

# Preface

*"All the World's a stage,  
And all men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and entrances,  
And every man, in his time, plays many parts..." 1*

The story of Henry Hacking is one of a remarkable individual. After researching his life, I believe it is best summed up by William Shakespeare's character Jaques, in the play *As You Like It*, *Act II, Scene VII*. If William Shakespeare knew Henry, I'm sure his Henry's story would be one of his plays!

Henry Hacking's 'many parts' are not only those whose life cycles from infancy to old age, but also the many roles he played in his long and extraordinary life. Being illiterate, Henry couldn't tell his story in eloquent prose or seductive verse. We rely on official records and his contemporaries to inform us about his life and achievements. Being illiterate meant Henry's advancement in the Royal Navy was limited. Those skills were required to apply arithmetic, cartographic and recording skills to pass examinations for promotion.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the World **was** Henry's 'stage'. He had circumnavigated it and travelled to many places. Henry Hacking was a 'common man', or a '**mere player**' of his time who **played many parts**. Throughout his long and interesting life he was; a son, husband, father, sailor, soldier, pilot, landowner, explorer and a criminal. Henry was respected and despised; brave and cowardly; feted and forgotten; admired and condemned; and a character, well known in the communities in which he lived and served. Like the sailors of Ulysses' time, Henry was enticed by the '*song*' of a *femme fatale*. Governor Phillip Gidley King commented to Lieutenant Governor David Collins that (when Henry was in Sydney) he was "... *Lost here, by the Arts of woman*". Henry was a man, like any other, both strong and frail, but more importantly he was a man **of** his time and **for** his time, who played "*many parts*" in his long life.

We can't look at a person's life in the past through the prism of the present. A man's deeds cannot be judged *out of* the context of his lived experience in his contemporary society. Like many people during the early period of Australia's history, Henry was influenced by alcohol. He has been condemned as a drunk, but how can we call Henry a drunkard when:

- Rum was the principal currency and a large portion of society bought and trading it to enhance their prosperity?
- Drinking was the common behaviour of sailors on ship and land
- Alcohol and alcoholism was prevalent and commonly consumed by all levels of society and
- Alcohol was the fashionable *elixir* of its time that would soothe a broken heart, and when wracked with depression?

History is full of accounts based on important deeds, wonderful discoveries, the exploits of brave men and women and critical events that changed the course of history. Very few accounts are given of the *common* man and woman who laboured and served those whose elite status and articulate records attracts the attention of historians. Their stories are largely unknown and not celebrated. History *should* also be about the lives of common men and women, whose *everyday* and *ordinary*

lives shaped their future and our present. Their lives give meaning to ours and a purpose to events and times.

As we live and grow and sculpture our own existence, our fate is determined by both decisions we make and those thrust upon us by individuals or our society. Henry's deep love and affection for the young Anne Holmes shaped his future. She was the mother of his children, his strength and, when at the peak of his fame, his *Achilles' Heal*. Her young life, living in Yorkshire as a Yorkshire girl, would have assumed a life and future not dissimilar to those of her peers in York, but life for Anne changed when she made a fatal choice to steal from her Mistress and set in train the events that would remake her otherwise *predictable* life. How can we judge actions of desperate Anne whose class, status and gender in society were ranked at the lowest level? Anne, like many of her gender and station in society, was a product and victim of her times.

At a personal level, Anne Holmes (despite being a victim of the times and being the subject of contemporary national policies) was able to reshape her own life and influence colonial events. Henry Hacking, as a common sailor, made an important contribution to Australia and the lives of those around him. His efforts in *earning a living* enabled him to shape, not just his life, but also the future of a new colony.

Henry Hacking, when he became a sailor, would not have dreamed that a piece of a new continent would bear his name, nor that his life would create and destroy the lives of others.

This is a story is an attempt to emphasise and illuminate those lives. By understanding their struggles and achievements perhaps we can recognise and understand the forces and factors that shape ours. Henry and Anne lived in a time of change so powerful that its repercussions are still felt by our society today. The antecedents of our society had their roots at the time when they lived! In the same way, we are living through times of revolution and social change that others in the future may reflect upon as we do our ancestors.

We are all born and live in a community at a certain time; in peace, in war or in pandemic. Times shape people and people shape times. In Anne's time a symbiotic relationship existed between her class (the lower class of society) and the upper classes. Both needed each other to survive, but the relationship was less than equal, even though their need for survival was the same. Anne was born and lived through the Agrarian Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution was about to explode in a way that would affect everyone. The resultant social revolution that followed was taking place as she grew into womanhood.

Before, during and after Anne's time, England produced influential writers whose ideas helped to stoke the fires of social revolutions in France (1789) and America between 1776 and 1783. England, too, has its own revolutionary rumblings. Revolutions of this period had a commonality of causes: a downtrodden population who suffered oppressive social conditions and injustice. The '*common man*' was disenfranchised and subjugated. Monarchy, with its aristocratic oligarchies, lost touch with the sufferings of their subjects. High taxes were levied and often used to pay for wars in which the lower classes were expected to fight and die.

Just like French society, English society was also challenging the social norms and the rights of the aristocracy to rule. More than this, society was questioning the validity of human rights and how people are treated whether they be women, slaves, or the social underclasses. In Britain the promulgation and perpetuation of slavery was an economic necessity to 'grease the wheels' of production and validate notions of racial superiority. Its 'Triangular trade' was based on it as well as the wealth of all institutions, including the monarchy.

