

Angas Convalescent Home, Cudham, Bromley, c.1905



Tower Homes, Cudham, was built in the 19th century as a vicarage for the parish of St. Peter and St. Paul. It was later used as the Angus Convalescent Home for sailors from the Dreadnought Seamen's Hospital. Later again it was used as a home for the mentally ill.



Recreation Room - Angas Convalescent Home, Seamen's Hospital Society, Cudham, Kent

Angas, George Fife (1789 - 1879)

ANGAS, GEORGE FIFE (1789-1879), merchant, banker, landowner and philanthropist, was born on 1 May 1789 at Newcastle upon Tyne, England, the fifth son and youngest of the seven children of Caleb Angas (1742-1831), coachmaker, and his second wife Sarah Jameson, the widowed daughter of John Lindsay, tobacconist, of Morpeth, Northumberland. His father was a native of Hexham, Northumberland, where his Scottish forbears had settled about 1650. In infancy George Fife suffered a violent illness that affected his nervous system and left him far from robust. At home he was fully exposed to his father's severely Puritan ideals and customs and at school he preferred religious books to games. After his mother's death he was sent at 12 to board at Catterick School where he was further influenced by a devout Latin tutor, but followed the example of his idolized brother, William Henry (1781-1832), and 'refused to be made a lawyer'. William was captain in one of his father's ships carrying mahogany from British Honduras when Angas at 15 became apprenticed to his father. At work he continued his studies and advanced rapidly. At 19 he went to Howe's coach factory in London for a year and won favourable references from his employers. At 20 he rejoined his father's business as overseer. In London on 12 April 1812 he married Rosetta French, by whom he had three sons and four daughters.

By 1822 Angas was carrying the main burden of his father's large establishment at Newcastle, with branches in British ports, the West Indies and Spanish America. In 1824 he moved to London to form the shipping business of G. F. Angas & Co. Next year he nearly overreached himself in bubble speculations, but recovered with his father's help. In 1831 he went to Newcastle to manage the family business and after his father's death returned to London. Through his cousin, T. Joplin, he discovered a special talent for banking; he helped to found the Provincial National Bank in 1833, the Union Bank of Australia in 1836 and the South Australian Banking Co. in 1840.

A Christian first, despite his varied business ventures Angas had a lifelong passion for forming societies and joining charitable committees. At 18 he helped to found a benevolent society to promote thrift and temperance among Newcastle coachmakers. At 20 he was received into the Baptist Church where his family were members. In 1816 he founded the first Sunday School Union at Newcastle and served for years as its energetic secretary. In London he joined influential reformers in fighting for the emancipation of slaves and the restoration of Nonconformist missionaries in British Honduras. Always eager to employ Christian officers in his ships, he helped his brother William to form the Bethel Mission for Seamen, and in 1833 became a director of the British and Foreign Sailors' Society. He was deacon of Ilford Church, treasurer of a dozen philanthropic societies and one of the founders of Exeter Hall. After the Reform Act in 1832 he was urged to stand for parliament, but refused; with the pressure of business, committees, lectures and prolific correspondence, his health suffered. He moved his home to Dawlish, Devon, visiting London for a few weeks each year.

Angas's interest in Australia originated through correspondence with [Lieutenant-Governor Arthur](#) in Van Diemen's Land, [Captain Irwin](#) in Western Australia and missionaries in New Zealand and other islands of the south Pacific. In 1832 he joined the committee of the South Australian Land Co., claiming less interest in systematic

colonization than in founding a colony where, with no established church and no convicts, his fellow Dissenters might enjoy civil and religious liberty. When the Colonial Office quashed the proposals, Angas retired disheartened, leaving [Wakefield](#), [Gouger](#), [Torrens](#) and others to carry on the struggle that led to the South Australian Act of 1834 (5 & 6 Wm IV, c. 95). The Act provided for appointment of a Colonization Commission, and Angas was persuaded by Gouger to allow his name to be submitted as a member. Although a Dissenter and a Whig, he was appointed in May 1835. With Torrens as chairman the commission's first duty was to sell £35,000 of colonial land before the Act came into operation and colonizing could begin. Unfortunately Angas lay sick at Dawlish when, after some dissension, the price of land was fixed at 20s. an acre. As this was much higher than the minimum of 5s. in New South Wales, sales came to a standstill after early enthusiasm, and the intending migrants were faced with months of exasperating delay. Angas came to the rescue by offering to form a joint-stock company to take up the remaining land at 12s. an acre. With little alternative the commissioners had to agree. With Henry Kingscote and Thomas Smith, Angas bought 13,770 acres (5572 ha), two-thirds of the unsold land, and in January 1836 transferred them to the newly-formed South Australian Co. For holding a pecuniary interest in the colony Angas had to resign from the commission, but for some months he continued to attend and pressed into the regulations a provision for special surveys, whereby the large capitalist willing to buy 4000 acres (1619 ha) might select them anywhere in the colony. He also persuaded the Colonial Office to allow the company to send an expedition ahead of the surveyors.

