HENRY ANGEL, OF ANGEL’S BRIDGE, CORRIMAL

Henry Angel has twice been the subject of notes in this Bulletin (November 1975 and March 1977). Although after an early residence in Illawarra he spent most of the rest of his long life elsewhere, he is to be honoured as an explorer in his own right, quite apart from any local association. Well did he merit the friendship and support of Hamilton Hume, because Angel was one of the Hume and Hovell overlanding party to Port Phillip in 1824-5. Then when Hume joined Sturt’s expedition of 1828-9 and the Darling River was discovered, Angel was again of the party. He was the only convict on that venture not to be rewarded by a ticket of leave, the reason being that he had already had one, until it was cancelled on the recommendation of an Illawarra magistrate, Lieut. Fitzgerald, for alleged harbouring bushrangers. But eventually Angel received a second ticket of leave, and finally a conditional pardon. He had fully earned both. In later life he became a successful landholder. The full story has now been told in an article: Ronald S. Angel, “Life of a Pioneer, Henry Angel - 1790-1881”, which appears in the 1986 Journal of the Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society, pp. 22-48 (price $6.50 including postage).

On the authority of that article, some corrections to my note of March 1977 are due. In the absence of any notation in the Indent Roll of the crime for which Angel had been transported for life, that note passed on the Angel family tradition on the subject. This was that Henry was framed by a wicked uncle, but that on his deathbed the uncle repented and, having confessed the frame-up, Henry was exonерated and pardoned. Well, it was a good story, as is usually the case with family traditions; but research has now disproved it, revealing that Henry was properly convicted of a serious robbery on the King’s highway. The conditional pardon granted in 1840 was in simple recognition of what had become an excellent colonial record which remained unblemished until Henry died a few days short of what would have been his 92nd birthday.

Our Bulletin note also passed on the family story that Henry owned some land on the Tank Stream in Sydney, whence Angel Place seems to drive its name. This is repeated in the article under review; but it is highly likely that further research would disprove this; such a property would almost certainly have been unavailable to a convict who arrived so late in our history as 1818, and who would not become capable of owning property for many years later. Incidentally, the article does not state the personal details of Angel as disclosed in the Indent Roll, so it may here be recorded that Henry was a small man, 5’2” in height, with dark complexion and hair, and hazel eyes. He is described as a labourer. His age appears as 26, but this was his age at the time of conviction not transportation.

These, however, are trifling matters. The main point is that we now have the life-story of an important explorer-convict who was outstanding in the manner in which, by a good and fulfilling life, he expiated his crime and became a most worthy settler. Although the emphasis of his story moves out of Illawarra, we can fairly claim his early life for our community, as indeed we can for his wife because she was a daughter of John Booker, whose name survives in Broker’s Nose. The Wagga Wagga article is to be recommended as an interesting sidelight on early life in Illawarra and on its people.

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