

Rev Dr George Brown 1835-1917; 'one of the toughest morsels'

Margaret Reeson

Paper for ANU Missions Seminar 2006

Abstract

The missionary career of Rev Dr George Brown in the Pacific began when he arrived in Samoa in 1860 with his bride Lydia Wallis. Over the years he traversed the Pacific repeatedly, working in various capacities in eastern Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands until his final Pacific journey in 1915. He served the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Australasia as missionary, mission administrator and President, hero and embarrassment, political stirrer and creative thinker, pugnacious peacemaker, pioneer and pastor, shaper of policy and teller of ripping yarns. During his first fourteen years as a missionary in Samoa, years that were marked by discouragement, frustration and conflict, Brown developed attitudes and understandings that informed the rest of his long career. These included his relationships with Pacific Island people, development of models for mission, views on colonial influence in island communities, relationships with other missionary organizations, his active curiosity about Pacific cultures and the critical role of his wife Lydia.

What shaped the life and work of Rev Dr George Brown?

Rev Dr George Brown was born in the north of England in 1835 and arrived in the southern hemisphere as a nineteen year old truant. He made New Zealand his first southern home, he said later 'simply because it was the farthest place from England'- and Central Africa would have done as well. Much later he would believe that God had a purpose for him in that part of the world. From that time, in 1855, until his death in Sydney in 1917, he lived and traveled widely south of the equator. In a full and varied life, he worked as missionary, mission administrator, denominational leader, explorer, able amateur scientist in several disciplines, political activist and sometime embarrassment to his church, the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australasia.

In this paper, I will explore just some of the influences, among others, that shaped this interesting man, many of them experienced during the fourteen years he spent as a missionary in Samoa from 1860-1874. How did these aspects of his life inform his later work in what is now Papua New Guinea, in his work as mission administrator in Fiji, Tonga, Samoa and the Solomon Islands and as President of NSW Methodist Conference and finally President General of the Methodist Church in Australia?

- 1. His relationship with his wife Lydia .**
- 2. His relationship with another missionary organisation**
- 3. His relationship with people of the Pacific Islands**
- 4. His interest in the wider world beyond the limits of the local reef**
- 5. His relationship with his Mission Board**

1. *His relationship with his wife Lydia .*

Many, many years after Sarah Lydia Wallis married George Brown, their contemporary Lorimer Fison would name Lydia as one of three women who had been 'specially made by God for missionaries' wives'. The other two were his own wife and Fanny Bromilow.ⁱ

Lydia was born Lydia Wallis in 1838, the third child of Rev James and Mrs Mary-Anne Wallis who arrived in New Zealand as Wesleyan Methodist missionaries in 1834. After several moves, at least in part because of the elbowing for areas of influence between Anglican and Methodist missionaries, the family arrived on the harbour at Waingaroa, now Raglan, on the west coast of the North Island. Lydia was a baby of about 3 months. Describing it many years later, James Wallis wrote:

'No settlement being near where the vessel anchored, our goods were landed on the beach where they had to remain some days. Meanwhile we secured shelter by setting up a four post kauri bedstead which we roofed with boards and blankets and which answered the double purpose of drawing room and bedroom.'ⁱⁱ

The family moved from this precarious beginning into a mission house and remained with the same Maori community for many years.

Lydia's early memories included the sight of tribal warfare, occasional visits from fellow-missionaries and colonial dignitaries and the constant presence of their Maori neighbours. In old age she would tell a friend that she was never anxious about living among Polynesians as she was familiar with them being 'in my own home. I lived among the Maoris as long as I can remember.'ⁱⁱⁱ When Lydia was a six year old, the artist George French Angas arrived unannounced at the mission house and described the kind welcome given by Mrs Mary-Anne Wallis and the 'group of half a dozen fine rosy-cheeked children who bore testimony in their health and happy countenances, to the salubrity of the New Zealand climate.'^{iv}

Her home was the scene of debates over denominational rivalry, Christian missions, Maori issues and the justice or otherwise of colonial arrivals buying up large tracts of Maori land. Lydia's father was very apprehensive about the loss of Maori land and wrote to England quoting a Maori leader:

'When you see an island you think you would like, you go and kill the people there and take their land. Where are the people of Port Jackson? They are lost, you white people have destroyed them ...and perhaps we shall be lost too., These thoughts tell me not to sell my land...'^v

Lydia's father James Wallis believed that any missionary needed to be fluent in the local language and also

'must have become acquainted with their customs and manners, not from books merely, but from observation. He must understand their modes of thinking and reasoning. ... Ignorance in these matters has often made wise men look ridiculous, and not infrequently exposed them to danger.'^{vi}

In common with fellow-missionaries in New Zealand and the Pacific islands, Lydia's parents were very concerned for the well-being and education of their children, who lived on isolated mission stations. They agitated for a school and finally, after years of effort, a co-educational boarding school was established in

Auckland in 1850. Lydia and her siblings traveled on foot and by canoe for six or seven days at the beginning and end of each school year in order to attend school. A traveler who once made the trek with the young people and their companions described the journey as tough but enormous fun. By Lydia's last year at school there were 75 young people enrolled, learning from a wide curriculum including French, arithmetic, Physiology and the classics, and an observer at their annual public display and examination noted that the girls were equally as competent as the boys.^{vii} After her schooling, she worked with her parents at their mission and on her marriage certificate the word 'missionary' appeared instead of the usual 'spinster'.

As a teenager, Lydia was given an autograph book and the signatures in it suggest acquaintance with many of the key figures of Methodist missionary enterprise in New Zealand and the Pacific. Her family had close friendships with these people and from them Lydia would have learned to be an educated citizen of Australasia and the Pacific, even though she was never to visit the northern hemisphere. Among the Wallis family's dearest friends were the Buddle family, aunt and uncle to George Brown and significant influences on his move toward Christian faith. Lydia married George in August 1860.

So Lydia Wallis was indeed a good mate for a missionary. A healthy and active young woman, bi-lingual and familiar with a Polynesian society, educated, a devout Christian, willing to walk for miles or travel in whaleboats around inhospitable coastlines, and familiar with issues of colonization, culture clashes, denominational conflicts and the developing history of missions in the South Pacific. She learned and used the Samoan language; their colleague Martin Dyson wrote in their first year in Samoa 'we left Brown and his excellent wife a few months on Manono while they got a little of the language. They both of them succeeded very well with it'.^{viii} In later years it was clear that her husband George turned to her for wisdom on many occasions, and valued her calm approach to temper his own more volatile personality. She was willing to go with him into potentially dangerous and challenging situations even though those choices brought her great grief. Lydia Brown was married to George for nearly 57 years, which is a sign of remarkable strength in itself. A future brother-in-law wrote in her autograph book when she was still a young single woman: 'To SLW [Sarah Lydia Wallis]...may you be a centre whence shall be ever radiating holy and happy influences...'^{ix} Those 'holy and happy influences' did radiate into the sphere of her husband and I believe she was a true centre for that restless man..

2. *His relationship with another missionary organisation*

Years before Brown arrived in Samoa in 1860, the scene was already set for potential conflict between his own mission, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society and the London Missionary Society. These two organizations, with very similar theology and ethos, had been expanding their work across the Pacific islands, the Wesleyans from Australia, New Zealand and Tonga moving from the west and LMS from Tahiti from the east. The two groups met – or collided – in Samoa.