By April 1836 Angas had equipped and sent out two whalers, a storeship and a coastal trader, although the cost of conveying crews and labourers was charged to the commission's emigration fund. Under the company's colonial manager, [Samuel Stephens](#), a settlement was made at Kingscote on Kangaroo Island, but it did not flourish and was closed after five years. The company had more success with the town and country land Stephens selected around Adelaide. He also imported livestock, but failed to hold his indentured labourers and tenant farmers, and when he involved himself in disgrace and the company in speculation Angas had him replaced in 1837 by [David McLaren](#). By 1841 the hard dealing of this shrewd Scot gave the company 26,000 well chosen acres (10,522 ha), 10,000 sheep, and a dominating hold of Port Adelaide and the road to it. In 1840 the company paid its first dividend, chiefly because Angas had saved its bank from competition for four years. McLaren's adroit use of this monopoly had saved the company's shareholders from many calls, but also stimulated the frenzied speculation that brought the colony into disrepute.

The company was not the only part of Angas's work for the foundation of South Australia. He lobbied the Colonial Office, subsidized authors and published magazines and pamphlets. He recruited pious Dissenters, helped to provide the colony with Nonconformist ministers and chapels, sent out missionaries to the Aborigines, founded the South Australian School Society and hoped to plant an advanced college and even a university like Oxford. The largest group of devout families that he persuaded to emigrate to the new colony were the German Lutherans under [Pastor Kavel](#). When the Colonization Commission and the company refused to help, he personally advanced some £8000 to the Germans for their migration. On arrival many of them became tenants on his land at Klemzig and later at Angaston. His chief clerk, Charles Flaxman, who sailed with them, was supposed to be Angas's agent, but he also acted on his own behalf. His dual role and lavish investment confused McLaren, who nevertheless accepted his bills and

charged them to Angas. Among other purchases Flaxman acquired, in his own name, the right to seven special surveys, on the Rhine and Gawler Rivers in the Barossa Range for £28,000. On his recall to London, he was in dire financial straits; his biggest creditor was G. F. Angas & Co., so he brazenly offered the Barossa land to Angas, demanding for himself a commission of 10 per cent and the first pick of 4000 acres (1619 ha). Angas refused at first, but on learning how good the land was, he made his own terms in 1840 and took it all. To meet this unexpected outlay he sold his shares in the Newcastle business and the Union Bank, and the South Australian Co. agreed to accommodate him in meeting calls on his 1300 shares. His financial embarrassment also saved him from becoming involved in the affairs of New Zealand; although he had been alarmed by French threats to British whaling in the south seas, he was now unable to share in a proposed joint-stock company for settling the South Island and 'saving' the Maoris.

In the depression years Angas struggled mightily for the colony. He gave evidence to the select committee on South Australian affairs in 1841. Despite his passionate faith in self help, he became convinced that the colony would founder unless aided by the British government. His interviews with the Colonial Office, his lecture tours and his wide distribution of literature on South Australia helped to ensure a majority for the parliamentary grant that saved the colony's credit, and for the Act (5 & 6 Vic. c. 36) that gave the Australian colonies a uniform minimum price for land. But his own fortunes waned and his family dispersed. In 1843 his three daughters married, and his sons, [George French](#) and John Howard, left for the colony, the latter to be his father's personal agent. Angas and his wife moved from their 'beautiful and convenient' home at Paddington to a 'humble retreat' near Gravesend. In 1844 he had to sell his copperas works and mahogany trade at Newcastle and began to dispose of other assets. After a narrow escape in a shipping collision on the Thames and news of his ships being wrecked, his health declined. He revived when George French returned in 1846 to exhibit his paintings and win patronage from the Prince Consort, but gloom soon returned. In November he closed his counting house and, while solicitors wound up his affairs, he travelled for five months, under medical orders taking daily exercise on horseback.

