BROGDEN'S NAVVIES

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This paper is about the 2,172 British immigrants whom the Engli railway contractors John Brogden and Sons landed in New Zealand between July 1872 and 5 April 1873. For the context we go first to the late 1860s, see what the colonists knew about railways, and why they were anxious to st building a New Zealand system. The Wakefield founding settlers had left Brita early in the Railway Age, between the first two English railway building mani of 1836 and 1845. Therefore many colonists will have seen, and all will ha heard about, the builders of the great English railway system, now virtua complete. Summarising the height of the construction period, a British histori writes

> By an extraordinary convergence of initiative an average army of ov 100,000 of the most physically powerful men in Britain, each reputed t be able to lift 20 tons of earth to a height of six feet in a day, worked fo twenty years to produce some 10,000 miles of railway.

The railways were not made by machines but by navvies - a term firs used for England's 1 8th century canal builders. Recruited mainly from the hal starved agricultural labourers, they took about a year to turn into real navvie being transformed by good wages and better food, continuous hard work t develop the muscles, and gang life, fostering a distinctive dress and bearing an a delight in a reputation for reckless hard-living. Navvying was pick, shovel an wheelbarrow, and horse and dray work. The early locomotives had a limite hauling power, so gradients were kept extremely low, with the lines carrie through deep cuttings and huge tunnels and across massive embankments an great viaducts. In terms of labour expended, the Great Pyramid of Egypt trivial in comparison. The Great Wall of China is a nearer equivalent.

New Zealand, however, has as yet only two short stretches of line, whic linked Christchurch and Invercargill with their ports. And in the late 1860s sh was going through desperate days. While the South Island had won riches fro gold and wool, the forest-covered North had in the mid 'sixties suffered cost land wars, followed by a sullen peace during which Britain withdrew most o her troops. She wanted no more part in the colonists' land wars, while th settlers were hopeful that they could cope through 'self-reliance'. In a fe weeks over the spring of 1868 their confidence was rudely shattered, as tw new Maori warrior-leaders, Titokowaru and Te Kooti, rose to meteoric fam Having quelled these uprisings the colonists faced a grim predicament. Shou Maori guerilla attacks persist the North Island situation looked almo hopeless. Each of the recently threatened districts was an extensive pocket thinly populated pastoral country, settled and serviced mainly from the sea, an hemmed in and cut off from other settlements by great stretches of mounta and forest. Should the Maoris withdrew their labour and settler workers m

...it would be impossible to run the stations and shear the sheep. Yet these ...icts needed greatly strengthening, and linking by a rapid advance into the ...stretches of surrounding bush. But coming from a land of open fields, even ...out their fear of the Maoris most colonists shunned the bush. Meanwhile ...hern taxpayers worried about a drawn-out conflict, and some muttered ...making the South Island a separate colony.

In desperation Hawke's Bay and Wellington political leaders spearheaded a ...to change government and policy, and in June 1869 parliament voted in a ...team, mainly of men from the threatened districts, with William Fox as ... Fox's Cabinet gambled on demilitarising the North Island frontier, and ...hing a new surge of development. Their most hopeful dreams saw Maori ...to partnership in the programme. At the least, they hoped to greatly ...then the threatened North Island settlements, and link them with a great ...nt-shaped, east-west military trunk road, stretching from New Plymouth ...anganui and the Manawatu Gorge to Napier. Perhaps, too, money might be ...for the colony's first substantial railway building, with a line paralleling ...ilitary road. During 1870 a bold borrowing and development scheme was ...to parliament and country, largely by the bustling new Colonial Treasurer, ... Vogel. But expecting money and manpower to surge into a struggling ...and especially to its recently threatened frontiers was expecting ...les.

