Henry Hickmott MLA

On 21 October 1914 Henry Edward Hickmott (pictured above with his wife Elizabeth and youngest son Arthur) was elected as the Member for Pingelly in the Western Australian Parliament, having defeated the Liberal Party incumbent, Nathaniel Harper. He was one of eight inaugural members of the Country Party of Western Australia that had been established by the WA Farmers and Settlers' Association (FSA) at its annual conference just two years earlier. The more progressive members of the Association insisted the new party operate as a 'third force' at the State and, ultimately, Federal levels, advancing its members' interests through negotiations on a case-by-case basis rather than by seeking a formal coalition with the Liberal Party. Concerned by the growth of support for Labor in WA's regional areas, the conservative elements of the FSA, who came from the same class as the Liberal elite, went along with the new approach even though many of them were ideologically pre-disposed towards coalition government.

The incoming Country Party Members were to be guided in their deliberations by the platform the party took to the 1914 election. This advocated a number of basic principles and policy positions – such as the sanctity of freehold tenure, importance of continued land

settlement and the extension and increasing decentralisation of the State's rural infrastructure – but provided little guidance on a range of other matters. This resulted in the new MLAs voting differently on occasions on various non-rural issues and taking stands on others that were closer to long-standing Labor than Liberal policies. In addition to reinforcing a growing perception that business in the Legislative Assembly over this period was both fractious and unpredictable, the practice of certain members speaking their minds and even praising the ruling Labor Government served to rankle the conservative wing of the FSA. This played out in the 1924 split which ended the Country Party's experiment with independence, and saw a number of its existing Members of Parliament, including Henry, lose their seats.

Henry's ten years as a politician, then, occurred in both interesting and testing times; times, moreover, that have many resonances with the state of politics in Australia (and beyond) today. These include: the growing disenchantment with the major political parties; the growing suspicion that Australia's two-party system of governance may not be the most appropriate for the times we are living in; the growing cynicism about the actions, interests and motives of party political elites and their advisers; and the growing public anger over the inability or unwillingness of the major parties to empathise with, let alone remedy or ameliorate, the every-day problems and pressures facing an increasing proportion of their constituents. Henry's particular experiences, and those of many of his colleagues, also raise a number of more specific concerns and questions for the modern reader to reflect upon. These include: should smaller political parties always remain independent; are we better served by amateur or professional politicians; and what is a reasonable and effective balance between a Member of Parliament's duty to his or her party and constituents?

1914-18: 'Dad gets the glad hand'

Henry was born at Mount Barker in South Australia in 1852, the youngest child and only son of Henry Hickmott (1825-1914) and Sophia Goldsmith (1828-c1853). These were married at Hackney in Middlesex in 1848 and, together with their two youngest daughters, Emma and Eliza, emigrated to South Australia the following year. They had a third daughter, Rebecca, in the Adelaide Hills in 1851.

Sophia died either during or just after Henry's birth and is probably buried at or near Mount Barker although the poor state of colonial records from this time has meant this has not been confirmed. Her older brother, John Goldsmith, is the 3xgreat grandfather of Kate Middleton, Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Cambridge. Henry's paternal grandfather, Samuel Hickmott, had been transported, along with his older brother Thomas, from Kent to Van Diemen's Land in 1840.[1]

Henry was 62 years old when he was first elected to the Western Australian Parliament. This earned him the sobriquet 'Dad Hickmott' which occasionally appeared, sometimes with malicious insinuations, in local and regional press reports of the time. The concerns expressed about Henry's age extended beyond newspaper editors. In a letter to the *Pingelly Leader* in the lead-up to the 1914 election, one of Henry's own constituents went so far as to question his vigour and energy in the application of his duties. This provoked the old gentlemen to fire off a response in which he suggested that 'Elector' and his lot should not so readily throw stones as: 'a visit to their homes and a glance at their surroundings would suffice to show you how vigorous and energetic they are'. As a general rule, however, Henry preferred not to respond to personal attacks although, as the above example demonstrates, he had his limits. An earlier, and possibly more telling provocation, occurred shortly after his initial election when he felt bound to take up space in the same newspaper in order

> … to contradict a silly and groundless rumour that is being circulated with reference to my nationality. Personally I did not intend to take any notice of such trash, simply treat it with contempt. But in the interests of my supporters and members of the F. and S. Association, I think it only right that I should give these rumours an unqualified denial. I am thoroughly British on both sides, and claim to have as pure British blood coursing through my veins as any man in the British Empire (*Pingelly Leader*, 5 November 1914).

It is not clear exactly what Henry's detractors were getting at. Were the rumours about his ancestors or those of his wife, Elizabeth, who was of Welsh origins but may have been thought to be Irish, or something else entirely? We will probably never know although one

[1] The story of Samuel Hickmott and details of Henry's other ancestors and descendants is contained on my 'First Families' website at http://www.graemecheeseman.com/firstfamilies.html.

possibility is that someone had got wind of Henry's convict heritage. Exactly twelve months after Henry's impassioned letter, the *Pingelly Leader* informed it readers of 'a joke' that was 'going the rounds of Pingelly concerning our district member [and] the Governor'. Apparently Henry was introduced to the latter during a stopover the WA Governor made on a railway trip to Narrogin. 'After exchanging the usual courtesies with Mr. Hickmott', the article continued, 'Sir Harry jokingly remarked: "Oh, you're an Englishman and left your country for your country's good!" Mr. Hickmott, misunderstanding the remark innocently replied '"Yes", greatly to the amusement of his friends, who did not fail to barrack him about it afterwards' (6 November 1916). Again this incident seemed to stem more from one or several misunderstandings than any hard evidence. They alert us, however, not only to the peculiar sense of humour of the privileged classes, but also to the fact that just as some immigrants to the colonies took the opportunity of a change of scenery to refine or even re-invent their identities, so, too, did some of those selectors who later moved from one side of the country to the other.

Like the majority of his Country Party colleagues, Henry had no previous Parliamentary experience although, as the letter below indicates, he was said to have served in various Council roles during his long time in country. Henry had also been a member of the Brookton Branch of the FSA since its inception and served as its president in both 1913 and 1914. It seems he did not actively seek to run for the Legislative Assembly but was cajoled by his colleagues in the FSA to do so. Their reasons for supporting Henry were spelt out in the following letter written by the Branch's Secretary and duly published in the *Pingelly Leader*:

> Mr. Hickmott is a successful farmer in the district, whose whole interest is centred in agricultural pursuits. He has been a resident for some years and a member of the local Branch of the Association since its inception, and has been elected President for two years in succession. Mr. Hickmott is a good platform speaker, commanding the respect and attention of his hearers and has had wide experience in Roads Board matters in Victoria, having been connected with the Kerang Shire Council as a representative man, and also on various Boards in that district. He has been asked to stand for Parliamentary honors in the Federal House, but has always declined.
> We trust that when the members come to the point of selection that Mr. Hickmott's claims will not be overlooked. (10 September 1914)

In his own pitches to voters at this and subsequent elections, Henry readily acknowledged his brief time in the West, and sought to counter this by emphasising his long association with farming pursuits in Victoria and the experience and insight this provided on matters ranging from irrigation and water conservation to the rabbit menace. As the following report in *The Northern Times* illustrated, Henry's broad experience together with his generally pragmatic and straight-talking approach to dealing with rural issues seemed also to impress his Parliamentary colleagues as well as some of those who watched them:

> The [parliamentary] discussion drew out most of the new Country Party members, and discovered a tower of practical good sense in Mr. Hickmott, who unseated Mr. Nat Harper at Pingelly. First impression was unfavourable, and the word passed round that 'Dad' would provide no little amusement for a tired House; but he completely captured the whole House by his maiden speech, striking the note in opening: 'Which farmers do you think will suffer most by the fixing of the price of wheat, those who have a little to sell or those who have a lot to buy?' His simple references to his several experiences of drought In Victoria and here more than justified his contribution to the debate (16 January 1916).

Henry's speeches and public utterances reveal a person who saw greater merit in pursuing private rather than state enterprises, was a passionate advocate for the development of a strong agricultural industry in Western Australia, and firmly believed the policies of present and past governments alike had continued unduly to favour centralisation over decentralisation (or the city over the bush). These views were shaped in large measure by his own experiences (which are detailed below) and those of the rural communities he had lived and worked in. They were likely to have been reinforced by his grounding in a trade, and his membership of a dissenting religion, one that valued, honesty, diligence, self-sufficiency and due reward for hard work.

While Henry's views were conservative in nature and generally consistent with those of many in the Liberal Party and the conservative wing of the FSA, they were not ideologically-based. As the following discussion illustrates, he was at heart a political realist or pragmatist who was prepared to speak his mind and work hard to better the lot of those he represented. Together with many of his Parliamentary colleagues, Henry also stood by the notion of an independent Country Party and was happy, where it was warranted,

both to work with and acknowledge the efforts of others - including Labor Government Ministers - who were prepared to help his and adjoining electorates. Thus, in a speech given at Bunbury during a tour of the region in March 1915, Henry:

> … instanced his own experience in drought times in Victoria and South Australia. He stated the legislation was very similar to that prevailing in the sister States, including the mortgage clause. He pointed out the difficult position they, a party of 8 out of 50, occupied in the House, and the fact that the Liberals were so seldom there in force they could never have a voice to dictate as had been suggested, besides in a House that was largely sympathetic to their troubles, what good could be gained by getting up and ranting in the House. They had given … between 80 and 90 speeches—some of them very short tis true: many of them long—but he thought out of a session of 31 sittings that showed that the Country Partyites were not asleep. (*Southern Times*, 18 March 1915)

He expanded on some of these themes in a speech at Brookton the following month:

> … the farmer had been satisfied neither with the Labour Partv nor with the Liberal Party. The latter party … had been almost wholly concerned with vested interests. Their idea had been to build up the cities and the secondary industries. The former party had its greatest thought for the workingman. The Country Party … [moreover] had a charter … not to be allied with either of the other two parties. Looking back he claimed that the party had allied itself with neither. … [he then argued that when Labor came to power] it was of no use the Country Party allying itself with the Liberals ; they were not in power, and consequently could do nothing for those whom the Country Party represented. The Country party carried out the pledge they had given to the people, and did the best possible for the farmers. While many were squirming and squealing at what the party had done, he thought it had the great majority of the people with it (*Kalgoorlie Miner*, 30 April 1915)

Three issues at which Henry and all of his Country Party colleagues were at one, concerned military training for the young, support for the war, and the need for conscription although there is some evidence his arguments in support of the war were perhaps more thoughtful and nuanced than those proffered by many others among society's leaders and opinion-makers. In May 1915, along with the Reverend D. Davies Moore, Chairman of the Board of Brookton State School, he attended the local Empire Day celebrations. The programme, according to the indefatigable *Pingelly Leader*, 'comprised in the first place addresses on the British flag, stress

being laid on its grand old traditions— justice, equity and right'. Later on, the report continued, 'the senior classes recited various poems, in which they brought before their [highly delighted] hearers the chivalry of the old "sea dogs" such as Drake, Nelson and others'. After recess, the children were introduced to the Reverend Davies Moore who subjected them to a speech the report of which is worth repeating in full. The future our great Empire, Davies Moore insisted, now:

> … hung in the balance, owing to the war, and its result would decide whether the Empire would exist or be destroyed; … if the Empire fell the English language would not be permitted to be spoken. That would be one terrible result if victory did not rest with us or with our allies. They had offered prayers for the safe keeping of our sailors and soldiers and for victory. Their heart and interest was in the war. He hoped they would not let their interest flag because the war might be long and drawn out. They must pray to keep up their interest. The war was not simply a great war against material force and German culture, but a war against "superman" but which really was "superbeast". They must take an interest in the war and pray to God to give them the victory. They wanted to be true and faithful, not recreant or cowards.