By the time George and Lydia Brown arrived, appointed to serve in Samoa with the Wesleyans, both missions had been established in the same islands, often

in the same villages. There had been a complex sequence of advances and retreats, misunderstandings, confrontations, reconciliations, the withdrawal of the Wesleyans and their return to Samoa in 1857. Although the Browns usually had good relationships with the LMS missionaries, supporting each other through illness and childbirth, offering hospitality in their homes, there remained a tension between them which became more pronounced as time went by. Some intemperate letters passed, over the years, between the leadership of LMS and the Wesleyan Mission Board in Sydney. For example, in August 1866, the Wesleyan Mission Board reacted angrily to a letter from Rev AW Murray of LMS who had written that 'Wesleyan intrusion' was 'the greatest hindrance to our work', even more than heathenism, tribal warfare or even the work of the Catholic priests.^x

George Brown found himself in the role of Chairman of the District in Samoa during a period when his Mission Board at home insisted that the Wesleyans ought to stay, the Tongan connection was convinced that they ought to stay, his fellow missionaries were divided on the matter and London Missionary Society saw them an undesirable intrusion and a hindrance to their work. A colleague believed that the presence of the Wesleyans in Samoa was like 'lampposts on a moonlight night' – not evil but unnecessary. The Samoan people suited themselves, switching allegiance from one mission to the other according to changing local alliances or other factors. When a group left the Wesleyans for LMS in 1868, Brown wrote in his journal 'It quite upset me and I was nearly ill from its effect. I cannot imagine how people can act thus. Such an act of black ingratitude I never expected to find in Samoa...'^{xi} The long-running tensions that sprang from the close proximity of two very similar missions in a comparatively limited sphere of influence affected relationships between Brown, his colleagues including his brother-in-law Wallis, his LMS friends and the Board, and went on for much of his fourteen years in Samoa. Although this conflict between LMS and WMMS only rated a single paragraph in his autobiography, a reading of his journal and letters of the period, particularly between 1868 and 1874, reveal the depth of his hurt, depression, anger and discouragement. Two examples: 'I do indeed wish that the way were made plain for us to leave Samoa. It seems a great waste of men and money to keep us here. I wish I could go to Fiji or New Guinea anywhere out of this.'^{xii} And 'I have often been tempted to give up' he wrote to a friend in 1872 'but have felt that I should incur the guilt of cowardice and unfaithfulness if I did so'.^{xiii}

It was no doubt partly from frustration but also from a genuine belief that it was a Christian duty to take the Gospel to unevangelised regions, but Brown had first mentioned leaving Samoa for a new field of service in what he called 'Papua' as early as August 1861. As the years in Samoa passed, he developed a strong vision of new opportunities in other island groups, as indeed were also the LMS people, particularly in Papua and New Guinea, but always with the condition that any mission groups moving to those regions must have 'separate coasts or Districts marked out'.^{xiv} He wrote frequently and enthusiastically to his Mission Board and other friends urging action. In one recommendation he urged investigation of 'the Islands up on the Line. Tis no use we thinking of the Solomons. The Bishop [that is Melanesian Mission] goes there and it is best not to interfere. I think we ought to take up New Britain and New Ireland. They are large Islands and *unoccupied*'.^{xv} Repeatedly he wrote about wanting to avoid future clashes. By 1875, as Brown finally set off on his new enterprise to New

Britain, his church journal announced, no doubt with relief, that 'In prosecuting the work of the mission, there is happily no prospect of coming into collision with kindred Societies.'^{xvi}

In later years when he was General Secretary of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, George Brown worked very intentionally to find ways to cooperate with other missionary organisations as they planned new work. Agreements over location and potential borders were very important. This included careful work in 1890, on the invitation of William Macgregor, the Governor of British New Guinea, between Brown, William Lawes of LMS, and Albert McLaren of the Australian Board of Mission which resulted in an agreement about discreet spheres of influence in the eastern areas of British New Guinea, with LMS along the southern coast, the Anglicans along the northern coast and the Methodists among the islands to the east of the mainland.^{xvii} (The agreement offended the Catholic Mission who felt that they had a calling to the whole population and were unhappy at their exclusion from significant areas.)¹ Similarly, Brown negotiated with the Melanesian Mission when planning work in the western regions of the Solomon Islands in 1902. Remembering his past experience, it explains Brown's determination to try to avoid the conflicts of Samoa through well-planned cooperation and comity agreements.

