

John Thomas Brogan and the Brogan Properties *Westend and Redleaf*

By Shirley Jurmann



*John Thomas Brogan
-photo Brogan family collection*

John Thomas Brogan had an interesting and productive life although it was cut short in tragic circumstances.

He was born in 1867 in Tamworth NSW, the son of John Sarsfield Brogan and Catherine nee Purcell.

By the early 1890s he was living in Moruya where he contested the General Elections in 1894 and again in 1898. Prior to the 1898 elections he placed advertisements in local papers including this one in the Ulladulla and Milton Times of 9 April 1898:

To the Electors of Moruya.

Gentlemen – I beg to announce that I will contest the Moruya Electorate at the next General Election.

I am

Yours Respectfully

J.T.Brogan Moruya, March 29th '98.

He lost on both occasions to Mr Millard.

His brief political aspirations were mentioned in this item which appeared in the Ulladulla and Milton Times of 21 April 1905;

The death is announced of Mrs Brogan of Tamworth. Deceased lady is the mother of J.T.Brogan who some years ago put up for parliamentary representation of this electorate.

He also stood as an independent in the 1918 elections after boundaries were rearranged and Moruya was included in the Goulburn electorate which included both the South Coast and much of the Monaro.

J.T.Brogan was a well-known carpenter and undertaker but he was more than that. He was particularly interested in the use of Australian cedar as a cabinet making timber. He was an architect and designed many of the buildings and altars he built. One such building was the Presbytery at Milton along with work in the Catholic Church, Moruya. The Freeman's Journal of 12 December 1896 reported on the opening of the new Presbytery at Milton. In part it says:

The site where the Presbytery is erected is the best around Milton. It stands alongside the church and commands a full view of the town on the south and a magnificent view of the sea on the east; while on the north and west for a distance about seven miles is perhaps the most beautiful rural view in Australia. The building itself is the prettiest in the district. It was designed by Mr J.T.Brogan assisted by the Rev. Father Sheridan. Mr Brogan, who built this house, has done some splendid work on the South Coast. The beautiful altars erected in the Moruya church are the work of his hands.



The Presbytery, Milton 2020-photo Maureen Addison

The present day altar in the Catholic Church is not J.T.Brogan's work. It is made of marble.

However a description of his work and a photo survive. What he actually built was an inlaid

cedar sacrarium for a statue of the patron saint of Ireland. After it was completed he had it photographed and inscribed on the back:

‘Designed, built and decorated by J.T.Brogan, Moruya. Respectfully Soliciting the patronage of the Good Samaritan Nuns’.

The St Patricks statue is still on the sanctuary of the Sacred Heart Church. Sadly the Sacrarium was taken to the rubbish tip in 1960.

The following year on 18 December 1897 the Freeman’s Journal again mentioned some of J.T.Brogan’s work. A journalist writing as “A. Traveller” wrote a series of articles entitled “A Trip Down the South Coast”. When visiting The Gulf, present day Nerrigundah, he wrote in part:

The Catholics here are building a very pretty church, Mr Brogan having the contract. The altar and sanctuary are very nice. The inside will be lined and great taste is being displayed in the design and carrying out of the work.

The Catholic Church at Nerrigundah was destroyed in the 2020 bushfires.

On 30 July 1908 The Catholic Press wrote about the new bell tower at Cobargo.

The ceremony of blessing the new bell at the Catholic Church at Cobargo was performed on Sunday week by the Rev. Father McNamara at the 11 o’clock Mass. The bell is hung on a tower 25ft high, designed and created by Mr J.T.Brogan (Moruya). It is a 32 in bell cast of bell-metal by Warner, London. It has a beautiful tone, and should be heard many miles. It was rung for Mass for the first time on Wednesday morning. The people of Cobargo are very pleased and proud of their bell and well they may, for it is equal to any bell in the country. The church requirements for Cobargo are now complete thanks to the zeal of Father McNamara and the energy of his parishioners.

The bell tower got slightly singed in the 2020 bushfires but survived.