To his credit, Henry eschewed the opportunity to join Davies Moore in his crusade, and simply reminded his listeners that Germany's decision to invade Belgium, thereby precipitating this 'terrible war', was contrary to the provisions of a Treaty they had signed in good faith in 1839. He wanted, Henry continued, the students 'to look at the question from their own standpoint … Whatever little agreements the boys and girls present made between themselves in their games, they should stick to. They should stamp reliability on their character, then they would be looked up to, esteemed and recognised, as being reliable; then their friends would recognise them as being trustworthy in their dealings'. Citing the Irish political theorist, Edmund Burke, Henry added:

> Though we were not compelled by the British Parliament to help the Mother Country, yet through our kinship and our great love, we were giving our sons and produce to assist them in the great struggle. This proved that we were bound together by sentiments of love and friendship. He trusted they would cultivate this noble trait in their heart, and character … and hoped they would remember the moral of his story and always let their word be their bond.

Henry's remarks with its academic references and pre-Wilsonian internationalist sentiments were quite remarkable especially when

viewed in contradistinction to those made by the, presumably, theologically-trained Davies Moore. Yet Henry had no formal education. His obituary suggests he undertook private schooling in South Australia although this is unlikely given he and his family travelled from that colony to Clunes in central Victoria when he was only four years old. In her book, *I Loved Teaching*, Frances Elliott, the teacher of his children at the town of Lalbert in central Victoria, recalls him as 'a Councillor who had never attended school, and yet could write a very good letter. Having a stepmother, he had to go out and earn his living at an early age. He told us that the different people he worked for were always very willing to help him in his willingness to learn. He made a very satisfactory adjudicator [she concluded and] ... later became a Member of Parliament in Western Australia'.

Henry learned about brick making from his father, Henry Hickmott senior, but as far as we are aware, had no formal training or accreditation in the trade. At Clunes and East Charlton, to where the family moved in 1872, Henry would have helped his father in his brick-making business - which fell into financial troubles in both places – as well as on the farm Henry snr had acquired at nearby Wooroonoke. In addition to some good times, the early settlers around Charlton were also confronted by the droughts, dust storms and rabbit plagues that were a feature of outback life and made it difficult for many of them to fulfil their licence requirements. As the *East Charlton Tribune* reported on 27 July 1878, returning a profit was made more difficult still by the absence of any rail link to the area. This placed the farmer 'at a great disadvantage [since] when produce has to be carted fifty or sixty miles, it leaves a very small margin for profit after all expenses [such as] the wear and tear of wagons and other vehicles used for the conveyances' are paid for. The main problem that faced the early settlers of Charlton, however, was obtaining a reliable water supply. In the drought years, water had to be carted from surrounding rivers and lakes, and families would have to do their washing at communal washing points such as the 'Sheep Wash Dam'.

The hardships facing the Hickmott family were compounded on 14 February 1877 when Henry's stepmother, Harriet Hickmott nee Waters, and his 19 year-old younger brother, Samuel Hickmott, were struck by lightning on the front step of their home at East Charlton and killed instantly. Two months later, our Henry married Elizabeth

Ann Owen (1855-1923), the sister of his good friend and cricketing colleague, John Richard Owen, at Kingower near Bendigo. Elizabeth was born at Emerald Hill near South Melbourne in 1855. She was the only daughter of a Welsh couple Edward ('Taffy') Owen, a miner, and Elizabeth Evans who were married at Liverpool in England in 1849 and emigrated to Victoria a few years later. While in Victoria, Elizabeth and Henry would have twelve children, eight of whom would later go with them to Western Australia.

After their marriage Henry and Elizabeth lived at Charlton where Henry continued to help on his father 's farm as well as work as a brick maker and builder. In 1881 he had an application approved for the lease of a block of land at Charlton West. On 6 December the following year the *East Charlton Tribune* informed its readers he had sold 30,000 first class bricks to the builder R. Westacott in preparation for leaving Charlton. Henry stayed on, however, forming a brickmaking and contracting business with his half-brother James John Hickmott (1854-1935). In 1885 the two brothers each had built (by Westacott) a four-roomed brick house on Camp Street in Charlton, 'directly behind Foreman's Mill'. The houses were, the leader writer for the local newspaper suggested, 'additional evidence of the increasing development of the rapidly rising town of Charlton which, at the present rate of progression, promises to become a large and populous provincial centre of activity' (*East Charlton Tribune*, 25 March 1885).

In January 1886 Henry and James undertook a contract for the Korongshire Council for the 'forming and metalling [of] about 20 chains in High and Halliday Streets in Charlton, and making two chains of footpath and kerbing by Ogburn's'. The contract earned them £227 10s. In March the same year Henry gave a 'short but stirring speech' at the local Wesleyan Church on the occasion of the retirement of its minister, the Reverend E. Taylor. Henry's civic duties were expanding as were his business interests. In October 1887 he began selling 'colonial salt', obtained from Lake Kunat Kunat near Echuca, on behalf of his brother-in-law Joseph Smith (1832-1926) of L'Albert. On 1 June 1888 Henry and James dissolved, by mutual agreement, their business partnership. The *Victorian Government Gazette* shows that on 22 February 1889 the Victorian Railways issued Henry with a contract 'for excavating a tank at Barrakee' for £186. In the previous month the local land board approved his application to lease a 227-acre block of land (block no.

103) at Buckrabanyule near Charlton (his application to lease a further block (no. 887) at East Charlton was not approved). On 23 October 1889 the same land board refused to grant an application by Henry to transfer the lease of his block at Buckrabanyule.

Not long after this Henry sold his farm at Charlton and moved his family northwards to the Lalbert district where his older sister Rebecca Smith and her family had lived since moving there from Bungeeluke North. They lived initially on Rebecca and Joseph Smith's 186-acre block of land located on the eastern side of the town. The Hickmott and Smith children made up the bulk of the early pupils attending Lalbert School No 2990 that had opened on 18 March 1889. From 1895 the locals began agitating to have the original school moved to a more central location. In a communication to the Department of Education in that year, Henry wrote on behalf of the community: 'I beg to inform you that the parents have agreed to erect a building on the site proposed ... Building to be twenty-six feet by thirteen. Eight feet walls, iron roof. Hardwood floor. Walls of Bush pine ... two windows, one door, spouting all around and lined and ceiled throughout'.

The Department agreed and the relocated school was opened on 1 April 1895, operating initially in conjunction with School No 2583 at Tittybong. Eighteen months later the school was transferred again, to the Mechanics Institute in the Lalbert township, and, from 1901, began operating independently of Tittybong. Even then, the Hickmott and Smith families accounted for seven of the twenty-member class. By this stage Henry and his family were living on their own block of land at the far end of Joseph Smith's allotment, some three miles east of Lalbert. Close by was the property of Samuel and Frances ('Fanny') Free whose eldest daughter, Frances Alice Free (1891-1979), would marry Henry and Elizabeth's son, William Henry Hickmott (1887-1976), in 1910.

During this time Henry continued to contribute to the life of the local community, conducting road works in and around the township, overseeing on behalf of the council engineer the clearing of Mallee scrub from the area, and serving for a time both as a Trustee of the Lalbert Cemetery and Chairman of the local Vermin Board. In 1905 he was elected onto the Kerang Shire Council, representing the citizens of its North-West Riding. A perusal of the *Kerang New Times* during this period shows that he pursued his Council duties with

some endeavour, seeking relief for farmers whose crops were destroyed by hailstorms, calling for stocks of seed wheat to be kept in place to cover emergencies, and arguing for more effective means of controlling the ever-present rabbit menace. He even found time to invent and patent a 'pug mill' for use in brickmaking. This was described in advertisements placed in a number of newspapers, including the *West Australian* on 11 December 1896, as follows:

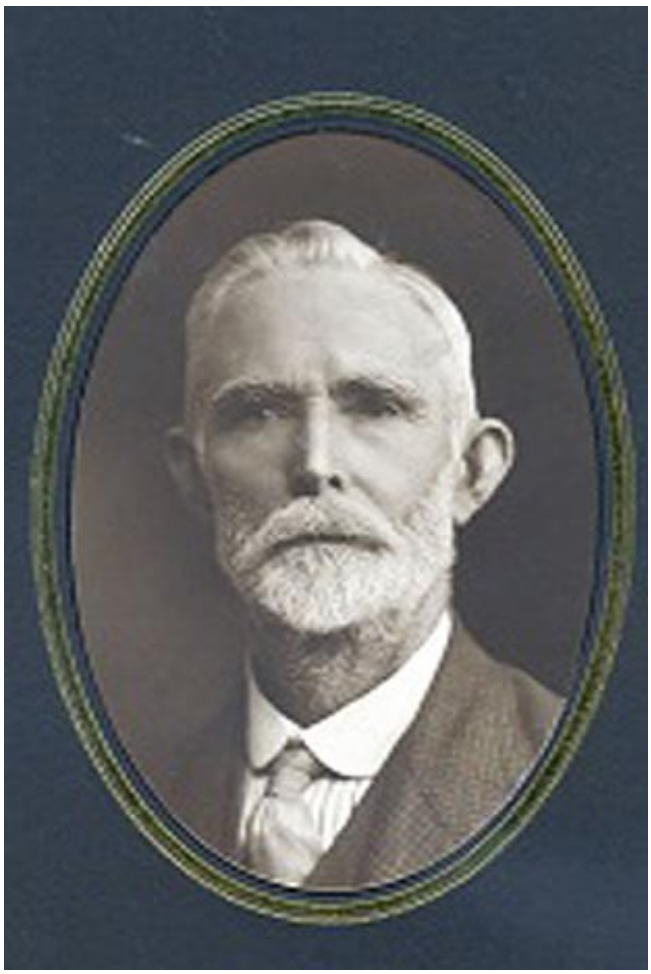
> This pug mill is for the purpose of affecting a uniform consistency to the clay before it is moulded for brickmaking, and by this invention the clay is thoroughly mixed. I obtain this valuable result by securing knives to the vertical shaft of the pug mill, and these knives revolve almost immediately over and above a fixed plate, which is meshed … the action of the knives is to force the clay through these meshes. After the clay has passed through the upper mesh it is subjected to a pulverising treatment by means of vertical revolving pegs or pugs, which are secured to horizontally revolving arms bolted to the central shaft. The clay is afterwards again forced through another meshed plate, and is ready for moulding into bricks. I may use any number of meshed plates and knives to suit the nature of the different clays. A better and more consistent brick is obtained by pugging the clay with this invention; also the brick is more dense and solid.