3. *His relationship with people of the Pacific Islands*

Learning the local language of Pacific people was considered essential. (Sadly, these days few people make the effort.) Brown began well in Samoa, combining hours sitting by the public path talking with Samoan people with attention to existing documentation of the language provided by earlier missionaries. The layers of meaning and appropriate styles for particular contexts intrigued him and he became a fluent speaker and interpreter. In time also he gained serviceable fluency in Tongan and Fijian languages. Being able to communicate was significant to any relationship with the people of the place. In their home, George and Lydia Brown both spoke Samoan or a mixture of Samoan and English with their children, judging by the language of family letters. When Brown arrived in the Duke of York Islands and New Britain in 1875, the issue of language learning was more difficult. There was no dictionary or grammar to guide him, but again he found local informants and made a beginning on word lists and a draft translation of Mark's Gospel. (As one who has tried it, I can attest to the great challenge of attempting to learn a language of PNG without a detailed grammar or dictionary being available – years later you may still be fumbling.)

It was normal to have Samoan people in their home as household staff, playmates, church workers, present to share with the family in daily prayers. In rebuking a colleague who he believed was too withdrawn from the people, Brown urged him to cultivate 'those relations with the Natives in [his] own family or outside which are generally thought necessary to a Missionary's success and influence'.^{xviii} He was also critical of a LMS missionary who refused to receive the Tongan 'Native Minister' Barnabas 'Ahongalu at his table, which suggests

¹ John Garrett, *To Live Among the Stars*, p.230-231

that Barnabas, much respected by the Browns, was a welcome guest at theirs.^{xix}

In common with the missionaries of London Missionary Society, the Wesleyans relied on people of the place and other Pacific Islanders, in their case Tongans, to serve as local teachers and pastors. These men were given some training and then placed in sympathetic villages. Brown and his Tongan colleague Barnabas offered much of the basic training in the early years and Lydia Brown taught literacy and other classes for their wives. These people gathered for regular church meetings, and Brown travelled around the island network of villages associated with the Wesleyan Methodists at least twice a year. Lydia joined him on some of these extended journeys. He came to respect many of these Tongan and Samoan church workers and when tribal warfare became a way of life across Samoa over several years, he relied on them to work with him for peace.

Brown did not assume that the Samoan people were compliant to the will of the missionary. He was too experienced for that. He recognized strong wills, independence, complex allegiances and cultural imperatives. Perhaps he knew of the statement of the King of Tonga: 'The friends in England are not able to change the minds of the people of Samoa or Tonga, as to what religion they shall be of.'^{xx} In the midst of the on-going argument with LMS about whether or not they could be accused of 'sheep-stealing', he asked, 'By what law Independent, human or divine are they to be denied the right to choose their own Pastors?'^{xxi} He accused the LMS leaders of working on the assumption 'that the Natives could be parcelled out into Pens like so many Sheep or Cattle without any regard to their own feelings and inclinations.'^{xxii}

When it came to the question of the designs of several colonial powers on the islands of Samoa in the 1870s, Brown was concerned about the rapid sale of Samoan land to speculators and pragmatic about which nation would finally take control there, though he tended to favour the United States. Land sales into foreign ownership were done through a muddle of private, communal or ambiguous ownership with the result that that the time would come when land claims would amount to two and a half times the total land of the islands of Samoa.^{xxiii} It was his belief that it was unlikely that the often-warring Samoan chiefs would be able to take responsibility for their own government as they were, in his vivid turn of phrase 'a rope of sand', lacking the cohesion to provide the necessary strength for the task.^{xxiv}

However, he did have confidence in some of his islander Christian leaders. In January 1869, Brown traveled to the Wesleyan Methodist Conference in Sydney in an attempt to have a clear decision on whether the Wesleyans should remain in Samoa. With him went two Tongan ministers, including the imposing Barnabas 'Ahongalu. At a public meeting reported by *Sydney Morning Herald* Brown assured the Conference that these were "not picked men, there were plenty more of them, and the great hope of the missionary was in their agency'. If Brown had hoped to persuade the Conference to release him from Samoa, he failed, thwarted by the charisma and persuasion of his friend Barnabas. Brown spoke warmly of the 'great and glorious work' being done by London Missionary Society in Samoa and urged that, as LMS was doing so good a job there, it was time for the Wesleyans to consider new work in Papua -

