

## What I know of the greatly respected Brogden family:

### builders and contractors of the Furness Railway

by Mr Tom Metcalfe<sup>1</sup>, head gardener to the Brocklebank family.

July 1939

*This transcription of Mr Metcalfe's memoir was made in 2002 from a photocopy which is in the possession of John Brogden<sup>2</sup>. Annotations in another hand are shown in square brackets. The footnotes have been added by Mike Brogden<sup>3</sup> using various sources.*

In my early childhood I have heard my father and mother speak of the father Mr. John senior and Mr. Alexander & Mr. John junior. The two Johns I never knew – they had been gathered to their “rest” before my memory got busy<sup>4</sup>.

Mr. Alexander I knew very well indeed also Mrs. Alex and the son Mr. James Garstang and daughter Mrs. Anne Edith who later married Mr. Kensington – one son. Later a big stout man in full manhood called Basil – he married a lady older than himself.

When Mr. John junior died suddenly Mr. & Mrs. Alex took both his children<sup>5</sup> and brought them up – at least they were all together at Holme Island when I was a child of 5 years of age. I can well remember how I padded about on the new yacht a gem with my sandy feet and nearly went into fits when Mr. Arthur John caught me, held me in his arms and told me in a big voice that he'd vaccinate me if I ever went near the yacht again – needless to say I respectfully kept away as this vaccination business to my childhood mind - the bottomless pit - I just say here that Mr. Arthur John and Miss Mary Helen (or Ellen) [Aunt Rosalie says she was Ellen (Nelly)] were the son and daughter of Mr. John (2<sup>nd</sup>) who by what my father and mother used to say had the maximum of brains.

By what I have heard I don't think any of them lacked the 'grey matter'. My old schoolmaster at Grange used to hold them up with pride before the scholars.

Besides Mr. John and Mr. Alexander there was Mr. James of Tondou<sup>6</sup>. Mr. George and Mr. Henry<sup>7</sup> all living around about Bridgend.

At six years of age we were all living together at Lightburn House, Ulverston where Mr. Brogden had a farm and vied with the Duke of Devonshire in breeding short horn cattle.

It was during this time that a soup kitchen was opened at Lightburn and often have I seen the poor of Ulverston come with their cans and jugs to the side entrance - yes - in the midst of the busy work of railway contracting they did not forget the duty they owed to the poorer brothers and sisters. In the years to come when shadows descended - 'ah well' man's inhumanity to man - those who had been fed – many proved snakes in the grass and forgot that sacred saying “Those without fault.” Besides Lightburn, Holme Island, Court Treherne, the family had Herne Hill in London and Galty Castle in Ireland for the 'shooting'. I rather think it was rented by a syndicate – my father being the organiser of all sing-songs and speech-making by the village folk after each great 'shoot'. A large hogs head was reared in one corner and a small ladder used for each competitor to mount to the platform if by chance any of them had got too much 'John Barleycorn' he was kept upright by others less affected often have I heard my father say the dear lads seldom forgot their manners if they did the duck pond was handy.

I am proud to say that when my father left at the end of the season nearly all the village set him off and loaded him with beautiful Irish oil-painting<sup>8</sup> which kept my mother busy with the frying pan for many a day – also geese and honey in the old skep<sup>9</sup> hive. Many a time have I heard him say he was welcome everywhere and being blessed with good nature sat down to a meal of praties ? and buttermilk whilst pigs and fowl and children were playing about their feet.

So much about Galty Castle.

<sup>1</sup> According to an annotation in an unknown hand, this memoir was written on 31 July 1939. The annotation also gives an address for Mr Metcalfe: Yew Tree Gardens, Hookburgh, Cork in Cartmel, Lancashire

<sup>2</sup> This John Brogden, now of York, has conducted a great deal of research into various branches of the Brogden family. He is not known to be directly related to the Brogdens who feature in Mr Metcalfe's memoir.

<sup>3</sup> Mike Brogden is also not a direct relation of the Brogdens in the memoir.

<sup>4</sup> John senior was born in 1798 and died in 1869; John junior was born in 1823 and died in 1855.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur John (1854 – 1885) and Ann Ellen (dates not known).

<sup>6</sup> Tondou was the Brogden residence in South Wales where the company held mining and iron interests, run by James.

<sup>7</sup> George and Henry, along with John and Alexander were all sons of John senior. He also had at least one, and perhaps, two daughters.

<sup>8</sup> The handwriting appears to say “oil-painting” but its meaning must be somewhat different.

<sup>9</sup> A skep is a basket; this was a woven rather than wooden hive.

Holme Island I think was the family favourite seat – there they were isolated to a certain extent and enjoyed themselves with yachting, swimming, fishing, skating and wild duck shooting as the seasons came round.

