



Historical Papers

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Some reminiscences of political and legal luminaries of a bygone age in the Mount Wilson/Mount Irvine District.

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William A. Holman (1871-1934) *Shasta Lodge*

If one stands outside the Yengo gates looking across Queens Avenue, the property to the right is *Shasta Lodge* and the property to the left is *Eastcote*. *Shasta Lodge* no longer has its name on the gate. Some 90 years ago, *Shasta Lodge* was purchased by William Arthur Holman, who was Premier of New South Wales from June 1913 to April 1920. He has often been described as New South Wales' most brilliant Premier. At the same time, *Eastcote* was purchased by his friend David Robert Hall who was, from April 1912 to June 1913, the Minister for Justice in the first Labor Government of New South Wales, the Premier then being James McGowan.

I can only touch in the briefest terms upon the careers of both of these men.

Turning first to Holman, it has been responsibly said by political historians that Holman and William Morris Hughes effectively created the Australian Labour Party as a political force in this country. Although both of them were driven from the ALP as a consequence of their support for conscription during the First World War, both of them, by reason of their outstanding ability and charisma, remained in positions of political leadership of coalition parties on the more conservative side of the political spectrum.

Because of the eminence of Hughes in the Federal political sphere, Holman's influence has tended to be overshadowed by Hughes' career. Holman was essentially throughout his career a States Righter.

Holman was born in London on 4 April 1871. Both his parents were actors and he had an older brother. Although an outstanding student he was apprenticed as a cabinet maker in London. However, motivated and encouraged by his parents he attended night classes and literary societies. He developed a fine speaking voice and became an insatiable reader. He is recorded as being tall, wiry, graceful and handsome with dark, curly hair. He developed wide cultural interests and mastered the French language, becoming a confirmed Francophile.

His family emigrated to Australia in September 1888 on the Orient Line ship, *Cuzco*.

Three years after arriving in Sydney, Holman joined the Labour Electoral League and threw himself into social and political reform in this State. Indeed it was about this time that he first met David Hall, and they remained close friends for the remainder of their joint lives. Holman is recorded as having been a brilliant fencer, and his political speeches often contained metaphors flowing from that now somewhat less popular sporting endeavour.

Despite his lack of formal education, Holman determined that he should graduate as a barrister because the growing Labor movement lacked supporters with legal qualifications. By a determined effort he was admitted to the Bar on 31 July 1903, at the age of thirty two.

Holman's biographers record that he was attracted by the romantic aura of the bush. In 1898 he was elected as the State member for Grenfell. At the time he was owner and manager of the local newspaper, *The Grenfell Vedette*. It was his practice to move about his electorate by bicycle; a practice he maintained even after he became Premier.

When the seat of Grenfell was abolished, he moved to the seat of Cootamundra and first won that seat for the Labor Party in 1904.

On 30 June 1913 Holman became Premier, leading a Labor government in the Legislative Assembly, but a conservative majority remained in the Legislative Council.

In 1916 Holman was expelled from the Labor Party with 17 other members of Parliament, and he formed a new government as the Nationalist Party.

In 1920 he lost his seat at the general election and thereupon ceased to be Premier of the State. He returned to the Bar and was involved in some notable litigation as a leading Counsel both in the New South Wales Supreme Court and the Privy Council in London.

However, the call to politics was strong, and despite declining health due to the stresses of earlier years, Holman resolved to obtain a seat in Federal Parliament. He obtained endorsement of the UAP – the United Australia Party – for the Sydney seat of Martin. He won the seat of Martin in the 1931 election. By this time however, his health was such that the old brilliance and energy had faded.

Whilst still the member for Martin, he died on 5 June 1934, having suffered a severe haemorrhage following a difficult tooth extraction. He died in his home at Gordon, and in the presence of his wife.

On 22 January 1901 Holman married Ada Kidgell. Ada was a journalist, and one of Australia's earliest feminists. She also wrote widely in fiction.

It is said that Ada Holman resented both the limitations to her own work consequent on being married to a prominent politician, and the demands on women to fill one role only, that of wife and mother. She believed women would be free when motherhood affected a woman's life only to the degree as parenthood does a man. A recurring theme to her stories was tension in marriage, as when a wife's interests were suppressed or ignored, or a woman married unwillingly from economic necessity or family pressure.