It is clear from this brief survey that Henry's approach to his parliamentary duties, together with his character and basic beliefs were influenced by his and his family's experiences as well as those of the communities they lived in. Conscientious and hard-working, he was largely self-taught, sought to make the most of the opportunities that were afforded him, and, where things didn't work out to his satisfaction, was prepared to look at alternative options or seek opportunities elsewhere. His training and skills as a brick maker and contractor meant he worked in the 'real world', dealing on a daily basis with a range of different people and problems, the latter usually within constrained circumstances or timeframes. Like all responsible and successful artisans, he would also have learned very early that honesty and reliability was always the best and wisest policy.

Henry's honesty and straight forward approach to life and work was clearly valued by many of his constituents. After he had delivered a 'very interesting address' to a well-attended meeting held at Stony Crossing in the lead-up to the October 1917 election, for example, a

> Mr E. Holdsworth moved a vote of confidence in Mr. Hickmott, and in, doing so said, that although he did not support Mr Hickmott at the last election,

he intended to do so on this occasion as he had proved himself to be a, good, honest and reliable member during the three years he had been in Parliament. The motion was seconded by Mr C. Bowring, and supported by Mr R. Robinson, who both testified to the integrity of Mr Hickmott, and the motion was carried unanimously (*Pingelly Leader*, 27 September 1917).



Such plaudits were not restricted to constituents and FSA Branch members. Henry's Parliamentary colleagues from both the Government and Opposition also spoke well of him. Even the Socialist-leaning *Westralian Worker* found favour in its 1918 overview of 'Personalities at Parliament': 'Hickmott is the oldest man on the floor, and perhaps the most respected. Rarely speaks, and is not effective when he does. His knowledge has been gained through a long life travelled on a hard road. As honest as the sun, Dad gets the glad hand' (6 September 1918).

A second and no less important determinant of Henry's actions and beliefs was his membership of the Wesleyan Church. As a warden of the Church and sometime lay preacher, he would have been familiar with the messages and teachings of the Bible as well as key Wesleyan sermons and texts. Among the principles stressed by this corpus of knowledge were: the importance of reason, personal experience and service to the local Church and its supporting community; a preference for forms of leadership that are earned rather than bestowed; and the idea of 'unity in diversity' which recognises the intrinsic value of all individuals and counsels respect for different cultures, races and perspectives.

We see these principles operating in a representative sample of his official activities between the years 1916 and 1918. At a dinner at Stony Crossing held to farewell a Mrs Davey, Henry stated that while he 'had not known the departing guest intimately, he had often heard of the excellent qualities possessed by her, and also by her late esteemed husband … he was sorry such a good woman was leaving their midst and trusted that after the hard battles of this life were over, she would be welcomed with "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (*Pingelly Leader*, 24 August 1916). Opening a fete organised by the local Methodist Church some twelve months later, Henry declared how delighted he was 'to see so many different denominations represented, and felt sure it was a real Christian spirit … [one that] was particularly beneficial in country towns (*Pingelly Leader,* 11 October 1917). In his opening remarks at the Marwonga Red Cross Carnival on Xmas Day the following year, Henry informed his audience it was his usual practice:

> … to spend Christmas under the parental roof, but he was pleased to be able to sacrifice that pleasure to help on such a noble cause as they were working for that day. In his opinion it was a fitting way to commemorate the birthday of the Redeemer of Mankind. Christ, when upon the earth, went about ministering to those in need, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind and helping all in need. Today the Red Cross Society was carrying out that work as far as lay in their power. He hoped all would do their best to help on the cause (*Pingelly Leader*, 10 January 1918).

Having said this, there is no evidence that Henry's expressions of faith verged far in the direction of proselytizing or evangelism. At a Methodist conference in Perth in February 1920, he did speak in

favour of the Church's Home Mission program as a means of helping keep 'the outback community in touch with God … in order that they could live so as to enter Heaven'. On travelling 'through his apportioned district', Henry added, 'the church-going and church-working men and women he discovered were but few', and warned that 'the need for good men to open up Sunday schools and the like was a pressing one, for the spirit of utilising the Sabbath to carry out more work than was done during the whole week was growing and needed combating'. He also called on more to be done to encourage those 'many' returned servicemen 'who hung about town indulging in liquor and other things' to join the ranks of their fellow soldier settlers (*Daily News*, 27 February 1920). This last suggestion, which had been applauded by his audience, attracted the ire of 'The Critic' in Perth's *Truth* newspaper (possibly a returned man himself) who lamented: 'Those brave ba-boys! How their stock has slumped. Any tin-pot politician can stigmatise them as drunken loafers now-a-days' (6 March 1920).

Overall, Henry's approach to religion seems to have mirrored his approach to politics, one that was less philisophically as practically oriented and took into account the constraints and realities of every-day life. One great advantage of his faith, of course, was the connections it gave him to the religious communities in his electorate. It may have been so that the number of church goers in his electorate was small, but so too was the number of voting constituents overall (2, 281 in the electorate of Pingelly in 1921). Anything that afforded him a few extra votes would be handy, especially in the electoral battles to come.

Given his background and experience, it should come as no surprise that Henry's focus, and strengths, as a politician operated more at the electorate rather than the State or Party level. He was a relatively conscientious attendee of the numerous and occasionally very long sittings of the Legislative Assembly that characterised the term of the Scaddan Labor Government in particular. As the item from the *Westralian Worker* cited above noted, however, he made very few speeches and, when he did say something, it contained nothing of great import. He seemed unaware of and had no interest in the theory or history of politics, neither practised nor seemed interested in inter-Party or factional intrigues, was not cursed with the unbridled ambition and sense of self-importance that characterise many politicians both then and now, and continued to speak his mind

even though it occasionally drew the ire of some of his constituents or FSA colleagues. Perhaps because of his age and somewhat unique approach he seemed to be both liked and respected by many of his Parliamentary colleagues and was able to gain ready access to Government Ministers and their bureaucratic advisers.

This last attribute was particularly useful in his role as the elected representative of a large rural electorate that was suddenly confronted by straitened times and circumstances. As J. R. Robertson describes in his article in *Historical Studies*[2], the Country Party made its debut at a time when commerce was being disrupted by the onset of the First World War, increasing numbers of rural workers were enlisting in the First AIF, and the Western Australian wheat belt was in the throes of a severe drought which saw growing numbers of farmers struggling and in need of government assistance. As Robertson argues, the agricultural crisis in particular, coupled with Labor's small majority in the Assembly, was conducive to Labor-Country Party cooperation. It also favoured politicians like Henry who concerned themselves more with meeting the needs of their constituents' than Party-political point-scoring or grandstanding.

The National Library's newspaper archive shows that from the time of his election to the Legislative Assembly in October 1914 until the end of the Great War, Henry and his Country Party colleagues were constantly involved in requesting, organising, meeting and hosting Ministerial meetings, deputations or visits. In Henry's case, these were done on behalf of individual constituents or such local organisations as the Brookton Progress Association, Pingelly Road Board and the local branches of the Farmers and Settlers Association. He and his colleagues met regularly with the Minister for Land and Agriculture, Minister for Transport, Minister for Water Supply, the Minister for Mines and Railways and their respective staffs. They were able, on a number of occasions, to get the Premier and/or his bureaucratic advisers to make special visits to the region, or they toured the wheat belt electorates themselves to talk to their constituents and listen to their concerns.

The typical issues and problems Henry sought action or assistance on included: a new grist mill, racecourse and recreational reserve for

[2] J. R. Robertson, 'The First Years of the Western Australian Country Party, 1912-1916', *Historical Studies Australia and New Zealand*, 11(43), October 1964, pp. 343-60.

Brookton; improvements to the Brookton and Pingelly water supplies; various extensions to the existing railway network and associated feeder roads and facilities; farmer assistance benefits and packages; support for returned servicemen and their families; and, towards the end of this period, the gathering rabbit menace. While success in these various initiatives could never be guaranteed and often took much longer than was hoped or expected, it did come, slowly but surely, and due in no small measure to the tireless and generally courteous efforts of Henry and his colleagues (unfortunately the newspaper record provides no indication of what support staff Henry and his confreres were able to call on, and their crucial roll in the process).

In addition to these various meetings with the Government, Henry was also called on to attend a host of activities in his capacity as Pingelly's elected representative. As well as those already described, these duties included, over the 1914-18 period: attendance at various official openings such as the Kunjinn to Brookton rail line and the Woyerling rifle range at East Pingelly; numerous functions farewelling soldiers proceeding to or returning from active service overseas and, later on, the unveiling of local honour boards or memorials to the fallen; attendance at local fund-raising activities, sports days, carnivals and annual picnics; local school prize-giving ceremonies and other activities; and various citizens' farewells or awards functions which were often accompanied by 'knife and fork teas', concerts and dancing into the small hours. Despite his age Henry seemed to enjoy all of these occasions and was ever ready with an impromptu speech. It is interesting that there was no mention in any of the accounts of these activities of his wife, Elizabeth. Was this, we have to wonder, because she was not invited, or was invited and chose not to go, or was in attendance but not mentioned by the respective correspondents?