‘there are islands to which he and others longed to go, and they would gladly receive the order’, he said. But Barnabas spoke next, through Brown’s interpretation, and swayed the house with his moving parable of how he and the pioneer missionary Peter Turner had planted a plantation, been forced to leave it, it became overgrown, and although he had returned and worked hard to restore it to fruitfulness he now feared being forced to leave it once more. With the sound of the loud and prolonged cheering still echoing, the Board could do no other than confirm that their work in Samoa ‘ought to be sustained in full efficiency’ despite the complaints of LMS.^{xxv} Barnabas the Tongan had had more influence than Brown the Yorkshire man over the decisions of the Conference.

In his dreaming over many years of moving to new regions in mission, Brown always assumed the presence and agency of Pacific Island people. In one of many letters to friends on the subject he wrote in 1872 that he did not think they ‘ought to keep up the old plan of crowding expensive Missionaries into a field. We must work more with Native Agents than we have done. You are doing the right thing in Fiji I am certain. I wish we could plant ten or twelve of your Fiji Institution men under the charge of some good Native Minister on Papua they would soon make themselves felt’.^{xxvi} When at last he was given permission to establish a new mission in New Britain, his first step was to recruit a team of men and their families from Fiji and Samoa. These people became very dear friends to George and Lydia Brown when they supported each other through the dangers, grief and isolation of that period. That story is told elsewhere. Other teams of island families would share in the establishment of new work in other island regions over the years. Where ever he went, Brown tried to engage with the people of the place, as missionary, explorer, anthropologist and photographer. Leaders of Pacific churches would be guests in the Brown home in Sydney in the years when George Brown was the General Secretary of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission Society until in their old age it was decided to build a place elsewhere in Sydney to accommodate the stream of visitors.

A long-running and acrimonious debate in the Methodist Church in Fiji between 1900 and 1905 gives an indication of George Brown’s attitude to the people of the Pacific in his mature years. The question was whether or not Fijian laymen could have representation on the decision-making bodies that dealt with the funds that they had raised, as set out in their new church Constitution. The white missionaries saw all sorts of dangers in this, possibly fearing the power of the chiefly system, and threatened to leave Fiji as a body if it were forced on them. In a number of settings, Brown made his own case. He pointed out that Tongan laymen had had representation for thirty years, and that Fijian ministers had for nearly as long. He wrote that ‘No man living can possibly have a higher opinion of our native ministers than I have...it was my privilege to work side by side with some of these brave and good men from Fiji... laboured together with our native brethren in all the varying circumstances of joy and sorrow, of difficulty and success...’ He suggested that proper representation in the administration of their church was quite different from the Fijian communal system of chiefly authority and concluded that in his opinion the best policy to pursue in Fiji

‘is that we should make our Church in Fiji the Church of the people of Fiji, that the people should feel that they do not belong to the church of the missionaries or of the people of Sydney or Australia, but that they and their

Church in Fiji form part of the great universal Church of Christ, and that they are responsible to God for its continued success... *Our strength as a Church will be in exact proportion to that of our hold upon the laymen of Fiji.*^{xxvii}

4. His interest in the world beyond Samoa

As with most things, the motivation that drove George Brown to press for new initiatives and new openings in islands far from Samoa was a mixture of Christian zeal and compassion, human curiosity and sheer frustration. By the early 1870s he was feeling redundant, misunderstood, misrepresented and that he was wasting the most valuable years of ministry. Perhaps if he had been happier, perhaps he would not have brooded over the possibilities of other, wider work for years, and pressed the idea on others.

By late 1871, George Brown was mentioning New Guinea and his ideas of a new mission in almost every letter he wrote. He was very interested in the initiatives of the LMS men who were making a beginning on the southern coast of Papua. To friends, relatives and Committee he wrote of his plans.