Over the mid 19th century both Britain's railway contractors and New ...d had sought the British farm labourer. With their works cutting across ...ountryside the contractors had considerable success. But New Zealand ...ation agents complained that he was the last man to listen to their ...ge and the hardest one to move. From the rural world they could usually ...lage artisans made redundant by the Industrial Revolution. But men with ...lls of the scythe, the plough, the shears, the wagon, the dairy, were ...ly so servile, demoralised and ignorant that they had neither the vision ... stamina to respond to emigration calls. After the land had provided an ...life style for squire, parson and farmer there was little left to feed ...use those whose labour produced the wealth. We must now introduce the ...o spearheaded the colony's search for the British money and rural labour. ... Dr Isaac Featherston, pioneer Wellington settler, and for nearly twenty ...Superintendent of Wellington Province. In 1869 the new cabinet sent him ...don to plead for the retention of British troops and for a Treasury ...ce for an immigration and public works loan. The troops were refused, ...ful lobbying won an unprecedented £1 million loan guarantee from a ...t British government. Without it the colonists would have had little ... getting London money for their schemes. But they had still to get the ...the skills. Back in Wellington Featherston was persuaded to return to ...as Agent-General, an office created largely for the direction of a major ...ion drive. Featherston quickly enlisted an old friend who had returned ...nd, Charles Rooking Carter, as his principal assistant. Carter had ...to Wellington in 1850, had become a leading builder and contractor, ...ms as a member both parliament and the provincial council, and taken ...part in a Wairarapa small farm settlement movement He had been an

emigration agent for Wellington province while in England in the mid 1860s. Yet when Featherston sent him to recruit immigrants in what seemed England's most promising county, his mission proved an almost complete failure. Carter went to Cornwall where the decline of the great tin and copper mining industry had for years been sending waves of emigrants across the seas. Cornish labourers were in keen demand, for many were extremely versatile, combining skills learnt on the farms, in the mines, and in the fishing fleets.

In six weeks of hard campaigning, from mid-September 1871, Carter drew only two applications. He reported competing American agents and a temporary mining revival, but gave as the main reason for this result New Zealand's failure to understand working class poverty. He estimated that under his regulations it cost at least £30 in cash for a family of four 'statute adults' to accept the offer. (Those over 12 counted as adults, from 1 to 12 as half adults). Few Cornish labourers ever expected to possess £30. Disappointed in Britain, Featherston arranged with German, Norwegian and Danish agents for 6,000 immigrants. In the event they procured only 2,000, and in any case Featherston knew the colony would not be happy with too many such 'foreigners'. Fortunately for him John Brogden and Sons now came on the scene.

The firm of John Brogden and Sons had its headquarters in Wednesbury in Staffordshire, but had made its name in Lancashire by building the Ulverston and Lancaster Railway, carried on massive embankments across the tidewaters of Morecombe Bay, and leading to the rise of the new port and shipbuilding industrial centre of Barrow-in-Furness. The firm had developed expertise in recruiting navvies from the farm labourers and miners of western England. In the late 1860s it began looking for work abroad and towards the end of 1870 started showing an interest in New Zealand. Vogel followed up this interest when in London in the second quarter of 1871 and began discussions which led to parliament agreeing to £1,000,000 of work being arranged with Brogdens. Negotiations continued with James Brogden who followed Vogel on his return to New Zealand. The government was keen that Brogdens should both take contracts and engage in immigration so that railway building would not send wages skyrocketing. While the railway contracts were being finalised in Wellington, the immigration question was referred to London to be threshed out between the firm's other principals and Featherston. For Featherston this was a godsend. Here was a firm expert in tapping the English labour market - but not the Irish one (against which there was much colonial prejudice). Once Brogdens got their contracts they could offer guarantees of work to their recruits. With a strong interest in averting New Zealand labour shortages, they might agree to fund their emigrants, recouping themselves from the wages. Featherston even persuaded Brogdens to dispatch four parties before negotiations were concluded. The agreement was finally signed on 27 June 1872, authorising Brogdens to send 2,000 men, together with women and children to a total of not more than 6,000.

The terms of this agreement became a matter of bitter dispute, but in the meantime it quickly got English labour flowing to New Zealand. Brogdens submitted candidates for examination by Featherston's agents. The New Zealand government managed the shipping of those accepted. Brogdens gave the

government promissory notes for their fare, and in turn took promissory notes from the emigrants with which to recoup themselves. Featherston assured Brogdens there would be no trouble enforcing these notes in the colony. With these assurances Brogdens were very generous to their recruits, advancing them ample funds for kits and journeys to the ports. It all looked good to many an English labourer - no money up front, a comfortable journey to two years of well-paid work, and the prospect of settling for a better life in this new country.

