

## Thomas Brown and son, West Yorkshire Coroners

**Thomas Brown** was born on 10 December 1800 in Calton, near Airton, in Malhamdale to **John Brown**, a 'gentleman farmer,' and his wife **Ann Blackburn**. John Brown had the tenancy of Calton Hall, a medieval building near Airton with a great history outlined by the Kirkby Malham Local History Group [ph1]. **John Lambert**, known as the 'Architect of the Cromwellian Protectorate' was born at Calton Hall in 1619. There is a memorial to Major General Lambert in the church at Kirkby Malham. It's a complete new build now.



Since 1792 the Hall and many other properties had been owned by **Gamaliel Lloyd** of Leeds and tax records show the portion rented by John Brown was valued at £1 7s 6d. In addition, John owned land valued at 16s 10d.



Thomas was educated at the Malham Endowed School and displayed '*unusual mental acumen*' so that, at the age of 15, he was articled to **John Preston**, the principal lawyer in the town, '*one of the attorneys of His Majesty's Courts of Kings Bench and Common Pleas at Westminster and one of the Solicitors of His Majesty's High Court of Chancery*'. This contract lasted from 12 September 1815 until 12 December 1821 after which he was invited to be a partner to John Preston. John died in 1829 and Thomas took over the business. In a closing-the-circle way, John Preston's son was later articled to Thomas.



On 21st November 1827 Thomas was unanimously elected by the freeholders of the county for the position of '*Coroner for the district of Staincliffe*,' taking over from **William Tindal** [3]. The district of Staincliffe covered everywhere from Ingleton to Addingham, Malham to Otley. Thomas' own son later said he was elected in the '*good old way*' referring to a bit of bribery.

Being a solicitor, Thomas was not short of money, but his income was supplemented from work as the clerk to the Poor Law Guardians, Deputy Superintendent Registrar and clerk to the Skipton Rural Sanitary Authority. Thomas was also a churchwarden.

**On the 21st ult. the election of a Coroner for the district of Staincliffe with Ewecross, in Yorkshire, vacant by the resignation of Mr. Tindal, came on, at the Castle of York, before Mr. G. Hindsley, county clerk; when Mr. Thomas Brown, of Skipton, solicitor, was unanimously elected.**

In Skipton in 1837, aged 37, Thomas married **Mary Bradley** who was the daughter of **John Bradley** and **Ann Hutton**, the innkeepers of the Devonshire Hotel on Newmarket Street in Skipton [4,5]. They had been the proprietors since 1820 when John advertised that it was business as usual [1]. He hosted a number of balls including one for the coronation of George IV to the throne, which may not have happened as the coronation was postponed after a row with the King's wife, Caroline of Brunswick.

"J. Bradley returns his grateful acknowledgments to his Friends and the Public for their liberal support during his residence at the Sun Inn, and hereby informs them that he has entered the Devonshire Hotel, lately occupied by Mr. James Ross, which he has fitted up in superior style, for the accommodation of nobility, gentry, and others, and he trusts by indefatigable attention to their comfort and convenience, to merit the patronage of a liberal public. J.B. has also purchased from the first houses in the trade a large stock of neat old wines and genuine fine-flavoured foreign spirits. Neat post-chaise, able horses, and careful drivers are always ready at the shortest notice."



Anne Bradley—I keep the Devonshire Arms at Skipton. Recollect two gentlemen and a lady coming in a coach and four, about eleven o'clock at night on the 7th of March. Saw them by the light of a lantern. Four horses were ordered for Settle. Ordered the servant to take some gingerbread, which was laid in the lady's lap. They had also two glasses of water. I said I should be glad to see them on their return, for I rather thought it was a runaway wedding. They were very cheerful, and laugh-

ing. The young lady was in good spirits. The gingerbread seemed to please the lady, for she took two plates of it.

In March 1827 widow Ann was called to give evidence in the trial of **William Gibbon Wakefield**, a handsome charismatic but duplicitous man, over the abduction of a wealthy heiress, **Ellen Turner** the previous year. Ellen, aged just 15, was taken around the north west of the country all the way to Gretna Green where they were married. While their horses were being exchanged at The Devonshire on the way to Settle, Ann gave the couple water and gingerbread [3]. From the way they behaved Ann thought they were involved in a runaway wedding, '*very cheerful and laughing and in good spirits*'. However, it all went pear-shaped once Ellen's father found out what was going on! The full account is given in the story of **Robert Hartley**, the innkeeper at Settle's Golden Lion.