By all accounts, over the time in question at least, Henry was a good, conscientious and generally well-liked and respected local Member, one who was alert to the trials and needs of those he represented and worked hard to improve both their lot and that of Western Australia's agricultural industries generally. As we have seen, he was not without his critics and, like us all, exhibited certain foibles and deficiencies. You get the feeling his speeches to his constituents went on a bit, although those who reported on them did not specifically say so. He tended to rehearse the same arguments and positions and, in

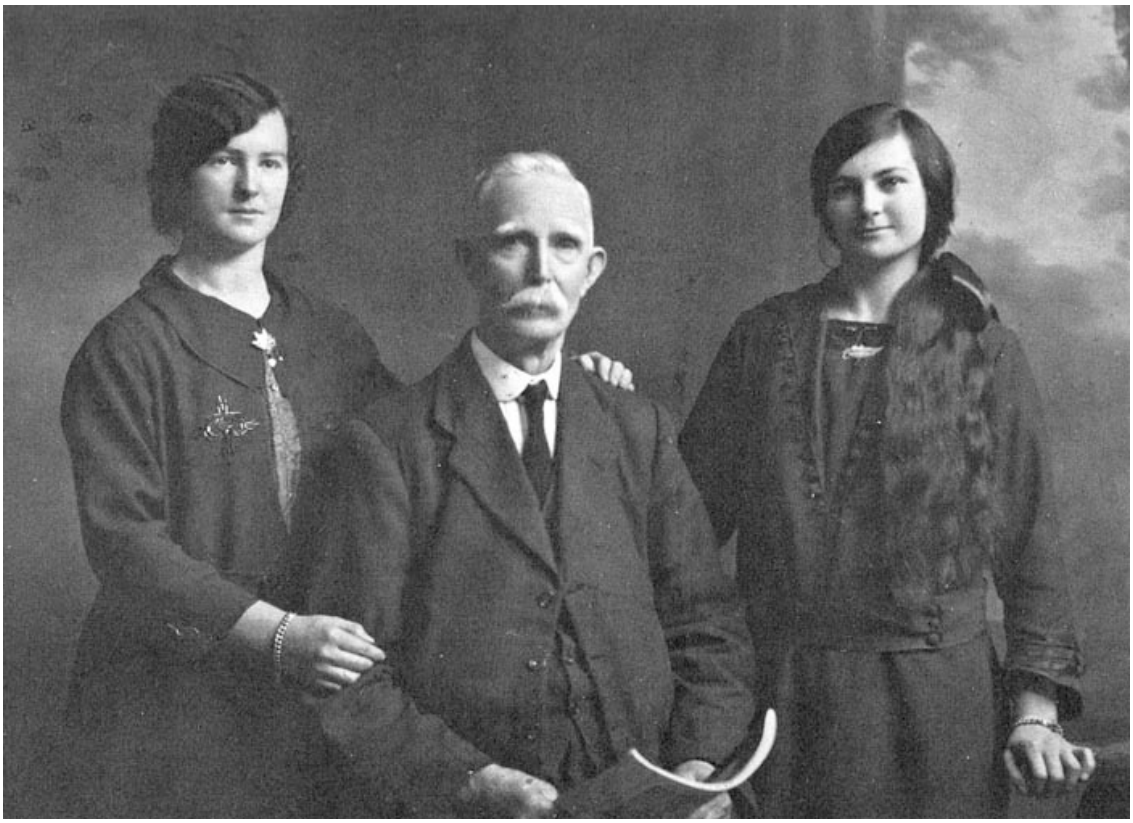
the manner of some who are not well educated, would often share with his audience long lists of government expenditures or other statistics. The constant reference to him in some quarters as 'Dad Hickmott' suggests he may have been somewhat doddery or forgetful. Indeed the redoubtable *Pingelly Leader* accused him of the latter trait after he failed to turn up for a pre-arranged meeting with the Minister for Industries during one of his visits to the area. 'Evidently', the newspaper's leader writer stormed, Henry 'went to " sleep on it," like Pat Malone, who " forgot that he was dead". So thereby hangs a tale!', the article continued, 'Mr Hickmott's political life is now sought more than ever by several citizens who feel that they and the town have been wronged by his forgetfulness' (7 June 1917). The newspaper subsequently apologised when it was pointed out to them (by Henry) that the Department of Agriculture had sent the details of the visit to Beverley not Brookton and so he received it after the Minister's visit. This may have dealt with the specific event in question but left open the broader inference that Henry, unlike some of his critics, had a tendency to be forgetful.

Although Henry had a deserved reputation for pointing out flaws or inconsistencies in government policies and programs, there were times when this facility deserted him. My favourite example comes, of course, from the *Pingelly Leader* (1 November 1917) and concerns an essay competition run by the Australian Natives Association (ANA). Designed to inculcate in the State's school children 'a love for Australia and all that is Australian', the competition attracted over 400 entries on the topic 'Australia's part in the War'. One of the prize-winners was Annie Johnson from Brookton State School who was duly presented with a certificate and 'two handsomely-bound books' by Henry at a public gathering that was held in the local hall and was attended by numerous other dignitaries as well as the school's parents, teachers and children. The books comprised the collected poems of Robert Burns and William Wordsworth who, while certainly reputable, had to my knowledge written nothing about Australia. Did Henry make mention of this discrepancy in his remarks or did he prefer to cite one or other of the bards?

While honest to a tee towards his colleagues and constituents, Henry seems to have been less inclined towards personal introspection and self-reflection. This made him more reactive than proactive, waiting for and dealing with problems and issues once they arose rather than anticipating and seeking to avoid them or minimise their costs. Coupled with his lack of background or interest in both politics and politicking, this made him

vulnerable not just to errors of judgement or perception, but also to changes taking place in the broader party-political environment of which he was part. State politics during the war years may have been fractious and unpredictable, but it was generally overshadowed and constrained by the needs, dictates and consequences of that 'terrible war'. The end of the Great War enabled nations and their leaders to lift their gaze, change tack and reopen old battlelines, with Western Australia being no exception.

1919-24: ‘A persistent old bugger’



During the early War years, the newly formed Country Party of Western Australia, led by James Gardiner and representing the Farmers and Settlers’ (later Primary Producers’) Association, operated independently in both the House and the Legislative Council and gave support to the Scaddan Labor Government on a number of issues that served it and the FSA’s interests. In spite of this generally amicable and productive relationship, some in the FSA and its executive remained uncomfortable about cooperating with the despised ‘socialists’. Egged on by certain Liberal Party interests, the FSA executive replaced Gardiner, who it claimed had got too close to Labor, with an English-born orchardist, Francis Edward Sykes Wilmott.

In July 1916, the Country Party combined with the Liberals to defeat Scaddan’s Government on the floor of the Assembly. After the WA Governor declined the premier’s application to dissolve Parliament,

government of the State was transferred to the Liberal Party. In spite of strong overtures from the Liberals, the Country Party decided not to join them in a formal coalition in part because the FSA executive feared their eastern region delegates would not accept the move but also because the President of the FSA, Alexander Joseph Monger, would not countenance dealing with the Liberal leader Sir James Mitchell. The Liberal Party thus operated as a minority government until June 1918 when, after re-badging itself as the Western Australian Nationalists and offering a number of specific incentives to the Country Party, it was able to form the State's first Coalition Government (in which the Country Party held three ministries).

The Nationalist/Country Party Coalition ruled from June 1918 until March 1924 when it lost the election to the Labor Party led by Philip Collier. During this time, tensions were mounting between members of the Parliamentary wing of the Country Party and the executive of the FSA/PPA and its increasingly authoritarian leader, Alexander Monger (nicknamed 'the Czar' by his detractors and derided by many as a 'St Georges Terrace farmer'). The tensions came to a head in November 1923 when the PPA executive decided not to re-endorse the candidatures of four Country Party members. The then Leader of the Country Party, H. K. Maley, requested his candidature also be dis-endorsed and convened a meeting of his parliamentary colleagues to seek their support for his actions. This was duly given by a vote of 15 to 5 and the decision conveyed to the PPA executive. Instead of seeking to diffuse the standoff by negotiating some sort of compromise settlement, Monger and his executive declared they would oppose at the next general election every Country Party member who supported Maley's actions. Faced with this deadlock, the Country Party split into two rival factions: the so-called Ministerial (sometimes Majority) Country Party (MCP), which comprised the bulk of those who supported Maley against Monger, and a breakaway Executive Country Party (ECP) which was led by the Deputy Leader of the Country Party, Alec Thompson, and remained loyal to the PPA and its executive. Both groups ran candidates in the 1924 election, where the ECP won six seats and the MCP was reduced from 13 to seven seats.

All this, however, was still to come. As the nation celebrated the end of the Great War in November 1918, Henry and his Country Party colleagues were hard at work ensuring the Coalition Government

was informed of, and acting to address, the multiple problems and issues facing or about to face Western Australia's agricultural sector. The record in the NLA's newspaper database shows that, in the beginning at least, not much changed in the daily routines, actions and overall responsibilities of Henry and the other wheat belt parliamentarians. Throughout 1919 they continued to lobby Government ministers and their advisers, sponsor or arrange ministerial deputations, tour their own and others' electorates, and perform the myriad duties expected of local Members of Parliament. Presumably as the incumbent Member for Pingelly, Henry was elected as the sole patron of the local golf club and a joint patron of the Pingelly Agricultural Society, thereby extending both his duties and contacts. He continued to play a relatively low-key role in Parliament, where his only contribution of note was to support a suggestion by his Country Party colleague, Alec Thomson, to help meet the State's parlous financial situation by reducing politicians' salaries by 10 per cent. As the Kalgoorlie's *Sun* reported, 'the motion was rejected with silent contumely by 26 votes to 9. The nine patriots were Messrs. Brown. Maley, Thomson, Broun, Hickmott, Pllkington. Duff, Veryard and Piesse'. A small harbinger of things to come did take place in November 1919 when Henry felt the need to publish the following letter in the *Bruce Rock Post and Corrigin Guardian*:

> I have been informed by members of my constituency that it is rumoured I have promised to resign my seat in Parliament in favour of some person aspiring to the position. In reply I beg to state the rumour is without foundation, and is absolutely incorrect and untrue. When the proper time comes I will place myself entirely in the hands of those who placed me in my present position. — I am, etc., H. E. HICKMOTT, "Dingley Dell," East Brookton,

The year 1920 followed a broadly similar course except the sting in the tale towards year's end was rather more serious and protracted than in 1919. It began with another letter from Henry, this time to the *Pingelly Leader*, complaining about an earlier missive from a 'Politicus' who declared 'the electors of Pingelly have been disfranchised for years, owing to the poverty of its representation'. Although 'the present member has done his best', the correspondent continued, 'he is long past the period of political usefulness'. Clearly both shocked and outraged, Henry reflected on the possible identity of his anonymous critic – deciding 'Politicus' could be neither a returned soldier nor a supporter of the Country Party – before stating, on the charge that Henry had grown too old for the job, that:

> I fail to understand why this gag is always used in reference to me. There are older men than I am in both Houses of Parliament in this state. I am both physically and mentally sound, and [could] probably give 'Politicus' a 'go' at almost anything. And if we note the leading men in our Federal politics and worldwide politics, we find men of mature age … with reference to being dis-enfranchised, I venture to say, without any boastfulness. or being in any way egotistic—taking the circumstances and conditions pertaining since I have had the honour of representing the Pingelly electorate— the wants and requirements of the electors have never been better attended to (2 September 1920).

