

THE GHOSTS OF GHOST CREEK

[Extracted from the Illawarra Mercury, 17th. September 1920

Written by Albert Elias Organ (son of Private William Organ, of the 28th. Regiment who had been stationed at the Wollongong Stockade between 1839-40]

THE EARLY DAYS

GHOST BRIDGE

Tales of the Pioneers

(By an old Resident)

There needs no ghost, my Lord
come from the grave,
To tell us this.

Shakespeare

On the road from Wollongong to Figtree, after the crossroads are passed, and at the foot of the hill below the residence of Mr. Herb Buckland, is a bridge which has a history dating to the early convict days of 85 years ago [c. 1835]. In those days there was a stockade on what is known as Signal Hill.

A detachment of the 28th. Regiment was stationed there guarding a number of convicts, some of whom were engaged in excavating that portion of the Belmore Basin, where the Illawarra Co's steamers now berth. Others were working on the roads in chain gangs. One of their favourite songs when working was "Britian never shall be slaves". At the time my father was Sergeant and acting Q.M.[Quarter-Master].

There was also a Stockade at the Cross Roads, Lietenant Otway being in charge. The prisoners located here were engaged in sawing cedar logs and road making. At Charcoal Creek (now Unanderra) was located another Stockade, where the prisoners were engaged erecting a bridge across the Creek and road making. My uncle [Private Thomas Organ] was in charge of the soldiers looking after this latter lot of prisoners.

All the soldiers were allowed a quantity of "Old Jamacia rum". The soldiers wives were allowed half the quantity supplied to the husbands, and each of their children one-fourth. Needless to say the husbands invariably drank the lot.

One memorable night the Lieutenant in charge of the Stockade at the Cross Roads, whilst under the influence of liquor, rushed the sentry and tried to disarm him. The sentry - being the better man put him in the guard room. Rather than submit to court martial, with the probable result of his sword being broken over his head, and dismissed from the service, the Lieutenant shot himself.

This was the origin of the ghost at what became known as "Ghost Bridge". After the death of the Lieutenant several persons avered that they had met him in bodily form at or near the bridge, but that he instantly vanished. In those days numbers of the local residents would not travel down the hill after nightfall, for fear they would meet the ghost.

On one occasion three gentlemen that had been attending a meeting at Wollongong were returning to their homes south of Wollongong late at night on horse-

back. When they reached the "Ghost Bridge" neither whip or spur would induce their horses to cross the bridge. The fears of the horses were soon transmitted to their riders. I have heard an old resident that had seen them both going and coming, say that their journey back was made at a much faster pace than the outward one, being somewhat after the nature of the famous John Gilpin ride. They spent the night at Wollongong, returning home in the early morning.

I lived with my father for some time near the Cross Roads, and we had as a neighbour the Rev. Mr. Kingdom, a Primitive Methodist Minister, whose Church was at Mt. Keira. Whilst sitting at night in company with that gentleman and my father, we have distinctly heard a horse galloping up the road. The sound started at the bridge, and continued up to the top of the hill, where it would cease, only to at once recommence at the bridge. This would be repeated several times. The Minister in question told us that on one occasion he was sitting on the verandah on a moonlight night, when he heard the sounds of a horse galloping from the bridge, and a horse with a man on its back rode up to his gate and then instantly disappeared. He also stated that on another occasion he was returning from Mt. Keira in company with his wife on a moonlight night when they saw a horse and rider in front of them, which suddenly disappeared through a 3-railed fence on Mr. Stewart's road boundary, where neither slip rails or gate existed.

If Mr. Kingdom were alive today he could verify my statement. Doubtless the probationary period of the Lieutenant's spectre ended years ago and he is now at rest.

This narrative is my remembrance of 56 years ago [c. 1864]. Existence of the stockades dates back 84 years [c. 1836], and "Ghost Bridge" goes back to 83 years [c.1837].

B: The memory of Mr. Organ is rather precise for such a long period previous. According to extant records Lieutenant Henry Maxwell Otway committed suicide at the Cross Roads Stockade on the 10th. April 1836. The sad story of Lt. Otway is also related in "Reminiscences of Early Illawarra" by Alexander Stewart].

Michael Organ

[The site of Ghost Bridge is now buried under the concrete jungle where Princes Highway crosses the expressway at the foot of Geard's Hill. No self-respecting ghost would now be seen dead there.-Ed.].