Thomas and Mary Brown initially lived in Devonshire Terrace (Mews) opposite the Devonshire Hotel, but, after Mary's mother died, they moved to 3 High Street which is still a solicitor's office today. Thomas and Mary had five children although daughter **Maria** died aged 17. All the children remained single. Eldest son, **Thomas Parkinson Brown**, was born in 1838 and continued to live at 3 High Street with sisters **Eliza Margaret** and **Isabella** after their parents died. Unsurprisingly, son **Thomas Parkinson Brown** also became a solicitor and 'deputy coroner' to his father. Second son, **John Edward Brown**, became a corn merchant and spent most of his life in the outskirts of Liverpool. He died, aged just 50, after spending some time at Sunnyside Hydro Institution in Southport. This was one of several Southport health facilities offering hydrotherapy and electrotherapy cures and treatments.

Historically, 'crowners' served the crown primarily to decide taxes payable at death. The internet tells us that, over time, the role of the coroner has evolved to "*conduct an inquest into the manner or cause of death that appeared to be of a suspicious, or unexplained nature and to investigate the identity of an unknown person who has been found dead. Coroners' inquests were usually held within the space of 48 hours following a death, as soon as the coroner could assemble a jury. They were held in a local public-house, municipal building or workhouse, but sometimes in the building where the death occurred. Some casualties were taken to the hospital, so the inquest would be conducted there, rather than where the person was living or died.*" The coroner usually came from a legal or medical background and tended to be appointed for life by the respective county. Coroner's were appointed only if they had a wealthy background, the theory being that they would be less likely to accept a bribe. There was also quite a delay in the remuneration of expenses following quarterly sessions so a good financial cushion was required. It wasn't until 1861 that the ten coroners of West Yorkshire received an actual salary based on previous expenses. Thomas received £120 annually worth about £7,000 today on top of his salaries as a solicitor, registrar, clerk etc.



Thomas and son Thomas were exceedingly busy men. A quick search of 19<sup>th</sup> century newspapers throws up literally hundreds of articles. They presided over all the suspicious deaths by accident, assault or suicide in West Yorkshire, including those of the navvies who died during the

building of the Settle and Carlisle Railway. Father and son must have had incredibly strong stomachs. Newspaper reports of the deaths are graphic enough, never mind examining bodies in real life with associated odours. At an inquest held just one (warm) day after death, the body of navy Thomas Burton was described as “*being in an advanced state of decomposition, the effluvia offensive and sickening to the jury*”[6]. Poor Thomas had been crushed between two wagons trying to avoid an oncoming train. Thomas (Jnr) presided over the death of Thomas Smith, a married man with three children, who drowned in the Ribble after being seen ‘the worse for liquor’[3]. Oh dear.

Company:—“The body of Thomas Burton, 26 hours after death being in an advanced state of decomposition, the effluvia offensive and sickening to the jury, cannot but be detrimental to the health of the patients confined in the Hospital, and to the Master and matron of the establishment, and during the hot weather is likely to be a prolific source of disease in the locality; and the jury therefore urgently recommend the erection of a dead house detached from the Hospital as a means

MAN DROWNED.—On Sunday last the body of a man was seen in the river Ribble near to King’s Mill, Settle, and on its being got out of the water, it was identified as the body of Thomas Smith alias Bill Farrer, who had been employed on the new line of railway here. The body was conveyed to the Royal Oak Inn, where an inquest was held on Tuesday last, before Thomas P. Brown, Esq, deputy coroner, when evidence was given that deceased was seen the worse for liquor late on Saturday night, going in the direction

One of Thomas (Snr)’s most notorious cases was in 1846 when he found irishman John Rodda, aged 33, guilty of the ‘*Wilful Murder*’ of his daughter Mary by making her drink oil of vitriol (sulphuric acid) in order to claim £2 10 shillings from a burial club upon her death [5]. John was executed at York Castle [10].