Coincidently or otherwise, a second and unrelated letter from Henry was published the next day in the *Pingelly Leader* (with facsimiles appearing in the *Primary Producer* and *Bruce Rock Post and Corrigin Guardian*). In it, Henry sought to 'throw a little light' on a meeting held at Corrigin on the 21st August 'for the purpose of selecting a candidate to oppose me at the next general elections, to represent primary producers in the Pingelly electorate'. He went on to note the meeting was held outside the electorate and claimed that both the alternative candidate – a farmer named Harry Gayfer - and those who voted for him 'had never been members of the Association'. Henry concluded with the provocation that: 'the whole business was a farce and quite unconstitutional, and I am surprised that the chairman, a gentleman whom I have always looked upon as a solid supporter of the Primary Producers' Association, lending himself to these proceedings'.

Henry was being challenged and clearly did not like it. Not surprisingly in view of his claims and what was at stake, various letters of rebuttal soon appeared in the correspondence columns of the aforementioned newspapers. Harry Gayfer informed his readers he and the other gentlemen at the meeting, who all were known to Mr Hickmott, belonged to the Lomos and West Bendering Branches of the FSA. He went on to assert there were 'nominations from all quarters of the Pingelly electorate, which goes to show that it is not only Corrigin that thinks it is about time we had a "live" member'. Gayfer ended his response with the view that a 'Swan song is a sorrowful dirge at any time and wild, untruthful statements do not improve it'. Letters from Messrs Pickersgill, Head of the Corrigin Railway League and Chairman of the Corrigin meeting, and Campbell, Chairman of the Lomas Branch of the FSA, supported Gayfer's assertions and arguments and lauded his credentials as a possible

future Member for Pingelly. Following Henry's lead, Pickersgill ended his rebuttal with the unhelpful observation that it was 'regrettable that a gentleman occupying the position of Mr. Hickmott should descend to misstatements in his evident desire to hang on at all costs to a position that so many Pingelly electors think he is no longer fitted to hold'.

The temperature was rising and Henry could ill-afford the continuing publicity the stoush was generating. His best approach, he decided, was to speak directly to his constituents rather than his challengers. Thus in his reply to Messrs Gayfer, Pickersgill and Campbell, published in the *Pingelly Leader* on 30 September, Henry reminded his readers that the three gentlemen had accused him 'of making deliberate, false, and wild, untruthful statements. I am pleased to say,' he continued, 'the electors of Pingelly know me too well to take notice of such ungentlemanly claptrap. If there is anything I detest it is untruthful statements'. He was confident, moreover, that these same electors, who had seen fit to re-elect him by substantial majorities on two previous occasions, 'still have every confidence in my ability to represent them. Certainly, I am much better able to represent them after six years' experience than previously'. Should he be mistaken about Mr Gayfer's membership of the FSA , Henry concluded, he

> … was prepared to make a public apology and withdraw any statement I have made to the contrary. [But] I have seen the lists of the financial members at the Head Office. Mr Gayfer is not amongst them, and the first payment of subscriptions made by Mr Gayfer was made on the 31st of August, 1920, and received at Head Office on September the 1st … eleven days after Mr Gayfer was nominated.

Judging by the absence of any further correspondence on the issue, Henry's strategy worked, a conclusion supported by his subsequent victory over Gayfer and a number of other challengers - including H. S. Seward, a future President of the Pingelly District Council of the PPA - in the lead up to the April 1921 election. During the election campaign itself, he continued to sidestep the direct criticisms that had been levelled against him. At a rally held in the Mechanics Institute at Pingelly, for example, he suggested that 'members of the FPA were opposing each other because it was everyone's prerogative to do so'. As for his work in the past, 'he had no apologies to make, as the Pingelly electors had been as well looked after as those of any other constituency in the State'. Turning to the State's parlous

financial circumstances, Henry went on to rehearse a number of his standard concerns – such as the need for greater immigration and the release or more Crown land for agricultural purposes – but raised some new ones as well. These included an attack on the recent bouts of industrial unrest and demands for higher wages particularly by railway workers whose attitudes, he insisted, flouted the notions of constitutional government. He expressed strong opposition to increased taxation as a means of reducing the State's ballooning deficit on the grounds it would 'fall most heavily on the country people'. And, in answer to a question from the floor, he expressed support for the introduction of prohibition which, he claimed, was a distinct success in both America and New Zealand. Henry's interests, and opinions, were widening including, as we will see, into areas that could again get him into trouble.

Immediately after the 1921 election, which saw the Nationalist/Country Party Coalition returned to office, life in the wheatfield belt, and that of its elected representatives, resumed a degree of normality. On 25 April, Henry presented veterans with 'British war medals' at an Anzac Day ceremony held at St Mark's Church in Brookton. It was, according to the correspondent for *The Pingelly Leader*, quite a show. As their local member raised the Union Jack, the assembled ranks of boy scouts saluted in unison and three 'little girls' placed white flowers beneath the roll honouring those 'who gave their all for King and Empire'. This was then followed by a spirited rendition of the recessional hymn, the words of which had been written by Rudyard Kipling to celebrate not the end of the Great War but Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1897.

Later in the year, Henry joined the Minister for Mines and a number of other parliamentarians in a visit to Mount Magnet and the Murchison goldfields. He headed a deputation to the Minister for Works to discuss (once again) Pingelly's water supply. And he joined another parliamentary delegation that toured the area around Boyanup in the south west of Western Australia. In November 1921 he accompanied the premier, Sir James Mitchell, Lady Mitchell and a number of his colleagues on a visit of inspection to the Kendenup region to the north of Mount Barker. His local duties during this time also remained constant but not insurmountable. They included attendance at the Brookton Flower Show, the presentation of medals to returned soldiers at Brookton, the opening of the Nalya Hall and, together with Elizabeth, the opening of the annual fete of the

Brookton Anglican Church's Ladies Guild (where he gave a 'brief and appropriate speech').

Henry was also more active in Parliament where, as the following report of his Address-in-Reply speech illustrates, he was growing more loquacious, more confident and more willing to debate or express an opinion on issues beyond his normal brief:

> Mr. Hickmott could not find anything of great importance in the Governor's Speech. [Although] he did not believe in members being controlled by outside influences. He had told the electors that he would give the present Premier a chance. Mr. Collier: How long? Mr. Hickmott said the Labor Party had accused the Country Party of squeezing the Government. Mr. Angwin: Not an affectionate squeeze. (Laughter.) Mr. Hickmott said he had nothing against the working men, but he was opposed to people being compelled to join a union. Mr. Angwin: You don't believe in the wheat pool. That is compulsion. Mr. Hickmott said it was not. … He had always been treated with courtesy by the civil service. [But] there was room for retrenchment in the service. Economy could be affected in the expenses incurred by Parliament. The members might reduce their own 'screws' to a certain extent. He was prepared to fall in with any other member and reduce his 'screw' by 33 per cent .Mr. Lambert: You evidently know what you are worth. (Laughter.) Mr. Hickmott advocated the development of the South West. If dairying were firmly established it would help to straighten out the finances Of the State (Daily News, 1 September 1921).

This change in demeanour was noted with both amusement and interest by a number of newspaper commentators. The *Westralian Worker* told its readers, in its occasional 'Personalities in the Legislative Assembly' column, that: '"Dad" Hickmott comes up every week from Shingle Hut or Dingley Dell, or some such place near Stony Crossing. He fills the chair as well as anyone. Had his trials pioneering the Mallee country in the East. They all like dear old "Dad"'(19 August 1921). The 'Mannerisms of Members' column in the *Sunday Times*, took a similar view: 'Hickmott-(Good old Dad!)-stands like a poplar, and everybody listens' (25 December 1921). As interesting as these humourous but generally supportive assessments of Henry's performance are, two snippets of information that appeared around the same time in the 'Men, Women and Memories' column of the Perth *Mirror* provide a rather different vibe. One seemed to be warning its readers that 'Charlie Maley, Jack Smith, and Hickmott are all back in town having a royal time. Fish is in great demand, and the chippa da spuds likewise' (7 January 1922). The

other provided a faintly menacing, even gangsterish portrayal: 'Seen about town together a lot of late, Cuthbert McKenzie, M.L.C, of Albany, and Harry Hickmott M.L.A, of Pingelly. If these two get into partnership in a 'two-up' or 'poker school' lord help the mugs who play. Cuthbert always has a full hand, some say he may play the part of best man in a Parliamentary wedding shortly' (19 November 1921).

While entertaining, these snapshots suggest also that Henry had now well and truly settled into political life, was becoming more knowledgeable and accomplished and was enjoying, even thriving upon, the experience and what it was delivering. At a personal level, the latter would have included, of course, a sense of power, if only over minor officials or functionaries. Added to this would have been the thrills of comradeship and exclusiveness that pervades (and potentially corrupts) all party-political and parliamentary institutions. Most importantly in Henry's case perhaps, it may have engendered a strong feeling of satisfaction, even wonderment, at how far he had come. No longer a simple worker or farmer, Henry was now being feted and listened to by officials and town dignitaries, staying at the Royal in Perth when on Parliamentary duties, and rubbing shoulders with the Premier and other State political and business elites.