Jack (as he was known) also had a hand in the design of another beautiful building still standing at the corner of Campbell and Evans Streets Moruya. The Moruya Examiner of 9 May 1914 reported:

AN ORNAMENT TO MORUYA :- Standing well up from the ground at the corner of Campbell and Evans Street, commanding one of the best views in the district is the picturesque bungalow residence just completed for Mr G.H.James. The appointments and furnishings are most modern and the conveniences for utility are right up-to-date. The house contains eight rooms and offices, is outside of rusticated red mahogany. The principal rooms, as well as the wide hall, are ceiled and lined throughout with heavy patterned white enamelled Wunderlich steel. Multicolored lead lights doors, fumed oak art mantels, and over mantels, Brescian marble fenders, tiled hearths and grates, complete the decorative scheme, whilst outside spacious verandahs, lined and designed for outdoor sleeping, surround the building. These are finished off with grilles picked out in white, giving the outside a most attractive appearance. Ample light is obtained through large fanlights over each door, besides these are wide casement openings in floral and cathedral glass. At the rear water is laid on to set-in tubs, copper, bath, sinks &. It is Mr James intention to install the petrol air gas system. The whole of the work was carried out by local tradesmen, under the supervision of Mr Alf T. Watson. The building was designed by Mr James, with the assistance of our local Architect Mr J.T.Brogan, whilst in the decoration throughout, Mr Peter Davis has quite excelled himself.



Inlaid cedar sacrarium with statue of patron saint of Ireland-photo Brogan family collection



The Cobargo Bell Tower -photo Brett Jurmann 2020



House of G.H.James, Corner of Campbell and Evans Streets, Moruya -photo Shirley Jurmann 2019

Jack also built a tramline from the local wharf to the Company's store (Illawarra Steam Ship Company) in 1911. The Daily Telegraph of 24 Nov 1916 had an advertisement:

Building Tenders and Plans

Department of Education

Following are tenders accepted for the week – Shallow Crossing School, new building, J.Brogan Moruya.

Another of Jack's tenders was accepted according to the Government Gazette of 22 February 1918:

Tenders for the following Public Works have been accepted for the week ending 16th instant:- For the General Repairs and Renovations to Sergeant's Quarters and Lock-up at Moruya – J.T.Brogan, Moruya.

These photos show that the Sergeant's residence has had extensions done.



Police Sergeant's House 1888 and 2000 -photos MDHS

In May 1920 the Moruya Examiner reported that the old Kildare Hotel was to be pulled down and a new residence was to be constructed on the site. The Brogan family understand this new building was the work of J.T.Brogan, probably completed shortly before his death in December of that year.



Original Kildare Hotel – Photo MDHS



Replacement residence on the site -photo Shirley Jurmann 2019

In 1899 Jack married Mary Elizabeth Constable daughter of William Constable and Ellen nee Kilkelly born in 1875, Mungerarie, Moruya. They had nine children all born in the Gundry, Moruya area, Patrick Francis (b.1901, d. 1902), Philomena Mary Teresa (1904), Kathleen Margaret (1906), John Sarsfield (1907), Eleanor Elizabeth (1909), Josephine (1911), Helena (1913), Phillip Bazil (1915), Adrian Kelly (1917).

Jack and Mary purchased the home at 11 River Street Moruya. It was named "West End" and built for George Murphy and his wife Mary nee Stephens.

Jack was known as the most honest and conscientious of builders and contractors. He was an intelligent man, a deep thinker, extensive reader and one who kept up his religious obligations. He was involved in community affairs and his name appears frequently in newspaper reports of local meetings and functions. His spare time was devoted to his family.

In the warm weather it was the custom of Jack Brogan to take his children down to the nearby river for a swim before night fall and this he did on 22nd December 1920. As Jack jnr aged 12 and Ellie aged 11, were coming ashore after their swim the sand bank gave way and they were thrown back into the water. Jack was sitting on the river bank a few feet away carefully watching his children. He immediately rushed to their rescue without waiting to shed any clothing or boots. Mimi aged 16, also jumped into the water and managed to bring her brother and sister to safety, but Jack got into difficulties, hampered by his clothing and boots. Kathleen aged 13 rushed to his aid but both sank and were drowned.



