf by his brother in Manchester was presented to the Meeting: Launceston Monthly Meeting Minutes, 8 March 1844, S. 1/A.3, p. 4.
- ⁵¹ The first meeting met at Kelvedon: Launceston Monthly Meeting Minutes, 4 January 1844, S. 1/A.3, p. 1. The second at Launceston: Launceston Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1 February 1844, S. 1/A.3, pp. 2-3.
- ⁵² A burial in the Friends burial ground in Launceston took place in January 1844: Launceston Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1 February 1844, S. 1/A.3, p. 3. The clerk was asked to make a consolidated list of the books in August 1844: Launceston Monthly Meeting Minutes, 8 August 1844, S. 1/A.3, pp. 8-9.
- ⁵³ Launceston Monthly Meeting Minutes, 3 December 1844, S. 1/A.3, p. 11
- ⁵⁴ Launceston Monthly Meeting Minutes, 3 December 1844, S. 1/A.3, p. 11

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- ⁵⁵ Launceston Monthly Meeting Minutes, 6 November 1845, S. 1/A.3, p. 18; 2 December 1845; S. 1/A.3, p. 19.
- ⁵⁶ Launceston Monthly Meeting Minutes, 2 February 1846, S. 1/A.3, pp. 20-1.
- ⁵⁷ Launceston Monthly Meeting Minutes, 7 August 1845, S. 1/A.3, p. 16; 9 October 1845, S. 1/A.3, p. 18.
- ⁵⁸ Launceston Monthly Meeting Minutes, 28 October 1847, S. 1/A.3, pp. 38-9.
- ⁵⁹ Launceston Monthly Meeting Minutes, 3 June 1847, S. 1/A.3, pp. 34-5.
- ⁶⁰ Launceston Monthly Meeting Minutes, 13 January 1848, S. 1/A.3, pp. 40-3.
- ⁶¹ Launceston Monthly Meeting Minutes, 3-5 February 1848, S. 1/A.3, pp. 43-6.
- ⁶² The last recorded meeting was at Kelvedon, when the issue of George Cotton's marriage was referred to the Hobart Monthly Meeting: Launceston Monthly Meeting Minutes, 30 July 1851, S. 1/A.3, p. 68.
- ⁶³ *Traveller under Concern*, ed. Nicholls, p. 58.
- ⁶⁴ *Traveller under Concern*, ed. Nicholls, p. 59.
- ⁶⁵ *Traveller under Concern*, ed. Nicholls, p. 38.
- ⁶⁶ *Traveller under Concern*, ed. Nicholls, p. 59.