

## Our BROOKSBANK Family History

In the 'Origins of the Brooksbank Family' we identified a Thomas Brooksbank (Brokesbank) mentioned in 1273 as the first member of the family to have used the surname that we know of. He was probably born in the West Riding of Yorkshire, possibly in Rastrick, in about 1240 and was most likely a Yeoman of some standing in the local community. He had a son Adam Bythebroke born in about 1270, who in 1309 was a Yeoman with 8 acres of land and served as a juror. His son Henry Bythebroke was born around 1300 and by 1339 he too was a Yeoman, living at Rastrick in the Manor of Wakefield. The court rolls for the Manor of Wakefield are an important source of information, recording the business of the court baron (held three times a year at Wakefield) and the court leet (held twice yearly at Wakefield, Halifax, Brighouse or Rastrick and Kirkburton). Henry Bythebroke had at least six sons, the oldest being Thomas Bythebrokebank born in 1330 and living at Elland in 1377 as a Yeoman.

By 1379 the surname seems to have evolved into Brokesbanke, close to its final form. Thomas Brokesbanke had a son John Brokesbanke born in 1354 in Warley (Halifax) who ended up as a Yeoman in Allerton, about 7 miles away. There were then a couple of generations where we do not know the first names of the individuals before another John Brooksbank was born in 1453 in Warley. He was a Yeoman and Grieve (Bailiff) of Warley and the Brooksbanks were one of the leading families in Warley. Chapter 9 of the book 'Brooksbank – Yeoman of the Dales' is entitled 'The Murder of Sir Gilbert Brooksbank' and deals with the feuding in the Royal Manor of Wakefield at that time. The Steward of the Manor was Sir Richard Tempest, who had been one of King Henry VIII's bodyguards at Flodden Field, and he was fighting Sir Harry Savile of Thornhill. Sir Gilbert Brooksbank, son of John Brooksbank, an inoffensive, innocuous priest at Heptonstall was murdered in 1536 by Robert Briggs, one of Sir Richard Tempest's men, because he had displeased the knight. Sometime later Sir Richard was thrown into the Tower of London, for his involvement in the Pilgrimage of Grace, and died there from the plague.

Richard Brooksbank, a younger brother of John Brooksbank, born in 1455 in Warley, continued our family line and had at least four sons. The youngest born in 1480 became Sir John Brooksbank, Curate of Elland. The eldest, another Richard Brooksbank, born in 1475 in Warley became a Yeoman upholding the

other family occupation. He had at least five sons, the second of whom was Thomas Brooksbank born in 1495 in Warley and who became a Yeoman in nearby Sowerby. Thomas and his wife Margaret had three sons and a daughter that we know of and the youngest of these was a William Brooksbank born in 1517 in Sowerby. Being the youngest child of a second son would have meant a meagre inheritance was likely to be all he would receive and so William chose to settle in Almondbury some 10 miles away. By the age of 20 William had started a family and went on to have at least five sons, the second of whom was another William Brooksbank born in 1539 in Almondbury.

We do not know the occupations of this lesser branch of the family in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, but it is quite likely that they worked in the woollen industry and/or in farming. William Brooksbank the younger married Joan Oldfield in 1560 and they raised a family of at least seven children, five of whom were daughters (one of whom died in infancy). Their eldest child was James Brooksbank born in 1561 in Almondbury who became the man of the house at the age of 16 years when his father died aged 38. The older girls would have been able to help their mother in the house but there were three children aged six and under, and James was probably the only breadwinner. Somehow they got by and James Brooksbank had married another Joan by the age of 21 and they went on to have 11 children, three of whom died in infancy. The eldest of their children was William Brooksbank born 1583 in Almondbury and his second son was another William Brooksbank born 1636 in Almondbury.

His second son was yet another William Brooksbank born 1670 in Almondbury who married Elizabeth Mellar in 1704. They had three daughters before having a son William who died in infancy and then another son William Brooksbank born 1720 in Almondbury. This William married Mary Lund in 1744 in Almondbury and they had nine children, six daughters and three sons, with three dying in infancy. Their eighth child was a Joseph Brooksbank born 1764 in Almondbury where this branch of the family had been resident for over two hundred years. Indeed, the population of Almondbury had been steadily rising from early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and continued to do so until 1792 when a sharp decline occurred, probably due to a migration towards the prospering industrial centre of nearby Huddersfield. Those remaining in Almondbury were most likely still occupied in farming and/or cloth making. Joseph Brooksbank married Nancy Bradley in 1784 and they had six children that we know of, the third being another William Brooksbank born 1788 in Almondbury.

