

John Brogden of Manchester

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John Brogden's name is normally associated in Cumbria with the building of the Ulverstone & Lancaster Railway during the 1850s; however little is ever said about his other works or, indeed, about the man himself.

John Brogden was born on February 7th, 1798, at Worstone, near Clitheroe, Lancashire, the son of a yeoman farmer. After receiving his education locally, he took up the family calling and became especially interested in the breeding of horses. By the early 1820s he had set himself up as a farmer in his own right at Ancoats Hall, then on the eastern edge of Manchester. He soon gained a reputation as a horse dealer to the extent that in 1832 he obtained an agreement with the bororeeves of Manchester to supply all their equine needs. One of his major roles in this was to clean the streets, a task which he did well, so well that he later was able to take out a similar street cleaning contract in the City of Westminster. It would have been through this that he first met the Earl of Lonsdale. During the 1840's, with the help of the engineer Joseph Whitworth, he introduced a patent (mechanical?) street cleaning device onto the streets of Manchester.

Brogden's break into railway construction came in 1837 with the building of the Manchester & Leeds Railway. Samuel Brookes, banker and vice-chairman of the M&L, gave the necessary financial backing for Brogden to obtain and carry out the contract to build the southern section of the M&L, for the few miles northwards from the Oldham Road terminus. As most of this section of line was on a brick viaduct, he set up his own brickworks in Collyhurst. By this time he was living in the Longsight district of the town.

The M&L contract was to be the first of many. Between 1837 and 1840, Brogden obtained contracts for the northern section of the Manchester & Birmingham Railway (Manchester to Heaton Norris and several short sections around Wilmslow) and for the M&L new line into Manchester, from Miles Platting to Hunts Bank, including the new Victoria station.

1846 saw John Brogden take his eldest sons, John and Alexander, into partnership as John Brogden & Sons. They were later joined by two other sons, Henry and James. This company was to exist until the 1880s. Notable among the early railway contracts taken on by John Brogden & Sons were sections of the East Lancashire Railway, the Manchester South Junction & Altrincham Railway and the South Eastern Railway. The works on the SER coincided with John Brogden becoming a major shareholder in that company.

An interesting investment with which the Brogdens attempted to expand their empire was the Lancashire Extension of the Whitehaven & Furness Junction Railway (Chairman, the Earl of Lonsdale). This scheme failed in Parliament but shows John Brogden's first sign of interest in the Furness area.

It wasn't until 1850 that Brogden actually expanded his interests into Furness and this was done in no small way. In that year he obtained certain leases of iron mines at Stainton from the Earl of Burlington, he purchased the Ulverston Canal Navigation and promoted the Ulverstone & Lancaster Railway. He bought Lightburne House in Ulverston (a site now occupied by the Coronation Hall) to act as the centre of operations. John Brogden didn't actually move into Lightburne House, his home by now being in Sale, Cheshire. In fact he appears to have stayed in Kents Bank when in the area. However his sons, especially John jnr., certainly lived there at different times.

I do not wish to go into details of why Brogden turned his attentions towards Furness or go into some of the interesting details relating to the setting up and construction of the U&L; these should appear at a later date.

Other events of the 1850s included the lease of the South Staffordshire Railway, with J R McClean. It will be recalled that McClean was, at this time, Consultant Engineer to the Furness Railway. The lease was held between 1850 and 1856. In 1852 Brogden, with his brother James (not to be confused with his son of the same name!), set up the Irish Land Company, which speculated on the price of estates in that country. A year later John Brogden & Sons leased a large acreage of the South Wales coalfield together with certain ironworks in that area. This investment appears to have been particularly lucrative, and remained in Brogden hands until the demise of the partnership.

Another expansion on the mining front at about this time was a substantial investment in the Ulverston Mining Company. In 1857 John and Alexander Brogden, with Henry Kennedy, obtained lease to mine iron ore at Lindal Cote. This was worked by the UMcO. until 1882. According to his Alexander, John Brogden retired of a period of from 1858. As John Brogden jnr. had died in 1856, management of the partnership was largely taken by the sons Alexander and James. It would be surprising, though, if he failed to take an interest in business. During his period of retirement, Brogden & Sons were involved in, among other projects, the promoting and running of the Solway Junction Railway (Alexander was

its chairman), the promoting and construction of the Mont Ceniz (with Alexander as a director) and the promotion and running of the Ogmores Valley Railway (Alexander was the company chairman with his brother James as managing director).

John Brogden was a shrewd businessman. On paper, at least, the finances of each company were independent of both each other and of Brogdens' personal fortune. A relevant example of this is the Ulverstone & Lancaster Railway. When the U&L company was running out of money during construction, extra loans and investment was sought from outside the Brogden empire. Eventually this led to two senior FR Directors (Burlington and Buccleuch) bailing the company out. At the same time Brogden had taken a lot of farmland from the U&L for which he was eventually forced to pay. In fact a source of revenue for the U&L, during construction, was rents on land along the course of the line.

On the personal side Brogden appears to have been a rather abrupt, short-tempered character. He was not afraid to speak his mind. James Stelfox, a Clerk of Works on the U&L, noted in his diary, ". . . saw Mr B. was in a good temper for once. . ." On the other hand, he was a generous man. This ranged from helping his employees when they were in financial troubles to putting on a good feast for his friends at the opening of the U&L.

John Brogden died on December 9th 1869, at his house in Sale. His estate appears to have passed largely to John Brogden & Sons, apparently because of the state of his will. Following his death, the partnership continued to prosper until the late 1870s. Partly because of a family argument and partly because of his sons' inability to find finances for modernisation of the various companies, John Brogden & Sons disappeared from the scene. This took place officially in 1878 but the partnership took several years to wind up. As late as October 1885 the furniture from John Brogden & Sons' office at 3 Benson Street, Ulverston was put up for auction, a poor end to a once prosperous business empire.

Information for this article was obtained, with thanks, from:

- Dr. M. Andrews (Correspondence)
 - Glamorgan County Record Office (Documents relating to James Brogden)
 - National Library of Wales (Correspondence of James Brogden.—Higgins Collection)
 - Cumbria County Record Office (Documents in the Buccleugh Estates Collection)
 - Manchester Central Library (Information from Trade Directories)
 - Lancaster University Library (Transcription of James Stelfox's diary)
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