BROCKMAN John

John Brockman , J.P. is a son of the late Mr Robert James Brockman, of Beachborough House, Kent, England, who came to this State in 1831, and was one of the pioneer farmers of the eastern districts. He died in 1897, after living in retirement for thirty years at Bunbury. The gentleman under review was born at his father's residence near Guildford, Western Australia, on July 19, 1843, and was brought up to farming and station pursuits. At sixteen years of age he left home and obtained a position as foreman on a large horse and cattle station near Gingin, where number of fine horses were bred for shipment to the Indian market, and gained considerable experience as a roughrider.

Four years later, in conjunction with a friend, he took over the lease of a large dairy farm and cattle and horse station combined, and after its expiration continued in the pastoral industry for some years. About this time he obtained his first knowledge of seafaring matters, becoming owner and afterwards master of a schooner engaged in the coastal trade, and was the first load a shipment of guano from Houtman's Abrolhos, a group of small islands off Geraldton,[1] which he sold to Mr W Spencer, a merchant at Bunbury, thus proving its commercial value. Mr Brockman had long wished to visit the "great north-west" and at length an opportunity occurred. A party formed by two young men, Messrs Henry and William Clarkson, had been engaged by Messrs Grant, Harper and Anderson squatters, of the "De Grey" Station, in the Roebourne district, to purchase and drive overland a large herd of cattle.

Both brothers lost their lives in January, 1874, Henry Clarkson being murdered by the natives while endeavouring to carry water to the relief of his brother William, who subsequently perished from thirst. The part being left without a leader, Mr Brockman applied for and obtained the post, and succeeded after a journey occupying six months in getting the party to Roebourne. He next took a position as mate on the Government vessel "Adela" under Captain P Walcott, Inspector of Pearl Shell Fisheries, resigning at the end of the pearling season. In July, 1880, he fitted up a small vessel, the property of his brother Mr C S Brockman, for the purpose of engaging in the pearling industry. He procured native divers from the Gascoyne, now known as Carnarvon, and after touching at Cossack proceeded to the then new pearling grounds of King Sound.

Here he lost one of his divers, who was seized and torn to pieces by a large alligator while diving off the mouth of the Fraser River. This induced him to leave and to try his fortune in the latter part of December on the old western grounds near Roebourne, where he did remarkably well. On January 7, 1881, in company with fourteen other vessels, he was met by one of the terrible hurricanes common to those latitudes. Every vessel was either swamped or driven ashore, and many lives were lost. His boat, with two heavy anchors down, dragged for a long distance and finally capsized and sank. After keeping himself afloat for five hours in the height of the storm and in utter darkness he was carried by the tide and landed upon a sandy shore in a most exhausted condition. Here he found members of his own and other crews, all with a sad tale to tell of similar disaster. During five subsequent months he occupied his time by digging a canal, 300 yards in length, from the spot where his vessel had been thrown on the marsh, to an adjacent creek, and at the high spring tides floated her down into deep water, where he jury-rigged her and proceeded to Fremantle.

There he refitted his boat, and loading her with general cargo went into the north-west coastal trade, which proved very profitable until the era of the steamer arrived, when sailing vessels were at a discount. He then joined his brother, Mr C. S. Brockman, in squatting interests in the Gascoyne district, and ultimately, after many years, sold out his share in the enterprise. Unable to lead an idle life, he accepted an appointment as Inspector of Pearl Shell Fisheries at Shark Bay, where he remained command of the Government cutter "Genista" for six and a half years. He then received promotion to the post of Government Resident at Roebourne, the capital of the north-west, and after three and a half years resigned in April, 1900, when he came to Perth and has lived in retirement ever since. He was a Justice of the Peace for the whole State for forty years.[2]

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[1]Battye - *Cyclopedia of Western Australia, Vol 2*
[2]Battye - *Cyclopedia of Western Australia, Vol 2*