Kathleen Brogan not long before she drowned - Brogan family collection

Kathleen was a sweet girl who attended the local Convent School. Sad as it was to lose the father but the loss was more than doubled by the life of a bright and promising young girl being taken. The funeral was the next day as it was so close to Christmas and the sad cortege was a lengthy one. The Convent School children, attired in white and carrying floral tributes, preceded the priest's car, followed by the coffins of father and daughter in separate vehicles. Then came the mourners and a long retinue of sorrowing friends. Rev. Father Bossance performed the last sad rites at the grave.

John Thomas Brogan died as he had lived, sacrificing his life in his endeavour to save the lives of his children. On 22nd December 2020 it will be 100 years since the drowning. It must have been particularly sad for the family to remember each Christmas

Mary was left with a young family to rear, Mimi being the eldest at 16 and Adrian (known as Kelly) just 3, the youngest. A collection was taken up and people from East Lynne to Cobargo donated to help Mary and her remaining 7 children survive. Jack as the eldest boy had to leave school to be the family breadwinner. He was apprenticed to local builder Arthur Preddey and eventually succeeded his father as a carpenter and the local undertaker.

Mary continued to live in the house until her death in 1954. Daughter Helen lived with her. Helen was the receptionist for Dr Mackay for a long time. Helen continued to live there after her mother's death until her own death.



Helen Brogan as a girl



Helen, house in background -photos Marie Traynor



Helen as young woman

In 2020 this house is occupied by a Brogan descendant and her husband.

The History of the Brogan Houses “West End” and “Redleaf”

Two quite old houses associated with the Brogan family are still standing on top of the hill in River Street, Moruya, opposite the Hospital. One was called “West End” (No. 11) and one “Redleaf” (N. 19).



“West End” appears in this old photo just above and to the left of the chimney stack of the flour mill in Shore Street. Photo taken from Police sergeant’s residence in Page Street -photo of it put onto canvas, Marie Traynor

“West End”



Wedding photo of Marie Heffernan and Gary Traynor 1996, taken on verandah of “West End”-photo Marie Traynor



“West End”, 11 River Street, 1980s-photo Marie Traynor

“West End” is the older of the two houses. The first occupants of this house were George Murphy and his wife Mary nee Stephens and their family.

George Murphy was born in 1836 in Cork, Ireland, the son of Richard Murphy and Elizabeth Richards. He was educated at Eton College along with his brother and Osborne Wrightson. George came to Australia as a young man as did Osborne and probably two of George’s brothers and a sister.

Osborne is known to have been a gold miner at Araluen in 1865 so possibly it was the lure of gold which attracted them to this country. Osborne later became a school teacher at The Burra (1870), South Wolumla (1871), Moruya C of E School (1875), Cobargo (1879), Pambula (1883). He married Martha Stephens, sister of Mary, so the two men became brothers-in-law.

George married Mary Stephens at Moruya in 1858. Mary was the daughter of John Stephens and Maria Selina Leggo Jeffery. John Stephens was born in 1805 in Cornwall, England, the son of John Stephens and Loveday Treloar. Maria was born in 1812 in Cornwall, England, the daughter of William Richard Addicot Jeffery and Elizabeth Leggo. They married in Cornwall in 1828 and in 1839 they arrived in Australia with three children, two having died in England. They went to Boro near Braidwood where Mary was born. They then went to the Nelligen area and on to Kiora and finally to Bodalla. John was joined in Australia by brother James and his wife Elizabeth nee James in 1853 and Maria’s brothers Phillip Jeffery in 1848 and James Jeffery in 1853.

George and Mary Murphy settled on a farm at Kiora named “Terrembee”, a property later owned by Ken Taylor and then Jack Brogan. Here George and Mary had three daughters before moving to the Bodalla/Eurobodalla area where they had a further six daughters. George then bought property at Gundary and built “West End”. The family lived here for many years and George erected a bacon curing establishment with his brand becoming famous and gaining top prices. Two more children, a son and a daughter, were born.

