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**FREE METHODISTS IN COLONIAL
CHRISTCHURCH**

The Church, Community and Commercial Lives
of some Immigrants from Sunderland

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in History at Massey University.

William F. F. Thomas

2001

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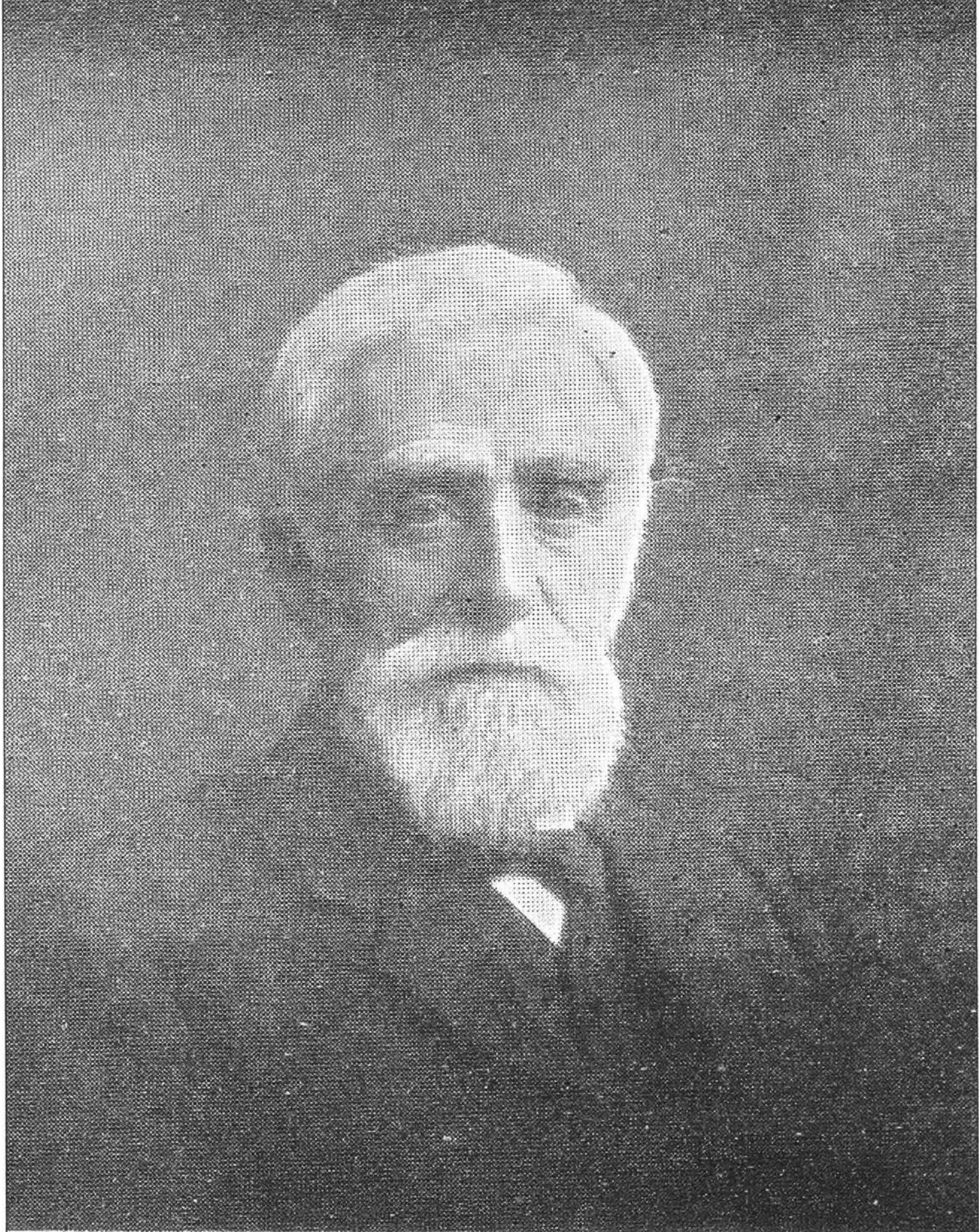
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The photographs of John Brown, Margaret Brown and the Addington Church on the following pages were copied from the *Souvenir Booklet of the Jubilee of the Addington Methodist Church and Sunday School, 1864-1914*, published by the Church Committee at Christchurch in 1914.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge those of my extended family who encouraged me to undertake this project and to hope that they find the family aspects of this study, as well as its context, a useful insight into our common history.