Publicly she was once asked to reply to the question: 'How to handle a husband'. Her response was; 'Not to be a doormat'. Her feminism was ahead of its time in criticism of unequal sex roles and sexist language.

Not surprisingly due to their passion for literature and Shakespeare in particular, when their only child, a daughter, was born in 1903 she was named Portia. In 1923 Ada took Portia to England for tertiary education. Holman, who was always beset by financial problems, remained in Sydney, continuing his practice at the Bar. Portia was taking Moderns at Cambridge, and it would appear that Ada remained for some time with her in England.

A perfect example of the family's passion for their Mount Wilson home can be found in a passage in Dr Evatt's study of Holman (a limited biographical study because it is mainly concerned with Holman's involvement in the creation of the Australian Labor Party). The author having referred to Holman's home at Mount Wilson being '*a frequent solace in the midst of strenuous work*' then quoted from the following letter which Holman had written to his wife, whilst she was in England:

'Beautiful weather, but the place is not so far forward as I expected. The lilac and wisteria is still in bud. I have lent the place to ... for next weekend, and to ...for the next. The one is a good friend, and the other is a good neighbour, but they will get the full benefit of the Spring. I didn't anticipate being able to go near it for some time. On the other hand, when we were there, the laurel hedge was in full bloom. I have not seen it before. I enclose a flower. They are full of honey. The rhododendrons and forsythia were flowering well, but the bulbs did not look so good.'

This letter could have been written in about 1923; perhaps as late as 1926. References are made to Portia when one reads of the participation of Australians in support of the Republic during the Spanish Civil War. I have seen references to her as *Dr Holman* and other references to her as merely a member of an Australian medical unit in a nursing capacity. I rather think, although this is only speculation, that she remained in England for the rest of her life.

After Holman's death, Ada was in precarious circumstances, and I would imagine that Shasta Lodge was sold upon his death. In 1947 she published *Memoirs of a Premier's*

Wife which has been referred to as ‘*the disappointingly anecdotal memoir of meetings with famous persons.*’ Ada died on 3 April 1949.

After William Holman’s death he was cremated after a State funeral from St. James Anglican Church in Queens Square, adjacent to the Supreme Court. His pallbearers included William Morris Hughes and his lifelong friend and neighbour David Hall.

The eulogy at Holman's funeral which was given by Hughes, contained the following moving passage:

‘He was not only a great orator, he was also a great debater. No man could marshal arguments and present them more lucidly and convincingly than he. In debate he was a model of courtesy. He never descended to personalities nor dipped the point of his foil in venom. His charm of manner, his felicitous phrases and the cogency of his argument, whilst demolishing his opponent’s case, left not a trace of bitterness, and this marked his relations with his fellow men in all things.’

One only has to look at the statute books during the period when Holman was Attorney-General and Premier to realise the great social reforms for which his government was responsible. They include, for example, the *Factories and Shops Act 1912*, the *Fair Rents Act 1915*, the *Workmen’s Compensation Act 1915*, and the *Family Endowment Act 1927*, with provision for invalid and old age pensions, and like legislation.

The avenue of liquid amber trees in Queens Avenue was planted by Holman. The wisteria, the laurel hedge, the rhododendrons and forsythia remain almost eighty years after he wrote that charming letter to Ada.

David Robert Hall (1874 – 1945)

Eastcote

As Holman was overshadowed by Hughes, so Hall was overshadowed by Holman. David Hall was born on 5 March 1874 in the Cooma district. His father was a road worker. The family moved to Forest Lodge in Sydney. Hall studied Law with Holman and Hughes, and was admitted to the Bar on 19 November 1903. He is then described as ‘dapper and enterprising, sporting a flowing moustache and displaying striking button holes’.

In 1901 he won the state seat of Gunnedah for Labor. His association with Holman grew into a warm friendship but he lacked Holman’s style and charisma. He moved to the Federal seat of Werriwa winning that seat in the federal election of 1906. However, at Holman’s suggestion, he resigned the Federal seat and moved back to the State arena and became Attorney-General during Holman’s Premiership. Like Holman he was expelled from the Labor Party in 1916; however, he remained as Attorney-General in the Holman Coalition government.