In a few short years all were scattered. All of them followed their own ambitions and all got married.

In 1882<sup>10</sup> I left the home circle and took to the gardening profession. I was head gardener for Lord Churchill at the early age of 26. Previous to this at the Earl of Lonsdales, Lowther Castle where I was, for one season, floral decorator – in due time I left Rolleston, Leicester. I came north and followed Landscape gardening under a noted Windermere firm. I could have gone as foreman to the Hague, Athens, Switzerland, U.S.A. but tired of keeping two houses going I threw all my driving force ambition to the wind and closed with the offer from Mr. H. Brocklebank<sup>11</sup> to go as head gardener to him at Duddon Hall, Broughton in Furness and from there Grizedale Hall, Hawkshead, Ambleside being with him 37 years and so I continued the long service for you will have guessed Mrs. Brocklebank was the Miss Mary Ellen Brogden – Mr. John Brogden the junior's daughter.

On my taking hold as head gardener my father and mother retired to Ulverston for they were still with the Brocklebanks, they died at the ripe old age of 84 and 89 and very strange to say sleep together in the same little hillside cemetery at Satterthwaite – there they lay for even after life's long journey they are not separated. My mother and Mrs. Brocklebank with Mr. Brocklebank. Another old lady Mrs. Coward sleeps close to them and here again is a coincidence for they were altogether when young. Mrs. Coward's aunt – Esther Robinson was Mr. Arthur John Brogden's niece – my mother took her place and was present in the room when Mrs. Brocklebank was born. All of these good and noble souls nursed me – no doubt when I was a baby in short clothes.

How I could weary you with the many events which took place during those 67 years that I can look back at, ups and downs, sunshine and shadows and as I sit back unable to do much - the bitter-sweets of memory come crowding in and I cannot help a dew rising in my eyes when I long for the touch of a vanished hand and a sight of the old familiar faces.

When we were at Holme Island great rejoicings were in process in the welcoming of Mr. Alex Brogden from Russia, Holland, Germany etc where he secured orders for a snow-clearing machine<sup>12</sup>. I remember the great excitement and the booming of the small cannons at the look-out and on the front of Bella Vesta Temple – great days I can assure you and the great dinner party given when several titled people were present – ah yes the name of Brogden was a house-hold word in Furness and then after a flood tide the ebb and outward flow but somehow I never got to know much of this – the greatest cause would be the finish of the Furness Railway of that dangerous portion for which they contracted.

I first remember the servants going and then the garden and stable staff being reduced. The family went to London and my father and mother were left in charge because my father's eyesight failed him which forced him to leave the service as butler – even so we were there at Holme Island for quite four years after my father started a small tea business and did well for a number of years.

Mr. & Mrs. and Miss Edith went to New Zealand<sup>13</sup> and were away for a long time and I believe lost a lot of money and Holme Island was sold. I only know of this by rumours so discard anything I do not know to the real facts of the case.

After leaving Holme Island my parents went to Ulverston and my father's eyesight improving was offered the good position as butler to Canon Harman of Aldingham with the privilege of the use of a firm to look after his business as tea dealer. Mother was at this time the caretaker of a small mansion just outside Ulverston so once again all went well till the mansion was let and Canon Harman left after which we went into a small cottage and mother took the laundry work of Mr. Arthur John's and Mr. James G Brogden's and so once again we came into the service again but during the interval there was always correspondence and which continued as my mother was often called away from home to overlook whenever one or other of the branches of the family wanted her.

During this absence my aunt Sarah Evans kept house and I am nearly certain that she was in service with one of the Budgett<sup>14</sup> family at some time. She is now 82 years of age and lives at Langdale. Can you look back the years and see if you can remember her?

Continuing as I had left home I got very enthralled with my work and of course travelled about to gain experience. In this interval very much had happened. Mr. & Mrs. Alex Brogden were dead<sup>15</sup>. Mr. James Garstang Brogden<sup>16</sup> also. Mr. Arthur John after the great loss of money

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<sup>10</sup> See previous footnote in which Mr Metcalfe's year of birth is thought to be 1868; he would therefore have been 14 when he left home to become a gardener, a typical age for a boy to begin such an apprenticeship.

<sup>11</sup> See footnote on the Brocklebank shipping line on page 1.

<sup>12</sup> Not aware of this machine from other sources but it is very reminiscent of the street cleaning machine that John Brogden senior developed and sold for use in Manchester.

<sup>13</sup> John Brogden & Sons were awarded several contracts to build railways in New Zealand and to supply workmen (The "Brogden Navvies") but the contracts ran into difficulties and the company could not fulfil them. Much money is thought to have been lost in these ventures. The "Mr & Mrs and Miss Edith" may refer to Alexander whose daughter was called Edith but other records show that it was James Brogden who went to New Zealand to manage the contracts there, following a major falling out with Alexander.