'No single Society can hope to take up that immense Island, FAR larger than Great Britain. Let us have a District marked out and let us begin with Native Teachers. Let also the *Wesley* do the LMS work at the same time... there would be no clashing in future... We could get Teachers from Fiji, Tonga and Samoa and one Missionary could go every year with one of the LMS...'^{xxviii}

A formal letter to Rabone, the general secretary, setting out his plans in detail was written on 14 November 1871.

Although he did not let anyone forget his scheme, another three years would elapse before George Brown was finally free to put his case to the Committee in Sydney. At last, on 9 September 1874, George Brown met the Committee. After years of inaction, when Brown presented his case in person, they listened. In his journal that day he wrote:

'I introduced my plan for a New Mission and advocated it to the best of my ability. It was most favourably received and I have full permission to [agitate?] the affair. May God help us all.'

The Committee was impressed. In their Minutes they recorded that changing circumstances made new plans possible and approved of the proposal, 'that the *John Wesley* do on her mission voyage pay a visit of inquiry to the Islands of New Britain and New Ireland.'^{xxix}

In establishing the new work, Brown demonstrated that he had not only the vision but also the gifts to plan workable strategies and put them into practice. When he moved into his new role as General Secretary for the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, he planned and established new other missionary initiatives. He took the lead in 1891 in gathering an astonishingly large team of 70 people, to establish a pioneer work in the Papuan Islands, off the south-eastern coast of Papua New Guinea.^{xxx} Ten years later, in June 1901, Brown explored new possibilities in the Solomon Islands and returned a year later in 1902 with a pioneer team of eighteen.

Why did the islands of Papua, New Guinea and the Solomon Islands in particular capture Brown's imagination? Was it that they were the only heavily populated regions not already marked out by the colonial and missionary aspiration of other mission societies? Was Brown as amateur anthropologist, linguist and explorer attracted to peoples whose languages, customs and manner of life had never been explored?

Why not other people groups? Despite repeated requests for help to minister to the thousands of Indian labourers arriving in Fiji, the Wesleyan Missions Board, with Brown, did nothing for fifteen years then sent a solitary woman worker in 1897.^{xxx} The same Board was criticized for ignoring the Australian Aboriginal people for at least seventy years.^{xxxii} This was at least in part because of the influence of Brown. His own focus was in the Pacific, with Polynesians and Melanesians, and it seems that he could be selective in the projects that claimed his interest and energy.

5. *His relationship with the Mission Board*

When George Brown visited the church Conference in Sydney in 1869, to be welcomed warmly, he apologised for being guilty of thinking that 'in times of trial and deprivation the missionary was forgotten and that the interest in missions and missionaries almost extinct.'^{xxxiii} There was, I think, a barb in the tail of that apology. Over the years he had good reason to feel abandoned. The Wesleyan Methodist Mission Board meeting in Sydney was a very long way from the missionaries in the field. Only some of the members had experience in the islands. Communication was slow at the best of times. Visits from Board members were rare. The mission in Samoa was a much smaller enterprise than either Tonga or Fiji with far fewer resources applied there. The Board consisted of good men with the well-being of their people at heart. Rabone and Chapman had served in Tonga, Firth had served in Samoa and Vickery was a wealthy industrialist with a generous heart but they were very remote from their mission staff.

Particularly in his early years in Samoa, George Brown was not well known to members of the Board. If they had been in Auckland, not Sydney, it would have been different; the Methodists of Auckland knew him well. But Brown had only visited Sydney in 1860, 1869 and then not until 1874, by which time he had become a source of anxiety to them. News from Samoa often came in letters critical of the presence of the Wesleyan Methodists from LMS, and personal criticism of Brown by both colleagues and opponents. At that distance, the Board found it hard to sift out the truth.

Brown himself became increasingly discouraged. His own general attitude was to obey the church leadership, even though it was often frustrating. In a difficult correspondence with a colleague he wrote 'You are a Methodist preacher and promised honestly and solemnly to obey the Australasian Conference ...Perhaps they are wrong, you at all events think they are but that doesn't at all affect the matter, so long as they rule, you as a Christian man pledged to them are bound to obey, *the responsibility they have told us over and over again is with them not with us...*' [My emphasis]^{xxxiv} As the years passed, he chose more and more to follow his own instincts, whether or not the Board approved.