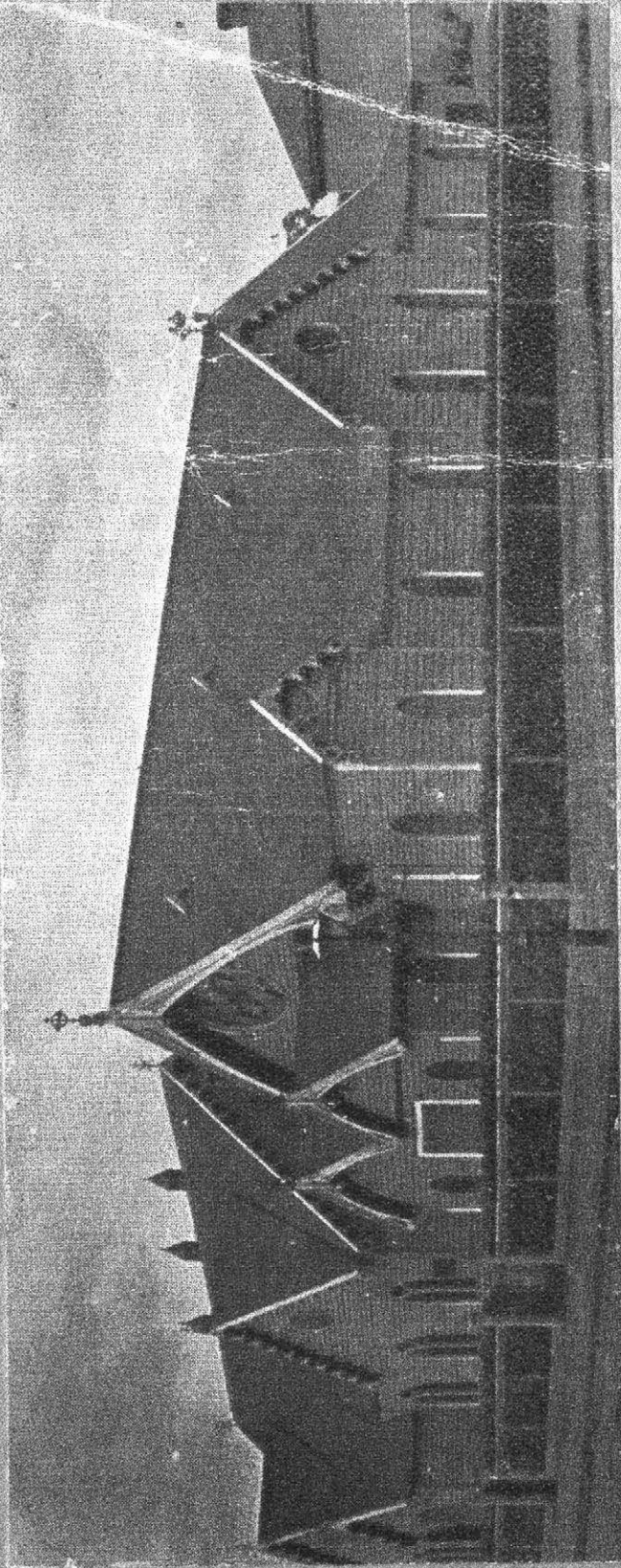
MR. J, T. BROWN.



MRS. J. T. BROWN.

Of the . . .

Addington Methodist Church And Sunday School



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INTRODUCTION

This thesis tells the story of a small group of immigrants to Canterbury from Sunderland, England in 1858 and follows their lives and the events in their community up to the time of the First World War. John Thompson Brown and his fellow-settlers belonged to an off-shoot of the Wesleyan Methodist Church – the Free Methodists. Their commitment to this denomination and its ethos and the influence of religion on their lives is a central theme in their story.

Life in pioneer society was hard. The environment made it so as much as anything and there were many privations. The sacrifices made by the early settlers and the generation of colonials that followed them were invariably perceived from the perspective of both material conditions and social values. A new community cannot be built without a vision of what that community should be like. This blend of the visionary and the pragmatic co-existed in the beliefs and actions of the early settlers and the colonials, and probably to the generations beyond. The values of the Free Methodists emphasised self-improvement and self-reliance and were supportive of the development of New Zealand as a Christian community. As with other denominations their church was a central part of their community which they fostered both spiritually and materially - a considerable commitment of heart and mind in the demanding colonial environment.

This thesis links church involvement to community and business activities, through the experiences of J. T. Brown and several of his friends. Brown was very active in all three spheres and the linkages between them reveal patterns of behaviour that illustrate the relationship of the spiritual and physical worlds and illuminate many aspects of colonial life. At the end some assessment of the influence on colonial society of these linkages and patterns will be attempted.

While religious beliefs and values are slow to change, the church as an institution in a developing colonial environment had to keep pace with societal changes if it

was to retain its relevance for members of that society. How the Free Methodists met this challenge is a central theme of this study. This includes an analysis of relations with the other Methodist denominations and a discussion of the growth of secularism and the Freethought movement, both pertinent to the changes required of the Free Methodist Church. The numerical growth and spread of Methodism are examined, but as a subsidiary to the main themes of this thesis. The raw data is contained in Appendix One, but extensive quantitative analysis has not been applied, as this is more a study of patterns of conduct than it is of statistical trends.

The number of churches built and maintained by the Methodist denominations, the number of ministers employed and the resources put into mission and pastoral services demonstrate a very considerable commitment by the members and the churches to which they belonged. This was valid and appropriate in a society that accepted Christian values as its spiritual and moral basis. The greater diversity of twentieth and twenty-first century philosophies and values and the exposure of Christian theology to scientific questioning can inhibit an analysis of the historical importance of religion and the church in colonial New Zealand. At one extreme it can start from an agnostic position, move to the viewpoint that religion is humbug and hypocrisy and end with the conclusion that Victorian society was a vast web of cant and megalomania in which respectability screened the abuse of political and economic power. At another it can assume that Christianity was the sole repository of social values, religion the main civilising influence on colonial society and the churches the bastion of good against evil. The reality is somewhere in the balance of conflicting perspectives.

This thesis is primarily a social history, initiated by an interest in the lives of my forebears and driven by a fascination with the pioneer setting that demanded so much of them and the ways they found to deal with the challenges confronting them.

In working on this thesis I have found the following observation from Rollo Arnold's essay *The Patterns of Denominationalism in Later Victorian New Zealand* a useful starting point:

While I believe that if we social historians are ever to get a worthwhile grip of our complex and diffuse subject, we must be continually sensitive to the presence of meaningful patterns, and find imaginative ways of explaining them in reporting our findings, we should, I think, always take our proposed patterns with a grain of salt. For social realities are perennially enigmatic, paradoxical, contradictory.¹