<sup>14</sup> John Brogden senior's daughter Sarah Hannah married Samuel Budgett and it is through their descendant, David Budgett, that Mr Metcalfe's memoir came to light.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander died in 1892; the date of his wife's death is not yet known.

<sup>16</sup> James Garstang Brogden (son of Alexander) died in 1885.

took to the church<sup>17</sup> and went to live at Baldock where I should have gone to him as gardener for we both of us had a sympathetic liking for each other. I decided not to go by the advice of the head gardener I was under – said I was too young by far (21 years) to have the charge of the place and men under me – I was cut up and wrote him a letter explaining in detail and so ended our correspondence. He wrote to me saying how sorry he was that I would not go to him. He died a short time after and my fine mother was with him at the last and nearly his last words for ‘Annie’ his name for her.

I know other items respecting him, which are sad; he died through the affect of a blow of a cricket ball on the chest when he was a young man<sup>18</sup>.

His widow (no children) afterwards married a Captain Cameron (not quite certain here) and they went to India.

Of Mr. James Garstang Brogden I know very little – he was very very pleasant and my father’s favourite whilst Mr. Arthur was mothers and my favourite.

Miss Ann Edith<sup>19</sup> married Mr. Kensington, as I believe I wrote earlier. I saw her once at Grizedale and I believe had a leaning towards the Roman Catholic. I never got to know much of her after. The years passed on and I only saw Mrs. George Brogden and Georgie as we children called him he came but once and then with open hand ‘with Tom’ meeting after so many years and so we stood and talked of the old days two grey-headed elderly men. Mrs. George fairly ran at me and clutched hold of my arm ‘come on Tom’ let us walk round the garden and talk. Not the least trace of pride – to me a beautiful little old lady, happy vivacious as always and then a close clasp of the hand and maybe a lump in the throat – we did not see each other again.

The years rolled on and then came the Reaper for Mrs. Brocklebank – a sad day for me when I bid her good bye for I had been sitting with her in her private room talking of old times, smiling – yes even smiling at each other when we took each other by the hand I promising her never to leave Mr. Brocklebank. I kept my sacred promise and so after his day I came away. I went with my men who were my friends - neither were we wanted. How sad an ending God knows and I swore then that none of my boys or girls would ever be servants again. It changed me from a man who would go through anything for my employer my whole thought was to be honest in all to them. I did all that and at the last I took my little bit of a nest egg and part bought this little place<sup>20</sup>. I have freedom.

There is a wise saying – that we come this way but once – so I try to put all bitterness to one side and live from day to day.

Please forgive me this outbreaking but after 37 years one perhaps looks for a little consideration not to be told to go at so short a notice.

I need hardly say the ‘transplanting’ was not easy for I laid out Grizedale and how proud I was to see the years adding beauty to my thought-out plan and now all is like a wilderness - walks and drives knee deep in weed and worst of all I am now a cast off nor do I ever wish to set my feet there again.

I have not spoken or written much of Mr. & Mrs. Brogden – Georgie being all to us but I can say this of them that all of the villagers thought much of them – also of Mr. James and Mr. Henry. I only knew them afar off – too big for such as I.

They must have been in big business; my memory recalls coalmines and brick works where I used to sit and watch them being made. I also remember hundreds of mules and ponies being brought up from the collieries. I went to a very big school at Tondur<sup>21</sup> where if my memory is not at fault were over 600 scholars – 3 masters and 10 teachers also one of most up-to-date schools having swings and a kind of flight apparatus. The scholars had their own school sports and all had sashes – as if they belonged to a kind of club or band of hope. Each Monday all the boys marched round the school singing the Welsh National Anthem -Men of Harlech. I write now of 65 years since<sup>22</sup>. I picked up a smattering of the Welsh language and had I been there two years more I should certainly have got proficient in it.

It was whilst there I saw people baptised in the river by Parson Timms – quite a number of times – a very beautiful service and well attended.

I also got myself into a room whilst an inquest was going on – it seems to me I just pushed open the swing door unseen and uncovered the dead mans face to see how he looked for I had known him before and I remember he was very white and cold and I felt very sorry – later I was seen and kindly taken outside - I did not seem in anyway afraid. It was also whilst at Court Treherne I climbed up the cupboard shelves and got a bottle (whisky), which I poured in a cup, sugared and drank the lot. My mother and father found me in my little rocking chair, humming. We’ll wait for the turn of the tide and my father called in the coachman who offered me a sixpence if I would walk to him but I was packed off to bed instead. Sometimes all of the branches of the Brogden family came down – possibly settling matters of their business. I could write you a volume of the sayings and happenings of the various branches of the family for believe me there was none like them and they are all in all to my father and mother and naturally we as children adored them.