One of the lowest points in Brown's experience was a period that lasted for over a year when he waited in vain for news of whether or not he had been censured by the Australasian Conference on the ground of criticism by others. Many months elapsed between visits of the mission ship with mail, and even then there was no news. He came close to resigning, believing that his ministry was over. At one point he wrote angrily 'We do feel so bitterly disappointed and hindered in every way... 'Tis no use my pretending to write you a letter tonight. I cannot do it. I am too vexed for one thing and so upset at getting no news again that I cannot settle down to anything at all. I hope that when we do get news it will be good news. ['when' is underlined four times, the rest twice!]^{xxxv}

Even after the decision, in his favour, had been made, all his correspondents assumed that someone else had told him the details.^{xxxvi} He learned later that during this period in Sydney his chief correspondent, Stephen Rabone, had been very ill and finally died in office, and that the other Board members were very distressed and distracted by this sad loss.

In the process of establishing the new mission in New Britain, Brown seems to have viewed the Board's decisions as suggestions rather than directions. At the Board meeting in February 1875 the Board decided to give 'discretionary power' to Brown to visit New Britain with the mission ship to make contact with tribes along the coast and to locate potential stations for island teachers. He was not to stay himself. Then, by April, news had come of the measles epidemic in Fiji and he was instructed to bypass Viti Levu and only stop at Levuka, so missing the opportunity to collect Fijian teachers for New Britain. By the July meeting of the Board, they dealt with a message from Brown explaining 'the grounds on which it had been decided to deviate from the last instructions of the Committee' and collect a team of Fijian teachers. The Minutes of that meeting add, perhaps a little grumpily, 'No action taken by the Committee'.^{xxxvii} Then of course he stayed on in New Britain area instead of returning as instructed. Following the killing of the Fijian workers in 1878, the Board was very agitated about Brown's role in the punitive raid and though he was exonerated it was not without controversy. He had again made his own decisions. When the Board agreed to send the new staff, newly weds Benjamin and Emma Danks, soon after the murders and punitive raid, on condition that they be located close to the Browns; Brown decided that that was a silly idea and was about to send them off elsewhere when other events intervened and they stayed with Lydia Brown.

From 1886, when he found himself in the shoes of the Board as General Secretary of the Mission, sitting in the office in Sydney dealing with the needs of mission staff scattered across the Pacific, he understood very well their need for timely information. Perhaps he also understood how many of them were people of very independent spirits who would often make their own decisions. And though he was not a good 'desk man', preferring action, he made it his business to travel to meet the staff face to face.

While in most circumstances he had a strong loyalty to the process of corporate decision-making by Conference and Committee, and did his best to participate fully in that process, Brown made it his policy to communicate face to face with those affected by those decisions, and to be fully informed about the situation in

the island groups. This meant constant travel and continued until he was an old man. In 1890, for example, he noted that he had spent a total of 16 days at home; the rest of the year he was visiting staff, dealing with issues at the source, counselling, debating, meeting with the key figures in conflict and building trust with staff and people.

An example of this style of working was when the Conference appointed Brown to attempt to resolve the conflict in the Wesleyan community in Tonga at the time of the secession of the Free Church of Tonga. Again, the groups with responsibility – the Conference and the Wesleyan Missions Committee – were far from the situation in Tonga, and struggled with various unsatisfactory options to try to solve the problems. Brown was appointed to attempt a reconciliation and in that context was described as ‘one of the toughest morsels’ on which they might chew. Although he had serious – and justifiable – doubts about the chances of success, he said that he was not ‘going to begin at this time of life to place himself in opposition to the vote of Conference’^{xxxviii} and spent a lot of time in Tonga over a three year period.

There are other influences on George Brown that have not been mentioned. The people who influenced his Christian faith, the colonial and trading community of his day, the scientific community, the reading and debate that shaped his thought on many issues. With our friend George Brown there is always more to explore.

