

Geelong & District Insolvency

Competition

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Insolvent: Edward Butler BROUGHTON

Submitted by

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Why did the Broughtons leave Geelong ?

Robert Broughton, his wife Mary (nee Butler) and their three children (Susannah, b. 1845; Edward Butler b. 1847 & James, b. 1849) arrived in Geelong on Christmas Day, 1852. They were assisted immigrants travelling on the ship “Anne Thompson”, which left Liverpool in September that year. In the 1841 Census of England, Robert was noted as a labourer and Mary a dressmaker.

Their first location was in the Barrabool Hills, working for a Mr Hopper, for which they were to be paid £53 plus rations for the first six months. By 1854/5 they must have moved to Mt Duneed since, according to family records, their subsequent children were born there – Thomas in 1854/5; Jane in 1856; Hannah in 1858; Mary Ellen in 1861; John Henry Fields in 1865 and Joseph in 1867.

In 1876 Robert purchased 14 ac of land; part of Section 20C, Parish of Duneed. This Section is on the south-west corner of what is now the Surfcoast Highway and Whites Road. He was described in the rates book as a woodcarter, which may well have been his occupation before buying land and which he continued to supplement whatever income he had from the 14 acres. So Robert and his family appear to have settled. However children move on and the family began to disperse.

Already, Susannah had married Samuel Danger in 1867 and Edward had married Rebecca Smart in 1869. Both continued to live nearby. The third “English” child, James, established a business as a Carrier, moving stores from Geelong to Birchip. He selected and farmed land at Laen, between Minyip and Donald, and married Eliza Hooper, of Geelong, in 1881. Thomas was also a Carrier and married Margaret Alexander about 1883. It seems they may have met whilst Thomas was on a visit to his brother at Laen.

The next child, Jane, had an illegitimate daughter in Geelong in 1876 and, later, married a Sam Metcalf and went to New South Wales for a short time. They then went to Bright, Vic., where they owned a Guest House. Hannah married Frederick Atkins in New South Wales in 1883 but their first two children were born at Mt Duneed, in 1884 and 1886. The remainder of their children were born at Hay, NSW, where Hannah and Frederick remained for some 25 years before coming to live in East Geelong. Mary Ellen met William Alexander whilst on a holiday in the Wimmera and married him in 1881 and made their home there.

Then, in 1884, Robert sold his 14 acres at Mt Duneed and moved to Strathbogie with his wife and remaining two sons, John and Joseph. To perhaps understand why they did this it is instructive to follow the fortunes of the eldest son, Edward (Ted) Butler Broughton.

According to the Family History of Robert and Mary Broughton and their descendants, Ted “owned 40 acres of land at Grovedale, near Geelong. This he later sold in 1879 and they shifted to Strathbogie where he selected 134 acres of land and leased it from the Crown Lands Department.” This seems innocuous enough and it may be imagined that the attraction was to get a larger parcel of land.

However, the reality was rather different.

In 1877 Ted had an accident. The details of this accident are not known but it must have been rather serious, for he was admitted to the Geelong Infirmary on the 18th of August with a “scalp wound” and was not discharged until the 28th, when he was pronounced “cured”. In the Infirmary admission book his calling was described as “Dealer”. There was no indication of what it was he dealt in, but later evidence suggests that he may have been a horse dealer.

The accident seems to have compounded a problem for Ted. The problem was that he owed money to a number of people and had done for some time.

For the period January to December, 1875, he ran up a bill of £14-0-0 for horse feed with a Mr Andrews, a storekeeper in South Geelong. In May, 1875 he obtained horse feed to the value of £1-4-0 from J. Bryan, a hay and corn dealer of Ryrie St., Geelong. Also in 1875, Ted had work done by a Saddler, Thos Hinchcliff of South Geelong, to the value of £2-0-0. And in 1874 and 1875 he had borrowed £20-0-0 from a Publican in Market Square, Geelong. Altogether, a debt of £37-4-0.

So, on the 26th of November, 1877, we find Ted petitioning for Insolvency. This was noted in the Geelong Advertiser of 27/11/1877. The Petition, No 2897, was filed by his solicitor, William Higgins, in the Court of Insolvency at Geelong, who attested that he had drawn up and written down the details under instruction from his client. It seems that Ted may have been illiterate, for he “signed” with “X, his mark”. The causes of his inability to pay were given as “losses of horses and personal injury sustained through an accident and pressure of one of my creditors”.

The “loss of horses” was later expanded to “loss of three horses through accident and disease” in 1875 and valued at £42-0-0. He also claimed a loss (presumably of earnings) of £9-0-0 when he was unable to work for 6 weeks and £8-0-0 for household expenses. In the petition, Ted is described as a labourer.

It is presumed that the petition was granted, for in the Victoria Government Gazette of August 2, 1878, is a Notice to the effect that Edward Butler Broughton “intends to apply to the Court of Insolvency at Geelong for a certificate of discharge...”

Now one of the requirements of a petition for insolvency was that the potential insolvent had to declare that neither he nor his wife owned or had any interest in land. If they did, presumably it could be sold or a loan raised to repay the debt. So either Ted lied or didn't in fact own the 40 acres at Grovedale. It seems hardly credible that he, or more particularly his solicitor, would take the risk of lying, so it would appear that he didn't own the land. Further indication that this was the case is that, in the Geelong Advertiser of 2/7/1879, it was noted, amongst others, that “the 40 acres adjoining the Germantown tollgate and occupied by Edward Broughton” was for sale.

One last reference to the Broughtons at Mt Duneed is contained in the Geelong Advertiser of 18/9/1879 under “Lost, Found, Rewards”: “Strayed into my paddock, on 9th September, a spotted red and white milking cow branded O-I. Owner can have same by paying expenses. Rebecca Broughton, Mt Duneed.”

This indicates that they were still at Mt Duneed in September, 1879. But in the Government Gazette of Friday, January 3, 1879, Edward Broughton is listed as having been granted a licence for 134 acres at Strathbogie. It is possible that Ted had already gone to Strathbogie, leaving Rebecca and the children to follow at a later stage, perhaps when Ted had built some accommodation. This could explain why the newspaper advertisement was in Rebecca's name.

It seems that Ted prospered at Strathbogie. He was noted for his proficiency with horse teams and was one of the first in the District to own a reaper & binder and a seed drill. He used these, not only for his own farm work but contracted out to other farmers. So, with the example of his eldest son, together with the promise of cheap land, it is not surprising that Robert left Mt Duneed in 1884 with his remaining family and went to Strathbogie.

References used:

VPRS 815/P0 Court of Insolvency Records, Geelong, Petition No 2897, 1877.

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