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<sup>17</sup> “The great loss of money” is no doubt the collapse of the John Brogden and Sons company in 1880 and the bankruptcy of Alexander, Henry and James in 1884.

<sup>18</sup> Arthur John died in 1885 aged 31.

<sup>19</sup> James Garstang Brogden’s sister.

<sup>20</sup> Presumably Yew Tree Gardens: see note XX

<sup>21</sup> See note XX

<sup>22</sup> See note XX

I have not mentioned that my mother entered the service by the time she was 14 years of age. But before this her soon-to-become her step-mother was there in command. She {the stepmother} married grandfather Evans who was one of the assembling engineers on the Railway and with the Brogden's - he came of good stock and had £500 from the Hoaly ?-hill Estate - all this he lost. I never knew how - but Sir James Ramsden and he were together at the same important trade - for I have heard my mother say that all gentlemen's sons had to have their 'Credentials'.

My father is of the old Yorkshire family of Metcalfe's. Landed proprietors - glorying in being yeomen. Captain Metcalfe was at the battle of Agincourt, they had five strongholds where they kept soldiering ready against the ravages of the Scots - these five strongholds belonged to brothers. They were inventors of the long bow. One was High Sheriff of York and attended by 300 Metcalfe's on white horses. In 1600 they were the most numerous family in England and all Wensleydale Dent ? and the surrounding country belonged to them.

I have in my possession the history of the family or clan.

Tom Metcalfe

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*The following note is attached to Mr Metcalfe's memoir. Its author is not stated but as the memoir was known to be in the possession of Mr David Budgett in the 1980s, the note may have been made by one of the Budgett<sup>23</sup> family who are referred to in the memoir.*

Mr Metcalfe was head gardener with Mr Brocklebank<sup>24</sup>, who married Ellen (Nelly) Brogden [daughter of John junior, son of John the railway contractor]. Mr Metcalfe's mother was nurse, cook and house keeper in living. Between the mother, son and grandson the Metcalfe family served the Brogdens for a hundred years. When Mr Brocklebank died a few years ago<sup>25</sup> and the estate was sold, the village (Grizedale Hall, Hawkshead, Ambleside) practically collapsed: all the employees had lived there. In the house and garden there were some 20 servants and Nelly said one day "in the sewing meeting" (Mr Metcalfe's words) "my happiest days were when we were first married and in our small house I had all my children round me." Nelly was indomitable. She died of cancer at 80 years of age but kept about till the last. She was much loved and respected and was a great help to her husband. Mrs Metcalfe, the mother, remembers taking out hot meals in the night to John Brogden when he was engaged on the railway.

Everyone mentions Nelly's beautiful complexion [not to mention love of dogs]. At one time Mr Metcalfe was in South Wales with George Brogden and he used to play with "Georgie", later Dr George Brogden<sup>26</sup>. "Aunt Pollie", mother to the doctor, was gay to the last and died when she was 80. Mr Metcalfe is now 71<sup>27</sup>, and runs a nursery garden at Hookburgh. He is well educated<sup>28</sup> and speaks excellent English and his manners befit a gentleman. He hailed me with delight and showed me many old Brogden photographs and also lent me a reprint of the Barrow in Furness News 1917, in which John Brogden's achievements are told and his fine character, especially his perseverance, are recalled.

At Grange over Sands the name of Brogden is well known though there are few now who remember John Brogden. He was known familiarly as "old Jackey Brogden"! Arthur Brogden was Mr Metcalfe's godfather. The Free Mason's Lodge here<sup>29</sup> is called after Arthur Brogden.

Holme Island, house and garden is well kept up but it is for sale. It belongs to a lady in Harrogate. By the building of the railway much fertile land was saved from the in-roads of the sea all round Morecombe Bay.

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<sup>23</sup> Samuel Budgett of Bristol married John Brogden senior's eldest daughter, Sarah Hannah, in 1858.

<sup>24</sup> Mr Brocklebank was a member of the shipowning company, Brocklebank, Morrison and Turner. He married Ellen (Nelly) Brogden in 1878.

<sup>25</sup> Information on the year of Mr Brocklebank's death would help to date this covering note.

<sup>26</sup> Presumably Georgie was George junior, the son of John Brogden's youngest son, George, who was married to Mary Elizabeth. George senior did not join his father's company but had mining interests of his own in south Wales.

<sup>27</sup> This suggests that Mr Metcalfe was born in 1868 but in his memoir his reference to his "67 years" appears to contradict this.

<sup>28</sup> Mr Metcalfe's copperplate handwriting is beautifully done.

<sup>29</sup> The author does not tell us where "here" is.