ⁱ C.Brunsdon Fletcher, *The Black Knight of the Pacific* p.64-65, quoting Rev Lorimer Fison

ⁱⁱ Rev James Wallis, notes for his grandson, 1880

ⁱⁱⁱ C Brunsdon Fletcher, *The Black Knight of the Pacific*, p.65

^{iv} George French Angas, quoted in CW Vennell & Susan Williams, ‘Raglan County: Hills and Sea 1876-1976’ 1976, Auckland. P.50-51

^v Rev James Wallis, letter to Committee July 1842

^{vi} Wallis to Committee 21 Dec 1850

^{vii} ‘The New-Zealander’ December 1852. Piece titled “Wesleyan College and Seminary”.

^{viii} 1861 Letter from Martin Dyson to John Thomas, Methodist archives in London

^{ix} Rev William Fletcher, January 1855

^x August 1866 WMMS Missions Committee, quoted in Minutes of Executive Sub-Committee 22 Oct 1866 MOM CY Reel 354

^{xi} GB Journal 20 May 1868

^{xii} 20 May 1868 GB Journal

^{xiii} GB to Martin Dyson 28 August 1872

^{xiv} GB letter to Rev J. Nettleton, Ovalau, Fiji 10 Nov 1871

^{xv} GB letter to B.Chapman, 27 January 1874

^{xvi} Wesleyan Advocate 1875

^{xvii} John Garrett, *To Live Among the Stars*, p.230-231

^{xviii} Brown to J.W.Wallis 10 May 1871

^{xix} Brown to Dr Turner, 1872

^{xx} Letter of King George Tupou of Tonga to Wesleyan Committee, 6 January 1843 quoted in A.Harold Wood, *Overseas Missions of the Australian Methodist Church Vol.1, Tonga and Samoa*, Melbourne 1975 p.285

^{xxi} Brown to Frank Firth, 20 July 1871

^{xxii} Brown to Benjamin Chapman, 1 January 1874

^{xxiii} I.C.Campbell, *Worlds Apart: a History of the Pacific Islands*, Canterbury University Press, 1989, 2003 edition p.114-115

^{xxiv} Brown to Dyson, July 1872

^{xxv} *Sydney Morning Herald* 25 January 1869; Board Minutes 28 January 1869

^{xxvi} Brown to Nettleton, 10 November 1872

^{xxvii} Leaflet titled 'For Members of Conference only. A Personal Statement. By Rev Dr George Brown DD' 1905. 'The Fiji Constitution'

^{xxviii} Brown letters to James Wallis Jnr 7 Nov 1871, Austin, 7 November 1871, Frank Firth 10 November 1871

^{xxix} 9 Sept 1874 Meeting of Executive Committee of the Board of Missions. President of NSW Conference in Chair, plus Revs James Watkins, George Hurst, Benjamin Chapman (Sec. Of Society 1873-1881), Joseph Oram, Walter J. Davis, Francis Tait, James A. Nolan. See p.6-7 B.Danks, 'A Brief History of the New Britain Mission'.]

^{xxx} *Missionary Review*, June, August, October issues 1891

^{xxxi} A. Harold Wood, *Overseas Missions of the Australian Methodist Church Vol III, Fiji-Indian and Rotuma*, 1978 pp. 10-12

^{xxxii} Joseph Bowes, 'The Australian Aborigine', in *A Century in the Pacific*, 1914 p.172

^{xxxiii} SMH 26 Jan 1869 Report on Wesleyan Conference

^{xxxiv} George Brown, letter to Rev James Wallis Jnr; 10 May 1871, Letterbook Mitchell Library

^{xxxv} George Brown, letter to Austin, 3 June 1872

^{xxxvi} Sequence of letters from Brown to friends and to Committee in 1872-73. Letterbook

^{xxxvii} WMMS Board Minutes 22 Feb 1875, 14 April 1875, 25 April 1875, 14 July 1875

^{xxxviii} G Brown Autobiography p.429 (See chapter titled 'Tongan Affairs' p.417-461)