The danger here was that this growing sense of satisfaction and contentment, while justified, could easily change into one of self-entitlement even hubris. At this time in particular, Henry needed to keep his head and try and avoid making some ill-considered remark that might get his colleagues or, worse still, members of his constituency, offside. A test case occurred on 2 September 1921, when Pingelly's *Great Southern Leader*, informed its readers that:

> "Dad" Hickmott, M.L.A., the Country Party Member for Pingelly, is not often heard from in Parliament, but he gave his Party and the Primary Producers' Association the surprise of the recent Debate on the Address-in-Reply. Coming in at the tail-end "Dad" declared that "the price of 9/- per bushel fixed for wheat for local consumption was far too high." Wants the wheat growers to get less for their work. "Dad's" constituents are all wheat growers, so an interesting reception should be in store for him when he next visits the outside centres of his electorate.

On this occasion nothing seemed to come from Henry's impromptu remark, possibly because most of newspaper's readers were

preparing themselves for the onset of Armistice Day on which a number of local commemorative events were to take place. These included the unveiling of the Brookton War Memorial – a granite obelisk engraved with the names of the fallen – and a returned soldiers' reunion dinner, at both of which Henry had been invited to speak. At the unveiling ceremony, he reminded his listeners that while they should be proud of the memorial, they should also remember it was merely an 'outward symbol' of what we should 'think and feel' about the war and those who died in it. In addition to the usual platitudes about loyalty to King and Empire and the War giving rise to the birth of the nation, Henry thought the memorial needed also to serve as a headstone before which the friends and families of all those resting peacefully in foreign lands can continue to visit in order to remember their loved ones and pay them their respects. Unlike speakers at similar ceremonies in later years, he was acknowledging the fact that sacrifices during the War were made as much by parents, families and their supporting communities as by the fallen themselves. Henry took a more conventional position before a receptive audience at the reunion dinner held later that evening. Although 'it had been said in many places that Australia was now able to go by herself … he did not believe we should "cut the painter". Australia should, rather, 'stick to the Empire, which was the proudest in the world, and fight her battles if they were presented to us, in order to make this country still more habitable to live in' (*The Pingelly Leader*, 17 November 1921).

But anxious and angry times were brewing, both for Henry and some of his constituents, initially in the unlikely guise of the Corrigin to Dwarda railway line. This had been one of a number of extensions to the existing railway system that had been approved during the early years of the Great War, but on which very little work had been done. Not surprisingly, the settlers whose livelihoods stood to improve once the line was in place, were anxious to see the work commence. But just as the Mitchell Government looked to progress the project, Henry, without warning or consulting with his parliamentary colleague and Member for Williams-Narrogin, jumped in, stating in Parliament the line was both unwarranted and unaffordable. On 7 September 1922, Henry moved that a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into the advisability of the line and that all work on it be suspended pending the report of the Committee. Strapped for funds, the Government was happy to delay action of any kind until Henry's motion was debated. The debate, which did not take place until

February the following year, saw Henry, no doubt advised by the Premier, withdraw his motion and suggest the Government may prefer instead to establish a Royal Commission (without pay) to consider the issue (*The Daily News*, 1 February 1923). Needless to say it didn't.

The complex and messy affair was over, at least for the time being, but not before Henry had raised the ire of the communities that were to be served by the new line as well as the local members of adjoining electorates who were bombarded with letters and messages of complaint. Matters weren't helped by Henry at one stage claiming the settlers around Codgagotine and the Hotham Valley were opposed to the line (and a route deviation subsequently recommended by the Railways Advisory Board) when they weren't, and, when after the Mitchell Government finally put to Parliament an amended Bill for the renewed construction of the line, Henry again moved (unsuccessfully) to have it put to a further Select Committee. Throughout the saga, Henry justified his actions by arguing he was acting in the best interests of the State. Thus, in his closing remarks in the debate on the amended Bill just described, he asserted that 'if a vote were taken from Albany to Brookton, leaving out Narrogin, scarcely one vote would be recorded in favour of the line', to which his colleague, the member for Williams-Narrogin retorted with some justification, 'The Narrogin people are the only ones who know anything about it' (*Daily News*, 31 August 1923). Altogether, the episode provided a lesson on the competing imperatives of personal honesty and political reality (or expediency) although it remained unclear whether Henry, to his credit or otherwise, had learned anything from it.

In May 1922, Henry turned 70 years of age. Although an active man it is likely the sheer grind of his relentless electoral and Parliamentary duties would have been taking its toll. In June of that same year, he had to deal with the unexpected death of his youngest son, James Arthur Hickmott, who was accidently killed in a shooting accident at 'Dingley Dell'. As the *Pingelly Leader* informed its readers, the 19 year-old Arthur had 'got up as usual about 6 o'clock, and proceeded, together with another lad, to carry out his early morning duties. The latter attended to stable work, leaving Arthur to light the kitchen fire, etc. However, the report of a gun was heard close at hand, and on investigation by Mrs. Hickmott, she was amazed to find her son lying close to the house, shot through the body … hurried into Brookton by

Mr. Pond, a neighbor, the lad, who was unconscious, passed away at about 1.30 the same afternoon' (15 June 1922). We don't know if Henry was in Brookton at the time of the accident. He no doubt took time off to attend to the funeral and, hopefully, grieve for his son. It was not long, however, before he was back at work again, in July overseeing the establishment of a local branch of the New Settlers' League and, in August, joining the Colonial Secretary and others on a delegation to the Premier to discuss the Brookton to Armadale railway.

Henry (on the far right of the middle row) in the Parliamentary cricket team. Others of note are: C. C. Maley (second from the left in the rear row) and H. K. Maley and James Gardiner (second and third from the left in the middle row). Taken from the *Western Mail*, 23 November 1922.

In the following months he opened the Roman Catholic jumble fair at Brookton, introduced a further deputation to the Premier on the issue of settling 'suitable' overseas agriculturists on small allotments in the Pingelly region, introduced two delegations to the Minister for Works and, again together with the Colonial Secretary, opened an agricultural hall at Woodlands to the south-east of Pingelly. In Parliament he participated in the debate on the Address-in-Reply

and, as described above, sought to establish a Select Parliamentary Committee to take evidence on the Narrogin to Dwarda railway. He also spoke about the urgent need to establish permanent water supplies in the agricultural regions and, as the photo above shows, even found time to participate in cricket matches between a parliamentary team and one from the press. But his hectic lifestyle was beginning to catch up with him and he sometimes had trouble staying awake in the Chamber. One of these occasions - admittedly during a marathon sitting on the Redistribution of Seats Bill - was reported with some glee by *The Daily News*:

> [In the debate after lunch] … Mr Troy tried persuasion. He appealed to the fairmindedness, the womanly justice of Mrs Cowan; he cajoled the member for Claremont (Mr J. Thomson), and he held out a hand to Mr Hickmott, 'my old and esteemed friend, whom I know has never 'told a lie'. Mr Hickmott failed to appreciate the kindly reference to his respect for truth, for the reason that at that precise moment his head was drooping on the back of his chair, his mouth was open, and his eyes were shut. He was asleep. He awoke to the laughter which followed a repetition of the observation by Mr Troy, who added that he believed Pingelly's grey-head must have, been pained at the proceedings. 'He looks pained,' said Mr Teesdale as Mr Hickmott returned to consciousness (26 January 1923).

It was time for a break and Henry knew it. At a meeting of the Pingelly Roads Board in March 1923, he concluded his report by informing those present that 'as he had not had a holiday for some considerable time, he had decided to take a trip to the Eastern States to see the members of his family and that during his absence the affairs of this electorate would be attended to by the Hon. Mr F.T. Broun, of Beverley. The chairman thanked Mr Hickmott for his visit and for his attention to local matters, and also, on behalf of the board wished him and Mrs Hickmott a pleasant voyage and a safe return to the West' (*The Pingelly Leader*, 8 March 1923). A report in the *West Australian* indicated Henry and Elizabeth left Perth for the Eastern States on the Great Western Express on 29 March 1923. A little more than two weeks later, *The Pingelly Leader* reported that the 'residents of Brookton and all acquaintances of Mr and Mrs H. E. Hickmott who recently left W. A. on a holiday trip to Victoria, will regret to hear of the demise of Mrs Hickmott, which sad event took place at Onijah (Vic) [sic] on Tuesday last' (19 April 1923). Elizabeth, aged 68 years, died at the home of her and Henry's son, William Henry Hickmott, at their farm outside Ouyen in northern Victoria and was buried in the local cemetery. It is both curious and interesting that we have not been able to find any obituary of Elizabeth published in Western

Australia or anywhere else. Indeed, apart from two death notices inserted in the *West Australian* by members of her family, there was no further mention of her death in any local, regional or state newspaper.

Of interest too, is that following his return to the 'Golden West after his visit to friends in the East', as Henry put it in a letter to the Secretary of the Pingelly Road Board in July 1923, there are no acknowledgements of Elizabeth's death in any reports of his public pronouncements. He did expound at some length, to both his colleagues at the Road Board and in Parliament, about his visit to Mildura and how that riverside township, which was flourishing as a fruit growing area, served as an exemplar for what he thought could be achieved in Western Australia's Hotham and Avon valleys (*Great Southern Leader*, 23 August 1923).

Henry's apparent reticence around this time was not restricted to the death of his wife. From mid-August, the local newspapers had begun reporting rumours that he had decided to retire from Parliament. By early October, Henry had still not confirmed he was going even though the *Great Southern Leader*, for one, was busy speculating on who might take his place (5 October 1923). Later that month, *The Albany Advertiser* included in its 'Personal' column the following intriguing report: 'Mr. H. E. Hickmott, who represents Pingelly in the Legislative Assembly; a member of the Country Party, has announced his intention of retiring from politics at the expiration of the present Parliament. However, he received an influential requisition asking him to re-nominate for the seat and promised to do so'. Henry's game, if that is what he was playing, had reached its conclusion and he was bound to explain its outcome to his loyal readers of *The Pingelly Leader*:

> I would be pleased if you would kindly allow me a small space in your valuable paper to explain my position. I have publicly announced that I intended to retire from public life at the end of the present Parliament, and it was my intention to do so. A very general expression of regret has been expressed in all parts of the Pingelly Electorate, and when Mr. Broun and I were at Corrigin, we were both urged to reconsider our decision, and asked to continue for another term, and again at the Pingelly show I was approached and urged to reconsider the matter, and finally I was presented with a requisition signed by 48 electors urging me to continue in Parliament. As there was no one offering who met with the general approval of the people — in fact it was said that none of the candidates had been approached on the political question—therefore, sir, after giving the

> matter careful consideration; I have decided to accede [sic] to the almost unanimous request to place myself in the people's hands and nominate for the Pingeliy seat at the forthcoming election, and may say that I have been promised support from Bindaring in the East, to Wandering in the West, and from Popanyinning in the South, to the Boundary of the Electorate in the North.