George became a JP. He and his son took up storekeeping at Pambula but this occupation did not suit George. He wanted a more outdoor life and went dairy farming at Kyogle. He sold out there and returned to the South Coast at Bega for a time before going to reside in Manly where he died in 1915. Mary continued to live in Manly until her death in 1921.

The children of George and Mary were:

1. Elizabeth (Lilly) Murphy born 12 February 1859 Moruya River. Died 1944 Manly.
2. Jessie Jane Murphy born 20 December 1860 Moruya River. Died 1944 Manly.
3. Maria Murphy born 6 July 1863 Moruya. Died 1931 Manly.
4. Mary Murphy born 5 December 1866 Trunketabella, Bodalla.
5. Annie Murphy born 9 May 1869 Bodalla.
6. Renetta (Nellie) Murphy born 6 May 1871 Eurobodalla.
7. Emily Murphy born 17 February 1873 Eurobodalla.
8. Alice Murphy born 24 November 1874 Eurobodalla.
9. Loveday (Lundy) Murphy born 1st March 1877 Eurobodalla.
10. Walter George Murphy born 12 December 1879 Gundary, Moruya. (Finally a boy!)
11. Elsie Stephens Murphy born 21st June 1886.

George’s aunt, probably Mary, came to live with her nephew in the 1860s. She died in 1891 at the age of 91. Other relatives of George also came to Australia. One was Ann, probably a sister, who married Joseph Hibel in 1850. A clue to these connections is the unusual given name Renetta. Mary Murphy dying in 1891, is recorded as being the daughter of Stephen and Renetta Murphy. George had a daughter Renetta and Ann who married Joseph Hibel also had a daughter named Renetta, born at Wamban, Moruya in 1863. Two other Renetta Murphys were born in NSW around this time, Renetta Emma, born 1864 Goulburn to Richard and Mary, and Renetta May born 1872 Bathurst to Stephen and Charlotte. Were Richard and Stephen brothers to George?

“Redleaf”



“Redleaf” in earlier times. Most probably William and Adelaide Stephens on verandah. -photo MDHS



“Redleaf” in 1978-photo Helen Wilson

A bit further down the hill and east of “West End” was the imposing home called “Redleaf”. It was built for William Stephens, son of James Stephens and Elizabeth nee James who had arrived in Australia in 1853 to join James’s brother John, Mary Murphy’s father. William was born at Mullenderree in 1863, went to Sydney as a youth and remained there for a number of years. He tired of city life and returned to the country, taking up a selection at Araluen. His father was found drowned at The Burra in 1890. It was thought he took his own life. Will took over the management of the family property at The Burra. Subsequently he and his mother rented out

the farm and he went back to Sydney. Will bought property at Dundas and became an Alderman at the Dundas Municipal Council. He married Adelaide Mary Gifford in 1906 and with his wife once again returned to Moruya, engaging in farming pursuits.

Retiring from farm life he purchased land at Gundary and built a fine residence which he called "Redleaf". He soon established a splendid orchard and garden. Towards the last few months of his life he suffered heart trouble and while working in his garden on June 3rd 1938 he collapsed and died. He was of a happy and genial nature and straight forward and honest in all his dealings. Adelaide died in 1942. There were no surviving children of the marriage. Will's mother Elizabeth had been residing at Gundary but went to live at "Redleaf" with her son and daughter-in-law when her health began to fail. She died there in 1923 at the age of 90.

The next owners were John Sarsfield Brogan (Jack) and Ida Brogan and family.

Jack and Ida married in 1941, Ida was Ida Etta Mary Hayes the daughter of Austin Hayes, headmaster at Moruya Public School. Ida and Jack had four children. The house has a similar style to the G.H. James house on the corner of Campbell and Evans Streets. Note the bay window and roof line so could it have been built by John Thomas Brogan?

The house at this time was set in grounds with vegetable garden and orchard established by William Murphy. The house itself was a grand old Federation style with pressed metal ceilings, fireplaces in the three bedrooms and lounge room, a bathroom with chip heater, old copper in the outside laundry. There was an external toilet and tank for water. When eventually a sink was put into the kitchen it had a backdrop of stainless steel, a bit before its time. It was probably left over from work Jack did at the cheese factory. A large shed and workshop with coffin storage was built and two open ended garages, housing the old Bedford truck in one and the shiny black hearse in another.