**SHOCKING MURDER AT SKIPTON.**—On Monday last an inquest was held at Skipton-in-Craven, before Thomas Brown, Esq., on view of the body of Mary Rodda, about a year and a half old, the daughter of John Rodda, a labourer. It appears that Rodda is a member of a burial club, and would have been entitled to 2l. 10s. on the death of his child. Under sentence of killing vermin, he mur-

**EXECUTION AT YORK.**—John Rodda suffered, on Saturday last, the extreme penalty of the law at York-castle, for the murder of his infant at Skipton, in Craven, on the 19th of April. The facts of the case are shortly these:—That the



Thomas (Snr) suffered from bronchitis for several years before his death in 1876. He had served as coroner for around 50 years. Obituaries quote *Henry Robinson* and *John Cowburn* being two of several contemporaries who remember Thomas as ‘*a good lawyer whose shrewd, sound judgement might safely be relied upon*’. Thomas was buried with wife Mary and 17 year old daughter, Marian in the Raikes Road burial ground in Skipton. They are in the north-west corner of the burial ground known as ‘*God’s Acre*’ which provided the final resting place for Skipton’s wealthier folk. Thomas’ gravestone is made from grey Yorkshire sandstone and the cross in the centre is made of Sicilian marble which, at one time, was finely polished [ph2].



*Thomas Brown of Skipton, Solicitor and Coroner, who died 9th April 1876, aged 76 years, Also of Mary, his wife, who died 18th January 1874 aged 65 years. Also of Marian, their daughter, who died 27th March 1856, aged 17 years.*

As predicted, son Thomas Parkinson Brown took over as coroner, a post he held for 40 years [1]. Thomas (Jnr) became the senior partner of ‘*Brown, Charlesworth and Wood*’ solicitors with the *Charlesworth* family in Settle and *Edgar Wood*. Thomas gave up work on the Board of Guardians and in the Rural Sanitary Authority, in 1897, aged 57, ‘*on which occasion he was entertained to a complimentary dinner.*’ He died in August 1905, aged 68, of a stroke, a ‘*fatal paralytic seizure*’ [2]. ‘*Many public institutions in Skipton and district were objects of Mr Brown’s beneficence while the poor and unfortunate often found in him a sympathetic and practical friend.*’ ‘*He was a Liberal, a Churchman and an enthusiastic sportsman.*’

**SKIPTON SOLICITOR DEAD.**  
**FATAL PARALYTIC SEIZURE AT HARROGATE.**

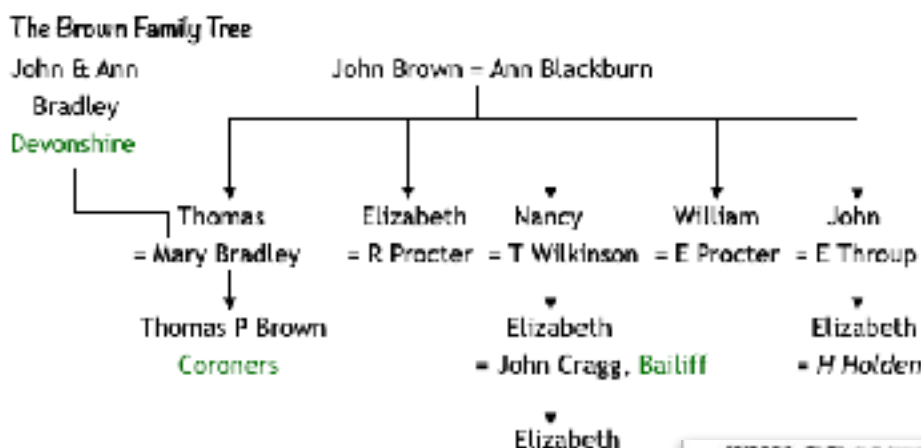
Thomas was buried at Waltonwrays cemetery with his sisters Eliza Margaret and Isabel. They had a spectacular stone amidst other burials of a similar background [ph2]. Raikes Road cemetery had closed in 1878 so he couldn't be buried with his father. He left a significant estate, worth well over £10 million in today's value [6]. It went to his cousin **Robert Brown** and several members of the **Procter** family.



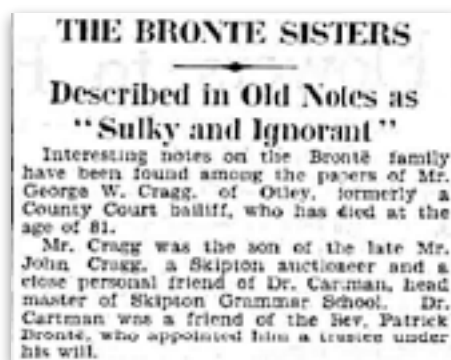
**Edgar Wood** took over as senior partner and coroner in January 1905 when Thomas retired, six months before his demise. An equal opportunities recruitment policy was probably not used for Edgar's appointment. The company continued to thrive, representing **Mabel Tottie** in her divorce case hearing in 1906. Edgar Wood held the post of coroner for 38 years until his death aged 82.