Carter managed the Brogden scheme for Featherston, and for nine months from late March 1872 it kept him extremely busy. On 1 April he was back in Cornwall and on this one day accepted 60 men for Brogdens in Falmouth. The majority were living in such poverty that there was no way they could have paid £1 for bedding and cooking utensils and provided an outfit and railway fare to London. They were only able to move because Brogdens advanced the money for 'kit', outfit and fare. Three days earlier, on Good Friday, 29 March, Carter had accompanied Alexander Brogden M.P., head of the firm, to Leamington, Warwickshire, where Joseph Arch had assembled a great gathering of farm labourers in the Town Hall. Two months earlier Arch, a hedging and ditching contractor and Methodist lay preacher, had set in motion the 'Revolt of the Field', the first really successful trade union movement among the downtrodden English farm labourers. The spread of literacy and the speaking and organising skills learnt in the Methodist chapels had at last given these men the abilities needed to stand together in union, and Arch's movement spread like wildfire across large areas of the south and east of England. Links formed between this union movement and ~e New Zealand immigration drive were to be a vital element in the latter's eventual success. At Leamington there was too much excitement about the prospects from union tactics for emigration to get much of a hearing but over the weekend Carter got twelve adults for the first Brogden party. This party of 13 8 sailed on the *Schiehallion* on 13 April. Besides those enlisted at Falmouth and Leamington, a few were selected at Plymouth, about a dozen in Staffordshire, and a small number in London. It was England's fine railway system which enabled Carter to move briskly backwards and forwards putting this carefully selected party together so quickly.

Carter summarised his work for Brogdens in two detailed reports to Featherston. These show him ceaselessly crisscrossing the country addressing meetings for Brogdens and selecting men from the applicants they assembled at a wide range of strategic centres. The map shows the centres at which meetings were held, giving a good overview of the districts from which Brogdens drew these navvies.

The two northern meetings (at Barrow-in-Furness and at Whitehaven in Cumberland) are in the district where Brogdens had made their name. For the rest the meetings are mainly in the southern Midlands and the Southwest, only taking in the east around London and at Brighton. Most of them are obviously aimed at rural or mining districts. Some of the repeated meetings (such as those at Leamington, Banbury and Oxford) must have been aimed at districts deeply stirred by the Revolt of the Field. Carter gave a breakdown by occupations. Well over half were either farm labourers (444) or 'labourers

MEETINGS WHICH C.R. CARTER ADDRESSED FOR BROGDENS

x Meeting centres. Numbered centres had repeated meetings as follows:

(1) Leamington [3 times]
(2) Banbury [2]
(3) Oxford [3]
(4) Swindon [4]
(5) Marlborough [2]
(6) Uxbridge [6]
(7) Brighton (3)
(8) LONDON (several)

stly brought up to farm work' (339). Most of the 284 navvies had probably merly been farm labourers and many of the 49 miners would have been nishmen with rural skills. When they moved on from their railway work ese men would have had much to offer to rural New Zealand. Brogdens put ward at least 6,000 applicants, no doubt after weeding out those they ught undesirable. From these Carter accepted only about 2,500, some of em did not proceed for various reasons. Carter gave a breakdown of where he lected the 2,298 men who sailed. Not many came from the high-wage ustrial north, but he got some from Brogdens' home ground - 42 at Ulverston Lancashire and 30 at Whitehaven in Cumberland, 45 from Staffordshire. There good pickings in the low-wage rural districts further south. 122 were ruited at Leamington in Warwickshire, the headquarters of Arch's new union. came from rural Oxfordshire. Large contingents were selected at a number of mmunication centres serving rural districts: 46 at Swindon railway junction Wiltshire, 210 at Uxbridge just west of London, 104 at Brighton, 65 at mouth. Cornwall topped the counties, sending 205, with 149 selected at mouth, 41 at Truro and 15 at Redruth.