We know from census records that William Brooksbank was a hand loom weaver (woollen weaver), but he would prove to be one of the last of a dying breed. In 1795 there were about 75,000 hand loom weavers (mainly men) in England and they could earn up to £1 10s per week, a princely sum in those days. By 1812 shortly before he married there were over 200,000 weavers and in 1820 as many as 240,000. However, the power loom had increasingly been taking over during this time as it was faster and cheaper, so wages for hand loom weavers had dropped to as little as 5s per week by 1829. By this time the numbers of weavers had started to decline, with 188,000 in 1835, 60,000 in 1845 and only 6,000 in 1861. In fact William may have been quite fortunate as he married Hannah Wood in 1814 and they raised a family before the worst of the decline, having seven children in all, and he was able to supplement his income by farming. He was still working as a weaver in 1861, aged 72, but could probably manage on the pittance this provided as only he and his wife remained at home.

Their second child was John Brooksbank born 1818 in Almondbury. One of only two sons, he too was a hand loom weaver like his father, but sometime after 1851 he became a greengrocer and by 1871 was farming 6 acres of land. As late as 1891 he still gave worsted weaving as one of his occupations, probably still having the loom at home he would no doubt have worked on it when he could. His younger brother Allen Brooksbank born 1831 gave his occupations as fancy cloth manufacturer, woollen pattern designer and tailor, probably because by then he could not make a living from weaving. John Brooksbank married Elizabeth Armitage in 1845 and they had ten children, six boys and four girls. The fifth of these was Wright Brooksbank born 1854 in Almondbury and he avoided cloth manufacture altogether, working as a stone mason, farmer and master joiner instead. His youngest brother John William Brooksbank born 1863 did though work as a power loom weaver.

Wright Brooksbank married twice, firstly to Anna who gave him two sons before dying in 1887 and secondly to Emily Scurry (whose first husband Fred Cox had died young) in 1888 at Helme. Although Emily was already 36 years old by then she managed to give him three daughters. The first of these was Hannah Brooksbank born 1888 at Spark Green only four months after the wedding. A devote Methodist, Auntie Hannah as we knew her, may never have known this as her baptism was not held until a year after her parents' marriage. The youngest of the three girls was Marion Beatrice Brooksbank born 1891 in

Helme, our grandmother. One mystery I haven't resolved involves the 1891 Census records for Wright and Emily Brooksbank. Emily, who would have been six months pregnant at the time, was living at Helme with her five daughters (three from her previous marriage) and listed as head of the family, working as a laundress. Wright meanwhile was five miles away at Almondbury, living with his father, mother and two of his brothers and working as a stone mason.

Whatever the reason for their separation at that time Wright died less than five years later aged only 43, leaving Emily with six daughters aged 4 to 19 years. At the time of the next Census in 1901, the four older girls were working in local cotton or silk mills and Emily was at home looking after the two youngest. By 1911 they had moved to Slaithwaite though the two oldest daughters had left home by then and all the others were now working, the middle two as woollen weavers in a cloth mill, the next as a shop assistant in a confectioners and the youngest as a dress maker working from home. Having managed to survive these difficult times they then had to endure the Great War and it was shortly after this that Marion Brooksbank married Hubert Roberts. Their only child was a daughter, Audrey Jacqueline Roberts born 1922 in Slaithwaite who was our mother. Having been gassed in the war Hubert was never fully well and he died in 1939 aged 47, but despite this further travail Marion was able to send Audrey to Girton College, Cambridge the following year.

The Brooksbanks are a large and generally very successful family, though I'm not sure that my mother ever fully appreciated their pre-eminence. For several centuries they were successful Yeomen in the Yorkshire dales and then in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century a branch of the family took London by storm reaching new heights. By the whim of fate my mother was descended from a lesser branch of the family who lost out to elder brothers when the inheritances were shared out. They struggled on a number of occasions when fathers, generally the only breadwinner, died early and women or children were forced to earn a crust. The industrialisation of weaving also dealt a blow to the family's way of life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But they endured and mother should have been proud of what they achieved.

Paul Fiddian – December, 2014