

DRAKE-BROCKMAN Frederick Slade

1857-1917, surveyor and explorer, was born on 9 July 1857 at "Seabrook", near Northam, Western Australia, son of Edmund Ralph Brockman, gentleman-farmer, and his wife Elizabeth Deborah, nee Slade. He was educated at Bishop Hale's school and articled in 1878 to surveyor J.S. Brooking. While stationed at the Preston River he married Grace Vernon, daughter of Alfred Pickmore Bussell on 20 February 1882 at St Mary's Church, Busselton. She was the heroine of the Georgette disaster (1875) when she helped to save some fifty lives.

Drake-Brockman joined the Department of Public Works and Railways in 1886 and was surveyor-in-charge of road and telegraph routes from Wyndham to Hall's Creek: his last campsite being known as 'the Brockman'. In May 1891 he transferred to Lands and Surveys, becoming chief inspecting surveyor in 1894. As staff surveyor he oversaw the drainage of the Harvey and Stirling estates and marked out the second line of the rabbit-proof fence from the Murchison to the Eucla. After the department's decentralisation in 1910, Drake-Brockman served as district surveyor for Nelson until appointed surveyor-general in June 1915.

An impressive explorer, Drake-Brockman was accompanied by eleven men when in 1901 he penetrated previously uncharted territory in the Kimberley, north of latitude 17. His senior officers, Charles Crossland, second in-command, Dr FM House, botanist, and A Gibb Maitland, the government geologist, explored areas at right angles to the main route, thus reducing the exploration time schedule to six months and eighteen days. Leaving Wyndham on 9 May, the explorers followed the Pentecost River then pushed north-west through the Leopold Range to Walcott Inlet and returned along the Drysdale River on the 15th parallel to reach their depot on 26 November, having passed many Aborigines *en route*. Discarding a faulty chronometer, Drake-Brockman checked his course by a system of rough triangulation between prominent landmarks and measured distance by astronomical bearings.

By identifying topographical features mentioned by Sir George Grey, TC Sholl and FH Hann and naming others including the Princess May Ranges and the Calder and King Edward rivers, Drake-Brockman succeeded in reconciling existing discrepancies and so completed reliable plans. His party also gathered geographical, geological and botanical information, and Aboriginal artefacts and ornithological specimens for the Western Australian Museum; the black grass wren *Amytis (Amytornis) Housei* was new to science. Because of tick infestation near North Mount Cockburn, Drake-Brockman advised against a stock route to Wyndham, instead recommending Napier, Broome Bay, as an outlet for pastures on the Synott tableland and north of the Leopold Range. His report of the exploration was published in Parliamentary Papers next year.

In the south-west, Drake-Brockman's 1904 report and classification of land for stock, dairying, fruit and potato growing between the Vasse and Shannon rivers, was a precursor to development. He declared in 1913 the resultant subdivision to be probably the finest cadastral survey that has been effected in Australia. During his career he was chairman of the land section of the Repatriation Board, the Wodgina Board, the Town Planning Association and the Licensed Surveyors Advisory Board, and a member of the Railway Advisory Board. In England in 1905 he actively promoted migration to Western Australia.

Tall and straight as a ramrod, with a long gingerish moustache and penetrating blue eyes, Drake-Brockman was very much a family man, whose colourful yarns were spiked with humour. He died of pneumonia on 11 September 1917, survived by his wife, three daughters and four sons, most of whom had distinguished careers. Geoffrey (1885-1977) was engineer for the north-west in 1927-41 and director, engineering services, Army Headquarters, in 1941-43; Karl Edgar (b.1891) was a Rhodes Scholar (1910), a member of the 5th Royal Fusiliers in 1915-18 and a puisne judge in New Guinea in 1921. EA Drake-Brockman and Deborah V Hackett were also his children. His estate was cleared for probate at GBP1018 and he was buried in the Anglican section at Karrakatta cemetery.