By 1920 he is recorded as ‘cutting a fine figure’. He has shaved his moustached and acquired a confident style. That is how he must have presented at Mount Wilson. As I have said, Hall purchased *Eastcote* from Marcus Clarke at the time Holman purchased

Shasta Lodge. He erected a home on the land and developed a garden which (as still can be seen) was of a more conservative style than its owner.

After ceasing activity as a politician in about 1920 he was admitted to practice as a solicitor, and from 1921 onwards he embarked upon what was to prove a successful legal career.

He maintained during that period an interest in social reform, in particular prison reform. He died in 1945.

Charles Herbert Currey (1890 – 1970)

Three Gables

Somewhat remarkably, two of the lecturers to whom I owe a significant and special debt during my years as a student of the Faculty of Law at the University of Sydney, were Dr Currey and Justice Frank Hutley. Dr Currey owned the property then named the Three Gables in Church Lane of which he was passionately fond. Indeed he was passionately fond of the entire Mount Wilson district. He bequeathed to us in 1968 a treasured publication *Mount Wilson New South Wales: Its Location Settlement and Development*.

Currey was born at Ulmarra, New South Wales. His father was a school teacher in the United States of America. Currey received, through his father's American inspired views, a deep sense of the democratic system of government and respect for the liberty of the subject.

In 1908 he began a lifetime association with the Sydney Teachers College where he was considered by the principal to be his best student. Moving to the University of Sydney he had a brilliant career in English and History. He later qualified in law and then ultimately attained the rare distinction of an LL.D. by thesis. His thesis 'Chapters on the Legal History of New South Wales' entered a previously unexplored field. Currey never practiced law, but lectured in Legal History in the Faculty of Law.

He was an active member of the Royal Australian Historical Society. When he was president, between 1954 and 1959, he is reputed to have had 'viperian' clashes with the distinguished historian M. H. Ellis.

He published many books, his most esteemed being his last, namely *Sir Francis Forbes* (1968) – a monumental review of the early social, political and legal history of New South Wales, which vindicated Chief Justice Forbes' constitutional position in his relations with Governor Darling.

He died on 2 March 1970 at Mount Wilson, his wife of 54 years surviving him. He willed half his residuary estate to the public library of New South Wales to endow the library's annual C.H. Currey Memorial Fellowship, to promote the writing of Australian history from the original sources. Very shortly before his death he sold the Three Gables. However he has bequeathed to us a lasting legacy through his written history of the village.

Francis Charles Hutley (1914 – 1985)

Robin Hill

Francis Charles Hutley resided with his family at Robin Hill in Wyndham Avenue for many years prior to his death in September 1985.

Hutley was born in Lithgow on 22 October 1914, his father practising as a doctor in Lithgow. He had a brilliant academic career at Sydney University, graduating Bachelor of Arts, winning the University Medal in Philosophy in 1935, and the University Medal in Law in 1939. He was admitted as a solicitor in 1941. However, in that year, he joined the Australian Army and served with great distinction between 1941 and 1945 as a member of an elite corps known as the Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs. That group consisted of distinguished anthropologists, geographers, colonial administration experts, lawyers and economists. The legal members included a young barrister named John Kerr. The group advised army chiefs on a number of matters particularly in the early years of the war, on the setting up of a military government, in the event (which of course in 1942 was considered a real possibility) of an invasion of Australia by the Japanese. It was rightly anticipated that in the event of such an invasion it would be essential that the military take over the government of whichever parts of Australia were not under enemy occupation. Hutley's role, in particular, was to draft the relevant legislation and regulations for the setting up and administration of a proposed military government.

Fortunately the invasion did not eventuate, however Hutley's work was of invaluable assistance in the setting up and administration of the military government in that part of Papua New Guinea which was not under Japanese invasion. It provided a foundation for the administration of Papua New Guinea after the termination of hostilities and assisted in providing a framework for independent government when it ultimately came.