Thomas Brown and his son Thomas Parkinson Brown did well. What happened to Thomas (Snr)'s siblings? They did well too.

Thomas' sister **Nancy Brown** married **Thomas Wilkinson**, a chemist and druggist and they lived in Skipton. After having six daughters and a son (who died in childhood) Nancy and Thomas spent the rest of their lives apart. Their daughter **Elizabeth Wilkinson** was just 19 when she married 40 year old **John Cragg** who was the 'High Bailiff of County Courts at Skipton and Otley' and also a soda water manufacturer, auctioneer and farmer. A busy man! John Cragg was the bailiff involved in the bankruptcy case of **Joseph Wilson Oddie Wilson** of Rathmell in 1861. Years later,



in 1937, after death of their son, it was revealed that John was a friend of a friend of **Rev Patrick Bronte**, the father of the Bronte sisters. The family had 'notes' that, allegedly, brother Patrick Branwell Bronte wrote all the books after the sisters had sketched the outlines. The notes described the sisters as 'sulky, peevish and ignorant country girls' [1]. Ouch! Tragically John and Elizabeth's eldest daughter Lizzie was killed, aged 9, when her clothes caught fire when adding coals [4]. Elizabeth and her family are buried in a significant plot, not far from Thomas Brown (Snr), in Raikes Road Burial Ground.



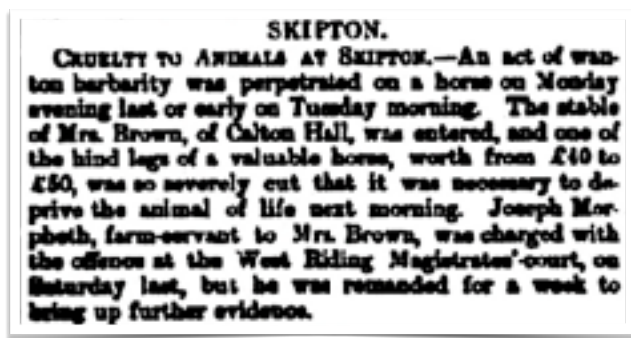
**SHOCKING OCCURRENCE IN A NURSERY.**—On Tuesday a great calamity occurred in the household of Mr. John Cragg, auctioneer, Woodman House, Skipton. His eldest daughter, Lizzie, nine years old, attempted to put some coals on the fire, in the absence of the nurse, and her clothes became ignited. Her terrified mother instantly responded to her cries of alarm, and with much presence of mind extinguished the flames by the most effectual means of rolling her in a carpet. The poor child is in a truly critical state.



Dr. Cartman told Mr. John Cragg (records the notes) that Patrick Branwell Brontë, brother to the famous sisters, did all the writing, and the girls only sketched the outlines of the stories. Patrick helped them out by writing the tales to provide himself with money for drink. The girls then sent the stories to current magazines. Mrs. John Cragg as a girl was a pupil of Miss Isabel Smith at the Clergy School at Cowan Bridge. This Miss Smith some years previously had taught the sisters Brontë, and (according to the notes) described them as quite incapable of writing at all, as they were "sulky, peevish and ignorant country girls."

Thomas (Snr)'s sister **Elizabeth Brown** married **Robert Procter** and their family were beneficiaries of Thomas Parkinson Brown's estate. Thomas' brothers **John Brown** and **William Brown** stayed at Calton Hall making a good living from farming. William won several awards at the North Ribblesdale Agricultural Show, for the best half acre of swedes and the best lowland oat crop in 1852 [3].

Thomas (Snr)'s brothers John and William died within a month of each other in 1853 aged 54 and 44 respectively. William's wife **Elizabeth Procter**, who could have been related, continued to run the farm with her children. In 1863 Elizabeth's farm servant, **Joseph Morpeth** was taken to court for 'an act of wanton barbarity' to the hind legs of a horse which had to be put down as a result [8].



William and Elizabeth's son **Robert Brown** and daughter **Elizabeth Brown** ran Calton Hall farm until they died, unmarried. Robert was one of the beneficiaries of Thomas Parkinson Brown's will. Robert and Elizabeth are buried together. William and Elizabeth's daughter **Mary Ann Brown** married her cousin **Henry Procter**, a farmer who, for some reason, changed his surname to **Henry Atkinson**.

Thomas' brother **John Brown** married **Ellen Throup**. Their daughter **Elizabeth Brown** married **Henry Holden** from the successful Rathmell farming family. She gave birth to twins John and Thomas. Daughter **Anne Brown** married **George Anderson**, also from Kirkby Malham, and uncle Thomas, the coroner, and sister Elizabeth (Brown) Holden were witnesses. George and Anne had several children. They moved straight to Rainhill, Lancashire where George made a good living as a wine and spirit merchant.