Jack and Ida Brogan on their wedding day 1941-photo Maureen

Jack was well known along the coast as an undertaker but was also an outstanding farmer and carpenter. He bought cows from Abraham Emmott and was intensely interested in breeding a strong bloodstock of Jersey cows on his farm "Terrembee" at Kiora. This necessitated the use of a Jersey bull which was ferocious and attacked Jack one day. He had to use a pitchfork to fend it off. Some of the milk was supplied to Billy Weeks who delivered it to customers around town. People left their billy on the front step and Jack filled it up. The rest went to the Gundary cheese factory.

Several houses and other buildings around Moruya, including four timber class rooms at St Marys Convent School, are testimonials to his ability as a carpenter. Pam Oxley nee Wiggins writes in her book "Not Just Ordinary People" that her parents Minnie and Clarrie Wiggins had the bakery at Central Tilba after their marriage in 1929 but moved back to Moruya in 1936 where her family purchased the property known as "The Cedars" on the corner of Evans and Murray Streets. They sold much of the property to Sid Louttit, Minnie's father but kept the corner block and engaged Jack Brogan to build them a home. It was the first home Jack had built in Moruya itself although he had previously built the cheese factory house at Kiora.



House built for Minnie and Clarrie Wiggins-photo Shirley Jurmann 2019

Another house built by Jack was at Mullenderree on the property now owned by Cletus Heffernan. In 1930 it was still owned by the "Perpetual Trust of the Hawdon Estate". Jack built a cottage here for rent. To get to the site he would walk down to the river from "Redleaf", row a boat across the river, walk across Mullenderree Flats, with a three foot rule in his pocket and a length of hose for levelling, cut the stumps for the foundations of the house from logs in the bush and build the house. Later around 1940-41 he built the dairy and water tanks. By this time he had acquired a Model A Ford ute which he could jack up and run a cement mixer off the wheel. Jack built a house and dairy for France and Jean Heffernan at Yarragee. Most of the houses Jack built had Cyprus pine shiplap external cladding so houses built in Moruya in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s with this type of cladding were almost certainly built by Jack.



House built by Jack for Vic and Elsie Louttit, 43 Evans Street Moruya-photo Ken Louttit 2019

In 1966 Jack was working on his farm "Terrembee" at Kiora and had a severe heart turn. He was taken to Sydney but died a few weeks later. He was only 58. Ida continued on in the house for some time but eventually built herself a new house. When Jack died his dairy herd was much sought after by dairy farmers all along the coast. It was eventually purchased by Arthur Cooper of Cooper's Island near Bodalla. The undertaking business was taken over by John Flynn. The farm "Terrembee" is now in 2020 owned by Jack's daughter and her husband.

"Redleaf" was sold to Ron and Gwen March and was again sold in 1976 to the Wilson family.

The orchard was still there when the Wilsons bought it but the Codlin moths loved the apples and pears. After battling them for some time the Wilsons decided the orchard had to go. Much has been done to restore the old house, internally and externally, including the verandah rail.



"Redleaf" in 2020-photo Helen Wilson

References:

Obituary for George Murphy, "Moruya Examiner" 5th June 1915

*Item in "Moruya Examiner" 14th August 1891, about death of Miss Murphy, George's aunt
NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages*

Article in "Moruya Examiner" 25th December 1920 about drowning of John Brogan and daughter Kathleen

Obituary for John Brogan and daughter Kathleen, "Moruya Examiner" 1st January 1921

Obituary for William James Stephens "Moruya Examiner" 11th June 1938

Obituary for Elizabeth Stephens "Moruya Examiner" 17th November 1923

Obituary for John Sarsfield Brogan "Moruya Examiner" 6th January 1966

Information and photos from Marie Traynor (Brogan descendent), Stephen Brogan, Ann Brogan, Maureen Addison and Helen Wilson.