The United States of America set up a military government for the administration of Japan in the immediate post-war years, and Hutley was an adviser to the United States Army in relation to the administration by the military of that country.

After the war Hutley commenced practice as a barrister at the New South Wales Bar and served as a Judge of Appeal between 1973 and 1984 when he attained the statutory retiring age of 70. Regrettably he died in the following year.

Hutley was passionately fond of Robin Hill and took a great interest in the affairs of Mount Wilson. His vigorous participation at meetings of the Mount Wilson Progress Association and his verbal jousting with Dr Currey added a certain vitality to local affairs for many years.

Among Hutley's many friends was Gordon Samuels, also a Judge of Appeal at the Supreme Court of New South Wales and, upon his retirement, Governor of New South Wales until this year.

On 6 September 1985 a valedictory address was delivered by Justice Samuels, as he then was, in the common room of the New South Wales Bar Association.

That address contained a delightful vignette which I quote:

'We became friends and stayed with Lee and Frank at Mount Wilson and saw something of Frank the father, a formidable spectacle which involved wholly unique methods of bathing small children, in which I clumsily co-operated, being at that time totally unversed in any activities of that kind. At some stage at Mount Wilson I committed some social solecism, the precise nature of which I never understood, but for which I gather I was ultimately forgiven.'

That address concluded:

'To me Frank was a loveable man whose absolute honesty and regard for the most rigorous standards of his profession I greatly admired. It is an honour to have had this opportunity of saluting his memory. I enjoyed his daily company, and life will be much poorer without him. All of us will miss him. And, truly, we may not see his like again.'

David Harold Meek

David Harold Meek practised as a Barrister at the New South Wales Bar from the 1920's to the 1950's. He purchased 125 acres in Mount Irvine, adjacent to the Morley's property. Apparently Meek suffered from 'shell shock' as a result of his participation in the First World War, and sought peaceful surroundings during weekends. He never married and visited the property each weekend with his mother and at times one or both of his sisters. The property (which is now named 'Yurunga') was sold to Cecil Kirk in the late 1950's.

Meek had served as a linguist in the Second World War and returned to practice at the Bar at the cessation of hostilities.

Meek did not have a distinguished career as a practising barrister, but became well known by reason his co-authorship of the '*Australian Bankruptcy Practice*', published by the Australian Law Book Company. That practice was co-authored by Macdonald, Henry and Meek, and was for many years the only practice book relating to the administration of the bankruptcy laws and, to that extent, his name was of frequent reference in the courts. After Meek's death the authorship of the practice was taken over by William Deane Q.C., who later became Governor General of Australia.

Meek was a rather diminutive man but his presence in Phillip Street was noticeable by reason of the fact that he always dressed in a morning suit.

It is interesting to note that it was he who named 'Danes Way'. The word 'Danes' came from the inability of one of his nieces, named Jane, to pronounce her name other than as Dane. When she approached the intersection of Mount Irvine Road and the track to Meek's property, she was heard to exclaim "this is Dane's way!". (I am indebted to Cecil Kirk for this delightful anecdote).

During Meek's residence at Mount Irvine the Fairclough family resided in Mount Irvine Road. A son, Peter Fairclough, worked at the sawmill. When a young lad, he

was apparently asked by Meek to clean the chimney of the house that still remains at Yurunga. It would appear that whilst Peter was in the process during the week of cleaning this chimney, his family was unaware of his whereabouts. During the cleaning process Peter's hat fell down the chimney, and in his attempt to recover it, Peter fell down the chimney and was unable to extricate himself. His disappearance prompted a search of the District which was unsuccessful until Meek arrived at the weekend and discovered the young lad trapped in his chimney. That chimney remains at Yurunga.

Meek sold the property to Cecil Kirk in the late 1950's and almost immediately thereafter passed away.

Meek is still remembered by Helen Naylor (to whom I am grateful for her recollections and assistance). As the young Helen Morley, she would take buttermilk through the bracken each morning to Meek when he was in residence. One of Meek's sisters was for many years the Chief Commissioner of the Girl Guides Association.

The walnut trees planted by Meek remain as a visible symbol of his long and peaceful residence on the mountain.

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