In 1848 Angas decided to go to South Australia, where his German tenants were at last paying their rents and the South Australian Co. was again paying a dividend. He resigned as its chairman and director, and with renewed vigour planned a score of colonial ventures ranging from the export of tallow to drain pipes made by machine. Again he lectured and wrote and lobbied, this time for the Australian colonies' government bill. When it was passed in August 1850 (13 & 14 Vic. c. 59) and all his English property was sold he sailed with his wife and youngest son in the *Ascendant* and arrived in Adelaide in January 1851.

Angas was greeted by his children and old friends, and praised at a public dinner for his years of energetic promotion of the colony's welfare in London. At Lindsay Park near Angaston he made a spacious home, improving the property and building a chapel, roads and bridges. As his health recovered he travelled through the settled areas, attending many public functions and often preaching. Later he acquired Prospect Hall as his town house.

Soon after arrival he had been made a justice of the peace and member of the Board of Education. In August 1851 he entered the Legislative Council unopposed as the member

for Barossa. The first major issue was state aid to religion and he had no hesitation in wholly supporting its rejection, thereby making South Australia the first part of the empire to separate church and state. Although disturbed by the colony's lack of 'spiritual atmosphere', he never ceased to believe that 'religion is a matter with which no government has a right to interfere'. On the select committee for education in 1851 he pressed successfully for Bible reading in schools, and later he strongly opposed Sunday trains and concessions for horse racing and gambling. He was also disturbed lest gold discoveries should increase the 'democratic element'. He supported the Bullion Act that brought gold into the colony, but opposed any subsidy of local search for precious minerals. With his own abhorrence of debts, he resisted government borrowing no matter how worthy the project. Although he agreed that the colony needed responsible government, he insisted that vote by ballot and an elected upper house were changes that could wait until population tripled. He dreaded manhood suffrage and wanted a franchise based on an educational test. When charged with prejudice he retorted that the colony should be 'a model for the world and a great reward to those who founded it'.

In 1857 Angas was elected to the first Legislative Council under responsible government. Soon afterwards his brother Joseph's fatal illness took him to England. He returned in September 1859 and resumed his seat in the council; claiming it to be 'the only safety valve' in the Constitution, he became its most conservative member. With patriarchal zest he sought adequate protection for the Aborigines and German settlers, but opposed annexation of the Northern Territory, borrowing for railways, tampering with the fixed price for land, and removal of the Anglophile [Judge Boothby](#). When [Henry Hussey](#) became his private secretary and confidant he turned openly hostile to Roman Catholics, into which faith George French had married. He had always opposed immigration from Ireland, particularly pauper girls, but now he circulated sectarian tracts in tens of thousands and worked hard to keep Catholics out of parliament. However, his most persistent complaint was the dearth of skilled labour, an issue he raised in his first and last speeches, and many others, in the Legislative Council. After sixteen years in the council his voice and memory began to fail and on 28 August 1866 he resigned his seat. Next January his wife died. In retirement Angas continued to contribute widely to many religious, educational and benevolent institutions. At the end he was said to be giving away £10,000 a year. In April 1875 he was suddenly taken seriously ill, and although he recovered his energy was spent. Two weeks after celebrating his ninetieth birthday he died at his home at Angaston on 15 May 1879 and was buried beside his wife in the family vault at Lindsay Park.

Angas's prominence in the foundation of South Australia has been somewhat exaggerated, partly because his remaining papers in the Archives of the Public Library of South Australia are on that period, but he deserves full credit for the capital and settlers that he introduced into the new colony. The lifetime journal that he began at 18 has disappeared, but his biographer, Edwin Hodder, quoted liberally from it. In all his biographies Hodder sought the moral improvement of young men by setting ideal examples before them. Yet not even Hodder's deft pen catches all the lights and shades of this complex character. Angas was infinitely more than 'philanthropy and five per cent' or a predatory Calvinist seeking salvation from total depravity. For all the certainty of his faith he lacked self-confidence, and knew it. For all his platform poise he knew that his beliefs gave offence. If he made it difficult for those he met to remain neutral to his views, he knew no neutrality in himself. His harshest critic never equalled his own self-

criticism. His worry over trifles long after others had forgotten them drove him into deeper anxieties. From his perplexing inner world he found relief in actions; by them his qualities are revealed more clearly than by his scriptural vocabulary. With relentless self discipline he reached his goals and generations of men benefited from them.

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