Following a now well-established pattern, Henry's letter attracted a number of responses. The *Great Southern Leader* led off the critical reactions to Henry's announcement with the following observation in its so-called 'Personagrams' column: 'Dad Hickmott, Member for Pingelly, after announcing his intention of retiring from politics, has suddenly discovered that he is still equal to another three years "silent" work in the interests of the long suffering rate payers of Pingelly and intends to nominate once more for the seat' (2 November 1923). This was followed by a letter in *The West Australian* penned by H. S. Seward, President of the Pingelly PPA District Council, noting that in an earlier issue, the newspaper had said the Council had endorsed seven candidates, including Mr H. E. Hickmott, the sitting member'. He then added, somewhat ominously:

> Unfortunately, such a statement conveys the impression that the endorsement has been only recently given, whereas, as a matter of fact, it was given some three or four weeks ago, and, therefore, long before Mr. Hickmott cast his somewhat extraordinary vote. No doubt, Mr. Hickmott will be accorded an opportunity of explaining his action, but it may be taken for granted that the Pingelly District Council will not endorse anybody who is not true to the Association, and who is not prepared to loyally abide by the constitution (4 December 1923).

The 'extraordinary vote' Seward was referring to concerned Henry's support for his Parliamentary leader's actions in response to the decision of the PPA executive, announced on 12 November 1923, not to endorse the candidatures of four sitting members of the Country Party (including Henry's good friends and colleagues Charley Maley and, the Colonial Secretary, R. S. Sampson). The announcement also made clear that, unlike the case of most of his colleagues, Henry's candidature had still to be determined, in his case, by the Pingelly District Council of the PPA (which would be acting on behalf of the executive). All was not entirely lost although, as Seward's letter foreshadows, Henry's chances would be complicated by the PPA executive's pronouncement, made after the 'extraordinary vote', that it was not prepared to support any member who had voted against its wishes. A second, but potentially significant impediment, was that

Seward was unlikely to offer his support to Henry, having, along with Harry Gayfer, unsuccessfully run against him in the Country Party pre-selection for the 1921 election. Some evidence for this, together with support for Henry, came in a letter published in *The West Australian* on 15 December 1923 by a V. C. Marshall, who wanted to provide the paper's readers with some background to what was taking place. A Brookton constituent and returned soldier, Marshall claimed that news of Henry's pending retirement had precipitated a 'rush of aspirants for political kudos. Numbers announced their intention of contesting the seat and the district was split up into innumerable small parties all barracking for their man. One who made himself prominent', he continued, 'and was a master of ceremonies', was

> Mr. Seward, whom Mr. Hickmott had forced to remain … on his farm at the last election. It was seen that … [the wrangling] would likely burst up the party by feuds in the district, so Mr. Hickmott was approached and told … 'if he again contested, he would not be opposed.' He was lauded and hailed as 'an honest politician' … [y]et the executive in Perth turned him down, and say that the local people 'are no judges'. They call their terriers on and Mr. Seward is appointed Master of the Harriers. The thing is a farce … What I ask is if Mr. Hickmott was politically pure two months ago why is he a dishonest person today? Anyway, will Mr. Seward keep his word, and the others, too?

The Pingelly District Council met to decide Henry's fate at the local Mechanics' Institute on 22 December 1923. Notwithstanding his potential conflict of interest in the affair, Seward occupied the chair, and nine other delegates - from the PPA Branches of Brookton, Popanyyinning, Kulyalling, Aldersyde and Pingelly - were in attendance. According to *The Pingelly Leader*, the meeting first reviewed the considerable correspondence dealing with the 'political situation' and then asked Henry to state his position. The sitting Member and former president of the Brookton branch of the FSA reminded them of his long and close involvement with the association as a prelude to declaring he remained in full accord with its basic purpose and gaols. What he did not like, however, was the high-handed action of the executive which he thought was too much influenced by 'Perth men'. As such, he remained 'firmly behind Mr H. K. Maley and would go to his electors as one of his supporters in the stand he had taken against the executive'. After being questioned on a number of matters, Henry left the room and the Council got down to business. Significantly perhaps, *The Pingelly Leader* provided no

details of the ensuing discussion other than the Chairman's summation of the Council's position as he saw it: 'If we continue to endorse Mr Hickmott after what he has done, we, as a Council, sever our connection with the PPA'. The delegates then voted nine to one to withdraw its endorsement of Henry as their official candidate in the coming election. It is interesting to note that the Council then thought it necessary to pass a second motion, namely that: 'this meeting of the Pingelly District Council endorses the action of the PPA executive in their fight against Mr H. K. Maley and his followers, feeling assured that the executive is working in the interests of the producers'. Who, we have to wonder in light of the political assassination they had just carried out, was this motion meant to assure: their respective PPA branch members, Alexander Monger and his Perth-based executive, themselves or some combination of these?

Henry had lost the first battle in his quest to continue on as the Member for Pingelly. His dis-endorsement by the PPA meant he no longer had that organisation's support or any resources it might have seen fit to contribute to his campaign. He would have to run either as an independent or join his other dissenting colleagues in the breakaway, and un-authorised, Ministerial Country Party (MCP). He decided on the latter course which offered the benefits of continuing comradeship and incumbency but little else. To win he would need a slice of luck or, in the absence of that, some inspired political manoeuvring. This was because when nominations for the election closed on 27 February 1924, Henry found himself confronted by no less than six opposing candidates all of whom were declared members of the PPA-backed Opposition Country Party (OCP). Under Western Australia's system of preferential voting, in order to win therefore, Henry would have to attract fifty per cent plus one of the eligible votes, not impossible given his track record but a tall order nonetheless.

His task was not helped by the fact that his long-time ally, *The Pingelly Leader*, seemed finally to have turned against him. In a scathing commentary entitled 'A Critique Politique' and published in the paper two days before the election, its leader writer noted the 'old war horse was a bit slow in getting away from the barrier scorning all obstacles' [until] … some people who were interested in him asked him to run'. Then, he continued, 'there was a "bit of a split," or a split rail or something, in the fence of the C.P., and he found himself on the outside of the fence. But he didn't let a little

thing like that deter him … thinking himself as good as any of those registered, he came forward again, content to leave the decision in the hands of the real judges, the electors … not a few in St. Georges Terrace". Turning to Henry's claims that he had done such a good deal for the district that the Minister most affected had labelled him 'a persistent old bugger', and the Brookton Road Board had seen fit to thank him for his services, the writer countered with:

> I have never heard that the Pingelly or Cuballing Boards have had any particular cause to thank him for benefits received. The Wickepin Board succeeded in getting a bridge over Rushy Gully just outside our boundary, but this Board has not been able to get any over the Avon at Cross Roads, the Uambine at Gargan's, or Gingarring Creek, at all of which places there is more need for it. He claims credit for the gravelling of the Karping sand patch but I know that was accomplished more by the persistence of the Cuballing Board and people on that side. As for the Pingelly Railway Station, and [the] alleged water supply, "nuff sed."

The correspondent went on to note that Henry was on record as saying that some of the other candidates 'were not very bright specimens, but seemed to think he is not in that category'. To this the writer turned to the poet Burns in order to castigate Henry: "Oh wad some power the giftie gie us, To see oursel's as ithers see us". Returning to Henry's declared list of achievements, he suggested his inclusion in these of the Dwarda-Narrogin line would have been

> … glorious news for Pingelly, and especially Brookton, where the line should have come, and probably would if we had had a man like Bertie Johnston here. He said the policy of' the Mitchell Government was right, and he would support the present Government as long as he thought they were doing right. In conclusion he said he was not prepared to be ruled by one man. It seems to me that is just what he is doing being ruled by one man, the Premier, instead of working hand-in-hand with the Association that sent him to Parliament to work for the good of the country (20 March 1924).

While the tone of *The Pingelly Leader*'s 'criticque' was unduly condescending and hostile, the criticisms that were made of some of Henry's achievements were, as we have seen, neither new nor unwarranted. They would have been well known in the district, and well-rehearsed by those who were unimpressed by their local member. On this occasion, they proved also to be effective. Although achieving a comfortable majority in first preference votes, the flow of preferences from the bottom-placed candidates were insufficient to

hold off the eventual winner, another farmer and fellow Victorian, H. J. Brown, who would serve as Pingelly's local member until his sudden death in February 1933.

Just as Henry's time as a politician petered out so, too, did his newspaper trail. We know, from the snippets of information that were published, that after the election he took two extended (and well needed) breaks to the 'Eastern States' where he spent time with friends and relatives. The first of these was in the month immediately following the election and the second in around August 1924. Although he continued to serve on the Pingelly Road Board and remained a joint patron of the Brookton Cricket and Race Clubs, he spent much of his time either in Perth or on his farm. Part of the reason Henry went to Perth (and possibly to Victoria) became clear on 30 October 1925, when *The Beverley Times* informed its readers that Henry had quietly re-married there. No details of the marriage were given and so those who did not know him had to wait for the following report in *The Pingelly-Brookton Leader* to find out who it was he had wed.

> On Monday evening … about 25 residents of East Brookton made a surprise visit lo "Dingley Dell", the residence of Mr H. E. Hickmott, to mark the occasion of his marriage with Miss Clark of Victoria. Parlour games were indulged by all for some time, after which refreshments were handed round, when some of the guests spoke fittingly of the occasion. Mr Eva said it was an opportunity to welcome Mrs Hickmott to the district, and was pleased to see Mr Hickmott on his farm again, and was sure he was voicing the opinion of his fellow visitors in hoping to see more of Mr and Mrs Hickmott and wishing them all happiness and prosperity. Mr Langley and Mr P. Dillion congratulated Mr Hickmott in getting a lady of high esteem as a helpmate. Mr Hickmott on replying, said both Mrs Hickmott and himself were very pleased to see such a number of friends on this occasion, and thanked the visitors for their best wishes, adding that he was glad to have had the opportunity of introducing Mrs Hickmott to his many friends in the district (19 November 1925).

