

EARBY--- OUR VILLAGE (IV)

THE BRACEWELL FAMILY

To the development of our village from a small agricultural hamlet to a fair-sized industrial town there is one name which stands out prominently - that is Bracewell.

The family originated in the locality of Coates, near Barnoldswick, and an old mill at Coates was at one time, about the beginning of the 19th century, run by one branch of the family. Mr. Christopher Bracewell, senior, removed from Coates to Thornton Hall and he married a daughter of George and Ann Smith, of Thornton. Their eldest son, William, was born in 1813. About that time the family removed to Green End, Earby, Mr. Bracewell having acquired the Green End Estate, in which handloom weaving was carried on, and at the end of the long row of cottages there was a warehouse which was used for the storage of cloth and yarn. Handloom weavers were accustomed to tramp to the Earby warehouse from many miles around with their pieces, returning with their yarn and bobbins. The woven cloth was conveyed to Manchester and Bradford by road. The walled-up doorways at the New Road end of the cottages are quite noticeable at the present time.

The Bracewell family became the pioneers of the cotton industry in its modern development over a very wide area.

The Old Shed, a long narrow building with windows at the sides, was built in 1839, the space providing for 140 looms, the power being provided by an old fashioned beam engine. The site of the shed was a little lower than the Green End warehouse, and abutting on a private road called "The New Road." Soon after the Old Shed was built the Plug Drawing Riots took place, and hundreds of people from Lancashire besieged the shed, and drew the boiler plug. The introduction of the power loom was much resented for a time by the weavers of Lancashire, and the neighbouring town of Colne appears to have been a hot-bed of "loom-smashers" and "plug drawers."

The rioters were dispersed by the military while they were proceeding from Earby to Skipton. The name of the firm who ran the Old Shed was styled "Christopher Bracewell and Sons." The eldest son, William, however, started manufacturing at Burnley in partnership with his brother-in-law, Samuel Smallpage, who married in 1846 Mary Bracewell. He removed to Barnoldswick and built Butts Mill.

Amazing success attended his enterprise, for the Butts Mill was twice enlarged; the large Wellhouse Mill was built; there were weaving sheds in conjunction with the spinning mills; weaving shed at Burnley (now the Burnley Iron Works), the collieries at Ingleton, flour mills, gas works, and many farms in the district.

In his day Mr. William Bracewell was reputed to be the largest single-handed manufacturer attending the Manchester Exchange.

The original firm at Earby continued to expand its operations. The business passed into the control of Mr. Bracewell, junior, and his brothers, Edmund, Thomas and Henry, and was called Ch. Bracewell & Bros. The large spinning mill at Earby with the weaving shed adjoining was erected in 1852, and the firm also took over the Airebank Mill at Gargrave and

the Waterloo Mill at Clitheroe.

Edmund lived at Gargrave, Thomas at Clitheroe, Henry at Thornton, where he built the Manor House, which has been for ten years or more the residence of Sir Amos Nelson; and Christopher at Earby. Miss Jane Bracewell, their sister, settled in Gargrave.

For a period of about eight years Mr. Christopher and family resided at Southport, for the benefit of his health and the education of his children. At that time he took much interest in public affairs, and was elected a member of the town council. He was associated with a reception given to the Duchess of Teck on visiting Southport, and also a reception for Mr. Gladstone.

On the death of Edmund Bracewell the partnership of the firm was dissolved and the new firm of Christopher Bracewell and Sons retained control of the Victoria Mill, Earby, containing 36,000 spindles and 600 looms. They also took over Sough Bridge Shed with 500 looms and the Oak Mount with 67,000 spindles and 560 looms.

In addition to his industrial activities Mr. Christopher Bracewell became the largest landowner in the Earby district. He acquired possession of the Moor Hall Farm, adjoining Green End Farm and erected the large barn at Moor Hall, which is the most prominent landmark on the countryside above Earby. There was accommodation for 64 head of cattle at Moor Hall and 30 at Green End. He also took over Waddington's Farm, Wheatlands Farm and Stoneybank Farm.

No Earby lad could forget the scene in our village during haytime when the "Old Master" was at the height of his power and influence. In addition to the regular farm staff 30 Irishmen were engaged for haytime, and on fine evenings when a lot of hay had to be gathered in scores of men trooped from the mill to the hay field to give a hand; and in the centre of operations was the Master sitting on his camp stool, or directing operations here and there in his characteristic manner.

And the sheep washing day in June! What a glorious Saturday morning it was to go down into "The Bottoms" and see hundreds of sheep penned up and then washed in the blocked up stream.

The Old Master was somewhat gruff and curt in speech, and he appeared to relish administering chastisement to mischievous boys by the application of his walking stick to their hinder quarters, but he was good natured at heart and generous when occasion called it forth. He and his family rendered invaluable assistance to the chapels, schools and public institutions in the village. He was twice married, and his first wife, a Miss Whittaker, of Bacup, who was a Baptist by family connections, obtained a gift from Mr. Riley, of Halifax, of land on which the present commodious Mount Zion Chapel is built, and she laid the foundation stone, but died before the building was completed. For his second wife, Mr. Christopher married a Miss Hopwood, of Burnley, his brother also marrying her sister.

They were largely responsible for the erection of the beautiful Gothic Wesleyan Chapel at Earby, and the similar chapel at Gargrave with the associated Day and Sunday Schools.

The Victoria institute, now replaced by the Liberal Club and Coronation Hall, which used to be the centre of the social life of the village, was provided by the Bracewell family, and in its

day it was a great boon to the community.

And who, remembering our village of 40 years ago, can ever lose sight of the cricket field, which was provided rent free by Mr. Bracewell. One of the best village cricket fields in Yorkshire, near to the village, plenty of room all round it, nearly level, with a slightly raised crease, a veritable paradise for cricketers! And the story that will be handed down from generation to generation of how "Bob" Bracewell, who was a mighty hitter when he was in good form, once sent a ball clean out of the field against the Old Shed door!

Then there were the flower shows which owed so much to Mr. Walter and his sister Miss Carrie. They were unsparing in their endeavours to help on those events of a sociable character which brightened the life of the village.

Misfortune and then disaster unhappily came upon our Old Master and his family. Two mill fires at Gargrave, a devastating fire at Oak Mount, and the Earby mill fire in 1884, through all of which the family lost £100,000, and attendant periods of bad trade, completely changed their fortunes.

At 65 years of age the Master with his family emigrated to the United States and commenced farming at Greely, Colorado, the only son remaining at Earby being Mr. Walter, who assisted his brother-in-law, Mr.(now Sir) Dyson Mallison (who married Miss Lizzie), in the management of Victoria Mills. Mr.Robert returned to Earby, but the other two sons, Mr. Willie and Mr. Edgar, remained with their father. Life in the New World was quite congenial to the old master, and he lived to a hale and hearty old age, being only three months short of 87 years old when he finished his earthly career.

Time has brought with it many changes but there remain among the "Old Earbyers" a few who have kindly thoughts and grateful recollections of the Bracewells of Green End.

J. Hartley

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