Brogdens' 15 parties of immigrants landed at ports serving the six icts where the firm won contracts, at or near Picton, Wellington, Napier, land, Oamaru and Invercargill. Neither for Brogdens nor their men did things out as they expected in New Zealand. Thus Brogdens had envisaged a ten day, but their men soon learnt of the local eight hours custom, and of higher than Brogdens were offering. The eight hour day made good sense w Zealand. Men heavily outnumbered women, and board and lodgings were at twice as expensive as at 'Home'. Either from necessity, or to save money get on', many men cared for themselves, cooking, washing, fetching ood and water, and so on. Many married men produced their own ables, fruit, milk and eggs and fetched wood, meat and fish from the wild. ight hour system gave time for these activities and the scarcity of labour ed the men to enforce it. At Picton, where Brogdens began their work in Zealand, men and management were soon at loggerheads over wages, g hours and payment for time lost in wet weather. When the men downed and marched on headquarters with their grievances, the firm collected tools and bluntly informed them that all future work would be on contract, n to provide their own tools. The men began leaving in droves for other ers and refused to meet their promissory notes. Taken to court, their was that Brogdens had broken their part of the agreement. The Picton ate's decision, later followed elsewhere, was that the agreement could ded. The promissory notes must be honoured, and the men could take to court to have their work agreement enforced.

bst of the men were no longer interested in Brogdens and by August 1873 7 of them were working for the firm. Brogdens had got into trouble through ignorance of colonial conditions, partly because the rules were We can only too briefly sketch how it all fell apart. The newly created public works department couldn't get the contracts sorted out quickly So Brogdens had to ask some of the men to look for work elsewhere. the contracts were 'half-baked', subject to continuing elucidation and

modification as they proceeded. A peculiar act on the New Zealand statute bo about how disputes with the firm were to be handled caused Brogdens mu anguish. When late in 1873 the government made its passages to New Zeala completely free Brogdens' men had an additional argument against meeting th promissory notes. Brogdens took 133 men to court over these notes, but g little out of it. So strong were the men's feelings that many disappeared country', some took assumed names, others filed bankruptcy, and yet othe went to gaol for debt at the firm's expense. By November 1872 Brogdens h decided that the immigration agreement was a mistake and suspende recruitment. We must briefly round off the Brogden story. They won most of th first year's railway contracts, but few thereafter. Local contractors, drawin labour from the immigration flood beginning in 1874, largely underbid them With troubles elsewhere as well as in New Zealand, the firm went bankrupt 1883.

We must now sum up why Brogdens' navvies are of particular interest in our New Zealand story. For thousands of today's New Zealanders these men stand at the beginning of their clan's move to New Zealand. Whether they know it or not, a single young man accepting Brogdens' superficially attractive offer was what started it all off. His letters home telling of the wonderful opportunities led others of his clan, including families, to follow. It is generally accepted that letters home from satisfied immigrants have provided one of the most potent persuasions to emigration, and it is evident that the priming of the flow of our great 1870s drive owed a great deal to letters from Brogden folk To give an example, from west Berkshire only 16 recruits were selected for Brogdens at Faringdon in 1872, and the local agent, a middle class supporter of Arch's union, reported infinite difficulty in disabusing these men's minds of anti-emigration prejudice. He reports that the following year glowing letters home were creating a different climate for emigration throughout the district. In 1874 farmers across wide areas of southern England combined to crush Arch's union, locking out all who refused to give up their union membership. It was crucial to New Zealand's recruitment of the cream of these locked out men that letters from Brogden folk had been circulating for months in their villages, both in the original and reprinted in the newspapers of their Revolt. Cornwall lay beyond the reach of Arch's union, but without the letters from Brogdens' 205 Cornish recruits of 1872, New Zealand might not have got its share of that county's much sought after emigrants over the next few years. In fact the Brogden recruitment must have had a considerable effect in deciding the mix and maintaining a high English element in the great 1870s flow. Official figures show England supplied 51.97% of the decade's government-assisted immigrants Ireland 24.83%, Scotland 16.67% and the Continent 6.63%. Carter's figures for his Brogden recruits show England supplying 95.67%, Ireland 3.64%, Scotland 0.51%, and only four foreigners. Without the strong Brogden boost to the English flow the proportions could have been very different.