Anne's sister **Margaret Brown** moved to Rainhill with them and soon became the second wife of another spirit merchant, **John Richard Pickmere**. Outside his work John became a JP and magistrate and served as Mayor of Warrington five times [9]. A portrait of John Richard Pickmere by **James Charles** is now on the walls of Warrington Museum [ph1]. He merited a glowing obituary, obviously.

moved the following resolution :—“ That we, the Town Council of the borough of Warrington, receive with deep regret the announcement of the death of **John Richard Pickmere**, Esq., honorary freeman and a justice of the peace of the borough, and formerly an alderman and five times Mayor of the borough, and desire to record our high appreciation of the valuable public services rendered by him to the borough, and the respect and esteem in which he was held by all classes of the community for his invariable kindness and beneficence and his honourable and unblemished life. And we request the Town Clerk to convey to Mrs. **Pickmere** and her family our sincere sympathy with them in their bereavement.”



Several of the Brown family are buried together at Kirkby Malham with some of the most impressive stones in the graveyard. Thomas' parents John and Ann, his grandparents John and Margaret, his brother John and wife Ellen and their son, another John, are buried together in a huge table top tomb. Daughters Anne (Anderson) and Elizabeth (Holden) are also commemorated on the stone but not in the grave. Elizabeth (Holden) is buried with her husband Henry and the regular gravestone just behind. Thomas' brother William and his wife Elizabeth are buried just in

## Settle Graveyard Project

front of them with a huge plinth, although Elizabeth also has her own unusual stone elsewhere in the graveyard. If nothing else, these gravestones are an indication of a very wealthy family, most appropriate for relations of a county coroner.



*This account has been compiled by Sarah Lister as part of the Settle Graveyard Project which has recorded gravestone inscriptions, updated church records and researched the lives of those buried. It has been written in good faith with no offence intended. If I have inadvertently included errors or breached any copyright I apologise and would welcome corrections.*

*The life stories of people with italicised names have been researched as part of the graveyard project and can be found on [dalescommunityarchives.org.uk/settle graveyard project](http://dalescommunityarchives.org.uk/settle-graveyard-project). The 'Old Settle' family tree on [ancestry.co.uk](http://ancestry.co.uk) includes the families buried in the graveyard. The project is ongoing and welcomes queries and information on [settleresearch@gmail.com](mailto:settleresearch@gmail.com). Latest news and events are on the Facebook page 'Settle Graveyard Project'.*

*Illustrations kindly provided by Teresa Gordon. With thanks to Jean Robinson for her help with the compilation of this account, and her book 'Not Lost But Gone Before'. The life stories of people with italicised names have been researched as part of the graveyard project*

*Newspaper cuttings with the kind permission of the British Newspaper Archives: 1 – Leeds Mercury, 2 – Preston Herald, 3 – Lancaster Gazette, 4 – Leeds Intelligencer, 5 – Yorkshire Gazette, 6 – Yorkshire Post, 7 – Knaresborough Post, 8 – Bradford Review, 9 – Widnes Examiner, 10 – Bradford Observer*

*ph1 – photo credited to Ben McKenzie, ph2 – kindly provided by Jean Robinson of the Friends of Raikes Road Burial Ground. Other local photography by Ken Lister.*

## MR. G. W. CRAGG Bailiff at Otley County Court for 41 Years

Mr. George Wilkinson Cragg, Cambridge Terrace, Otley, bailiff at Otley County Court for 41 years, died yesterday, aged 81.

Mr. Cragg was the son of the late Mr. John Cragg, who was appointed high bailiff for the Skipton and Otley districts on the passing of the County Court Act in 1846. Father and son held the appointment in succession for 82 years.

Mr. Cragg was for a time in the office of his uncle, Mr. Richard Balderson Cragg, a solicitor who was familiar with Charles Dickens and believed to be the original of a character in one of Dickens's books. Later he went to Canada, worked on the Canadian Pacific Railway, and was a passenger on the first trans-continental train. He returned to England in 1887, retired from the post of bailiff in 1926, and founded an estate agency. He was well known as a breeder and judge of poultry and pigeons, having judged at the Crystal Palace and most Yorkshire shows.

Mr. Cragg was the elder brother of Mr. Arthur Cragg, clerk to the magistrates at East Morley Divisional Court at Bradford.