Even today, we do not know a great deal about Henry's second wife other than she was Sarah Ellen ('Nellie') Clarke (1870-1958), the daughter of Alfred and Emma Clarke. We think she was born in Victoria although that has not been confirmed. We do know that she died at East Perth in 1957 and is memorialised in the Garden of Remembrance in the Karrakatta Cemetery. As the above quote indicated, she and Henry lived at 'Dingley Dell' after their marriage. During this time, in addition to running his farm, Henry continued to

serve on the Pingelly Road Board, attended the occasional public meeting (including some on the ubiquitous Brookton to Armadale railway) and, interestingly in view of his experience, served a term as the president of the Pingelly District Council of the PPA. In that capacity, in March 1928 Henry presided over a 'smoke social' that was held at the local Mechanics Institute and was attended by many farmers and politicians including H. J. Brown who had replaced Henry as the Member for Pingelly. In spite of the ghosts and memories involved, the occasion was said to be a joyous one where, led by Henry, 'speeches depicting the growth of the PPA and the wheat pool were made and musical items were interspersed'(*The West Australian*, 6 April 1928).

On Sunday 18 January 1931, Henry was laying poison to protect his property against his old and ongoing nemesis, the rabbit menace. As he was standing in the back of his poison cart, its wheel hit a rock and Henry was thrown to the ground, breaking his neck in the fall. His funeral took place the following day and he was buried in the Methodist section of the Brookton cemetery. While his death was reported in most of the State's city and regional newspapers, as in the case of Elizabeth, there were no detailed obituaries beyond the following notice published in *The West Australian* on 24 January:

> Mr H.E.Hickmott, who was one of the pioneering members of the Country Party in the Legislative Assembly, died on his farm, a few miles from Brookton, on Sunday last, as a result of an accident. Mr Hickmott was born in South Australia 78 years ago, and was educated at a private school in that State. After some years residence in Victoria he transferred to Western Australia. He was returned in the Country Party interest for Pingelly at the general election of 1914, defeating Mr N. W. Harper, and held the seat for nine years. At the 1924 general election, owing to a temporary disagreement with the party he failed to receive its endorsement and was defeated by Mr J. H. Brown. Mr Hickmott continued to take an active interest in Country Party affairs, and was for some time chairman of the local branch of the Primary Producers' Association. He was married twice, and left a widow and nine children, all of whom are married.

After Henry's death, Nellie lived for a time at 'Dingley Dell' before moving to Perth. The farm was run by Henry's youngest daughter, Rebecca Elsie Whittington, and her husband Selby, a returned soldier from the First World War. On Nellie's death in 1957 the ownership of the property was divided among Henry's surviving children. It remained in the family until the 1960s when it was sold. Remnants of

the original homestead can still be seen there today including, etched in a sandstone block, the name 'Dingley Dell'.

Concluding remarks: 'Hard roads' and cross roads

By any reckoning, Henry's life was quite a remarkable one, not just as a Western Australian politician but also, as the *Westralian Miner* had acknowledged, across the whole of his 'long life travelled on a hard road'. Before going to Western Australia, he had lived in the colonies of South Australia and Victoria. In the latter he had experienced the chaos and uncertainties of the early gold-rush era and eked out a living as a labourer and brick maker before taking his chances as a pioneer farmer and settler in the newly opened spaces of the Wimmera district. There life was both hard and precarious, always a mere accident or freak hailstorm away from ruin. As his family grew, he took on contract work to help pay his bills and other expenses. But he stayed and survived and was sufficiently successful and organised eventually to have time to serve and then represent his community at both a local and shire level. Not long after Federation, he and most of his family moved from Victoria to the wheat belt region in Western Australia where he repeated the exercise, adding, as we have seen, State representation to his record of political achievements.

Although remarkable, Henry's life and times were not particularly exceptional, mirroring those of many, many others who also took their chances in Australia's colonial and early post-colonial hinterland. He differed from some in that he came from both convict and emigrant stock. His grandfather, Samuel Hickmott, had been transported, with his older brother, Thomas, to Van Diemen's Land in 1840 for stealing three lambs from the property of Thomas Ash, a tenant farmer of Brenchley in Kent. Two years after receiving his certificate of freedom in January 1850, Samuel, accompanied by his third wife and fellow transportee Susan Piccup, sailed from Hobart to Adelaide where he met up with his youngest son, Henry and his family (Samuel's brother, Thomas, seems also to have joined them around this time). Samuel accompanied his son on the latter's initial foray into the Victorian goldfields and may have lived with the family later on although the evidence for this is only circumstantial. We have yet to discover when and where he died (Thomas died in Warrnambool in 1871 and is buried in the local cemetery there).

It would seem quite likely then, that our Henry was well aware his grandfather was a convict. Such knowledge may partly explain his diffidence about exposing personal details and his touchiness over questions about his nationality. Unlike today, where the discovery of a convict connection is a cause for celebration, in the colonial era convicts were both feared and disparaged. Convictism – the idea that convicts carried in their blood a 'virus of criminality' that was readily transferable from one generation to the next – was both widely accepted and readily used by those in power to maintain their social standing, emphasise their respectability and embarrass their rivals. As a consequence the early descendants of Australian convicts, especially those who sought to advance themselves socially or politically, went to great lengths to repress and disclaim any convict connection. As Robert Hughes and others have argued, in so doing, they helped instil the 'culture of forgetfulness' or denial that marks much of our historical and political consciousness.

Like those of most of his friends and colleagues, Henry's parents emigrated from Britain to Australia in order to pursue a new life here. Unlike many of their counterparts, they did so of their own accord and without the financial and other incentives that were provided to the hundreds of thousands who came as assisted immigrants. Although often derided as self-inflicted transportees or the products of 'pauper-migration', the later assisted immigrants in particular had generally better literacy and working skills than those they left behind. Many were also 'good Christians' who worked hard, placed great store in family and fireside life, drew inspiration from the Bible and pulpit orations, frowned upon public displays of frivolity and indulgence, and thrilled to tales of imperial adventures. Though individually independent, even assertive, they tended also to be conservatively minded. As a result those who journeyed inland to help establish Australia's rural and regional communities tended to reinforce rather than unsettle any prevailing social, political and normative structures.

While this characterisation of assisted immigrants rings true for our Henry, it seems less apposite to his father who didn't seem to be religious at all, had a tendency to challenge or circumvent the law and its presiding magistrates, and showed no inclination towards public duties or responsibilities. We have to wonder why this was so. Was it the influence of Henry's stepmother, Harriet, or his wife, Elizabeth, or something that happened to him in his formative years?

Did his interest in public life arise from his discovered faith or come through contacts with mechanics and artisans who had been involved in the Chartist movement or other struggles for citizens' rights and representation? Unfortunately in the absence of biographical notes or other public reflections, we can only speculate on the answer.

A second aspect of Henry's life on which we have no clear answer is his relationship with his family. He was undoubtedly a good provider and his death notices describe him variously as a beloved, loving and devoted father. But there is no mention of any of his family in any of his speeches or utterances, no indication of whether his unmarried children either helped or accompanied him in his political campaigns or official duties - Elizabeth is mentioned a few times towards the later part of his career – and no public acknowledgement, in the wake of his political victories or defeats, of the important roll played or assistance given by his family or anyone else for that matter. This may, of course, have been more a result of how politics was reported then than of any underlying reality. But it heightens the sense that during his ten years in Parliament he lived two quite distinct and separate lives, and over this period at least, seemed more of a distant patriarch than a father figure (a feeling that is nicely conveyed in the above photo of Henry, holding in front of him some document, with two of his granddaughters on either side of him). There is no indication, finally, that he encouraged in his children the same aspirations and ambitions that were so important to his own development and life prospects, or sought to provide them with the skills and opportunities to elevate their lives and prospects beyond their particular social and occupational milieu. None of his eight daughters, for example, received or seem to have been offered learning opportunities beyond elementary primary school. And none felt inclined to pursue a career away from farming or its attendant vocations.

The explanation for this may be found, in part at least, in Lenore Layman's observation that Western Australia's farming communities during this period were all motivated and sustained by a 'spirit of agrarian separatism which united farmer and country townsman in the bond of rural community and in common opposition to the city and all its works' (p. 162). An important component of this separatism, she added, was a strong sense of superiority not only

economically, in terms of produce and wealth generated, but socially as well:

> … the primary producer with his feet in the soil was the 'real' Australian, a man who battled the harsh environment, a man who lived in the true Australia away from the coastal towns. Because of his lifestyle he understood the country and instinctively knew what was best for it (p. 163).[3]

This view of the bush, as Layman acknowledges, was not a creation of either the Country Party or its primary constituents. It had its origins in the new forms of Australian nationalism that were being trumpeted in the 1890s by largely city-based artists and intellectuals who lauded, and overly romanticised, the lives and times of the early bushmen and other iconic (male) rural figures. But combined with a strong and stable electoral base, a widely-held sense of injustice and insecurity on the part of the new settlers in particular, and a well organised and resourced electoral machine, it provided the newly established Country Party with a 'strong potential for political power and longevity'.

As we have seen from the experiences of Henry and the other inaugural Country Party members, this theoretical potential was never assured and took some time to begin to be realised. The anti-city sentiment that helped galvanise the country and its political representatives also turned many of them against Alexander Monger and the other 'men from Perth' who ran the FSA/PPA executive. The comradeship and shared experiences of the rural members would have been instrumental in the majority of them, in the lead-up to the1924 split, electing to support their leader, and fellow settler, against the threat emanating from St Georges Terrace. At a more basic level, the intrigues, calculated duplicities and the grandstanding and point-scoring seen as necessary for success and advancement in the political sphere, would have been inimical with a utilitarian ideology that valued above all honesty, hard work and cooperation in the face of adversity.

Having said this, the generally conservative nature of rural communities and their constituents, combined with their long-

[3] Lenore Layman, 'The Country Party: Rise and Decline', in Ralph Pervan and Campbell Sharman (eds), *Essays on Western Australian Politics* (University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands 1979: 159-90).

standing working conditions and expectations, meant they tended to be pre-disposed towards non-Labor policies and philosophies. The question, which was at the heart of the tensions and ructions that characterised Henry's ten years as a politician was whether their interests could be best achieved by operating independently or through some form of formal coalition arrangement with other non-Labor parties. This question, and the tensions that underpin them, have not disappeared and the Western Australian Country (later National) Party has continued to alternate between operating independently and in coalitions (both formal and informal).

The periods of independence have been contrary to the wishes of the Federal Nationals who have always seen their interests best pursued through formal coalitions with the Liberal Party. Yet the experiences of the Australia's first Country Party, so long ago and now largely forgotten, should give everyone pause for thought. Although times, circumstances and key issues of concern have changed, the need for honest, hard-working and straight-talking political representatives remains paramount; representatives who live and work among their constituents, are both subject to and aware of their problems and concerns, and are prepared to place the well-being of those they represent above personal, sectional and party-political interests. For all his flaws and inconsistencies, Henry Edward Hickmott MLA, was that kind of politician.