Humanist writers of the period such as William Wilberforce (abolition of slavery) Mary Wollstonecraft who lived for some time in Yorkshire, (*Vindication of the Rights of Women*) Thomas Paine from Norfolk, (*Rights of Man*) and before them Thomas Jefferson, espoused the rights of minorities and challenged the status quo. They lived through the same time period as Anne and Henry. Humanism is the term we use today to describe those ideals. Rights we assume today as being axiomatic of a fair and just society in those times were viewed as heretical.

William Wilberforce lived in Yorkshire just 50 kilometres away from where Anne was born! Just 10 days after Anne's Court trial William Wilberforce had submitted a petition in the House of Commons for the abolition of slavery.

Four days before Anne's trial, the *Sheffield Register* on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 1792 believed:

*"The African slave trade is certainly in a fair way of receiving a coup de grace – nor will it, we hope, be in the power of its most sanguinary advocates to repel the blow. -The voice of the nation is loud – and the table of the Commons is likely to groan under the load of petitions from every part of the kingdom- Consistently with the distinguished philanthropy of the inhabitants of Manchester, not less than 20,000 names appear to a petition from that town."* <sup>2</sup>

The petition contained 20,000 names from Manchester's citizens. The attempt to abolish slavery was in high profile in Yorkshire and Lancashire. It also included fundraising efforts to mount the case and names of contributors were published. One column across, notification of Anne's trial was listed. When the petition was delivered to the House of Commons, the petition took two hours to process. Slavery was eventually abolished in Great Britain in 1807 and throughout the British Empire in 1833.

In 18<sup>th</sup> century England, life for many people had not changed for generations. Shackled to the rigid social order, people resided in their village, performed the same job as their parents and lived a similar, simple and predictable style of life. The Agrarian and Industrial Revolutions began to change that continuity and thrust people into a new world of winners and losers, rich and poor advantaged and disadvantaged. *New money* from wealthy industrialists rubbed shoulders with the *old money* of the aristocracy. Britain's rigid class structure was a monstrous barrier to social mobility, but changes to agriculture and industry could influence social advancement and decline.

Sometimes people are content and stay within their shackles, but in many cases the shackles which we are given at birth are broken, by desire, ambition, or luck (good or bad). We move to a different place from the expectations of us at birth. We might want a better job, house, climate or level of comfort. We can break our shackles by making wrong decisions or acted in ways that result in our place and status in the world changing. We can set a personal course for advancement to achieve our goals of aspiration or we can have no control and become hapless victims of a world through which events change us forever.

This story looks at real people who have been affected by the society into which they were born. Their actions and judgements have influenced the course of their lives for better or worse. Who is to judge them? They lived, loved, contributed to society, procreated and died. In that process, in a small way, they contributed to their society as we all do. By looking at their experience and struggles, perhaps we can learn more about ourselves. What are our 'shackles'? Are we content to wear them or do we seek to break them as Anne and Henry did?

All humans are fallible and victims of their time. Henry's rises and falls in the eyes of others are those experienced by fallible men. Anne's one big mistake adolescence, like many young girls in poverty stricken circumstances, shaped her life.

When we look at Henry Hacking the man, the final stanza of William Ernest Henley's poem, *Invictus*, come to mind.

***“...It matters not how strait the gate  
How charged with punishments the scroll  
I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul.” 3***

Henry's had choices in his response to events which impacted him physically, emotionally and financially. His choices may have been limited at times, but in the great scheme of his life Henry Hacking's decisions, both good and bad, did make him the 'master of his fate'. Henry's luck was derived from his association with important and influential people in the colony and decisions he made in dangerous places. His 'fate' was also controlled by others who controlled the ships on which he sailed and those who judged him. Some believe that Henry was an angry and violent man and a drunkard, but this story hopes to give you, the reader, a chance to form your own judgement in the circumstances that prevailed in Henry's life during 18<sup>th</sup> century New South Wales. You can judge his soul.

This is the first part of his long and remarkable story. Other parts tell of his other deeds, adventures and relationship. No man is wholly good or wholly bad and Henry is like any man. This and the next stories tell of his tales of fame and infamy and the frailty and strength that made him a man to be admired. Henry was known to the most influential in the colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land. Governor John Hunter said Henry was *a man on whom I can depend*. Lieutenant Governor David Collins said he was *the most useful man I have* and before that as Judge Advocate Collins said he was *held in great estimation by the officers of his ship both as a man and as a seaman*.

Anne is one of the diaspora of young women who were forcibly transferred to a 'New World' and a new life. Her descendants today are the product of her remarkable success in a domestic life. Henry is a forgotten man of Australian History, but I hope telling his story brings some recognition of his achievements and contributions, both good and bad.

Only Henry and Anne know their thoughts and the conversations during their lives. In an attempt to expand on their characters, motives and feelings, my imaginings of those thoughts and conversations are represented here as well as the social context in which the events took place. For all its attempts to achieve objectivity, the telling of history is still subjective and relies on the dominant, British, literate accounts that have survived through time. I try to let the events of history tell the story and attempt to stick close to the documented facts as possible. Journals, maps, transcripts of official documents and Ship's Logs provide reliable sources for the recounting of their life stories and the events they experienced.

#### **Footnotes**

1 <https://poets.org/poem/you-it-act-ii-scene-vii-all-worlds-stage>

2 *Sheffield Register* on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 1792

3 *Invictus* by William Ernest Henley <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/invictus>