Our second purpose in this paper is to explain why there are specific problems in tracing these Brogden immigrants. Table I gives a summary of what records are available for the various sailings. A superficial glance might suggest that we are pretty well off for the names of these folk, but careful

shows we are not. The three large parties arriving in December 1872 for ch there are no lists amount to 644 persons - just on 30% of the total. For *Halclone* and *Charlotte Gladstone* which brought 306 of these immigrants e are only a few names available without any details of occupation, age, &c. nearly half of Brogden's navvies are not named in the immigration records. thermore the 'Full Lists' noted for nine of the sailings are (except for one) nearly as helpful as those for government immigrants. The latter give the nty and occupation for all adults. The Brogden lists are a bit erratic for upations and do not give the county - if they give anything it is merely gland'. Moreover many of them are men travelling solo who cannot be linked other family members, whereas those in the government lists can often be ed to their families of origin travelling on the same ship. The one exception a tantalising one. The *City of Auckland* list outdoes the government ones by ng birthplaces and places of engagement. For my book *The Farthest Promised nd* I had great success in tracing 1870s government immigrants to their home ges by making county lists to use with other information to home in on cted places in the English 1871 census schedules. You cannot work that way th a Brogden list of folk coming from 'England'. I have, however, made some gress by collating these lists and annotating them with information drawn m many sources. Perhaps this paper will lead others to join the search to ve us a much fuller and more detailed list. Table II is a selection from my llation to illustrate the problems and some of the possible sources of wers.

ADAMS illustrates the most common type of entry, with no leads for arching English records. ASH and AUSTIN are from thee wonderful *City of uckland* list with real leads for English searches. CHAPPELL shows how a later mination by a Brogden immigrant can throw light on a place of origin. CKNELL and RICKARDS show how newspaper items can fill out the picture. My arch through a year's files of the *Marlborough Press* showed that a mbination of news from such happenings as inquests, criminal cases and civil ceedings (such as Brogdens' pursuing their promissory notes) can both give me ongoing stories and throw light back on English origins. In the CKNELL/RICKARDS interaction, and in a number of other cases, several gden folk were involved as witnesses, and some clearly indicated that they come from the same English districts. So solving the place of origin for any of them will help with the others. BRADNOCK shows how even the one-line y in the *Retum of Freeholders, 1882* can give the feel of an ongoing career. CK illustrates the cases where we have a bare name and the ship, DUNSTAN more extreme case where we don't even know the ship. Then there are the dreds for whom we do not even have a name. But SAMMONS shows that even situation is not hopeless. Knowing that the *Zealandia's* Bluff party of ember 1872 were all Brogdens' I have been able to make up this entry from a ter outlined in the *Cyclopedia.* Persistent descendants of these unlisted men g facts or hunches from family sources should be able to link many to their ings and even to Carter's English recruitment information.

I will conclude with brief extracts from one of those letters home were such a potent stimulus to ongoing emigration. Arch's Labourers' U Chronicle of 20 September 1873 published a letter received by John Pinfold Taynton, Oxfordshire, from George Smith 'late of that village'. Smith, a 3l y old farm labourer, his wife and family had sailed with Brogdens' Hawke's B party on the *Chile*. He writes from Kaikora [now Otane] on 28 May 1873. 1 3

> Dear Brother Pinfold, . . . I am now working on the road for the Governme I have 6s a day from eight o'clock in the morning till five in the evening I had been in Burford I should have worked three days for that. Worki men in this country don't believe in much walking; I have a horse and n saddle and bridle to go to my work on.... I got rigged out very soon; and n I am about getting a cow; my wife has got her fowls. The house we a living in is a two roomed cottage with a garden. I give 5s per week, and have firewood and the food for my cow for that.... We can sometimes get leg of mutton for sixpence. This is really the land of Goshen, and if yo acted wisely you would come; there is plenty of work for you.

John Pinfold took this advice, as did many others from this and neighbouring villages in this Wychwood forest area of Oxfordshire.

Note on Source

The main sources for this paper may be found footnoted to Chapter 'Brogdens' Navvies' of my *The Farthest Promised Land* (Victoria University Press, Wellington,1981). English background on railway building and the navvies may be found in Terry Coleman, *The Railway Navvies*, rev. ed., Harmondsworth,1968. The quotation from 'a British historian' in the first paragraph is from S.G. Checkland, *The Rise of Industrial Society in England 1815-1885*, London,1964, p.138. C.R. Carter's accounts of his 1871 visit to Cornwall and of his work with Brogdens' recruitment are in *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives* 1872 D- 1 A, pp.5-6; 1872 D- 1 B, pp. 11-12; 1873 D-2D, pp. 29-3Q.