
AGNES BRACKEN of Sutton Coldfield (and her family)

**A compilation of research material by Janet Jordan
(Member of the Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group)
with Roy Woodward-Clarke and Diane Woodward Clarke**



This article uses extensive research done by Roy Woodward-Clarke and his wife, Diane, following their purchase at a stamp auction of a letter written by Agnes Bracken to her mother in 1827. Such was their interest in this letter that it encouraged them to search for further details of the Bracken Family. They have kindly allowed me use of their written notes for this article. Other material was found in Sutton Coldfield Reference Library (references given herein), particularly in the 'Agnes Bracken' folder, also in Keith Jordan's Photographic Collection, the author's own local history collection, www.Ancestry.co.uk and www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk. Agnes Bracken and Caroline Bracken's photos can be found in Sutton Library.

Janet Jordan

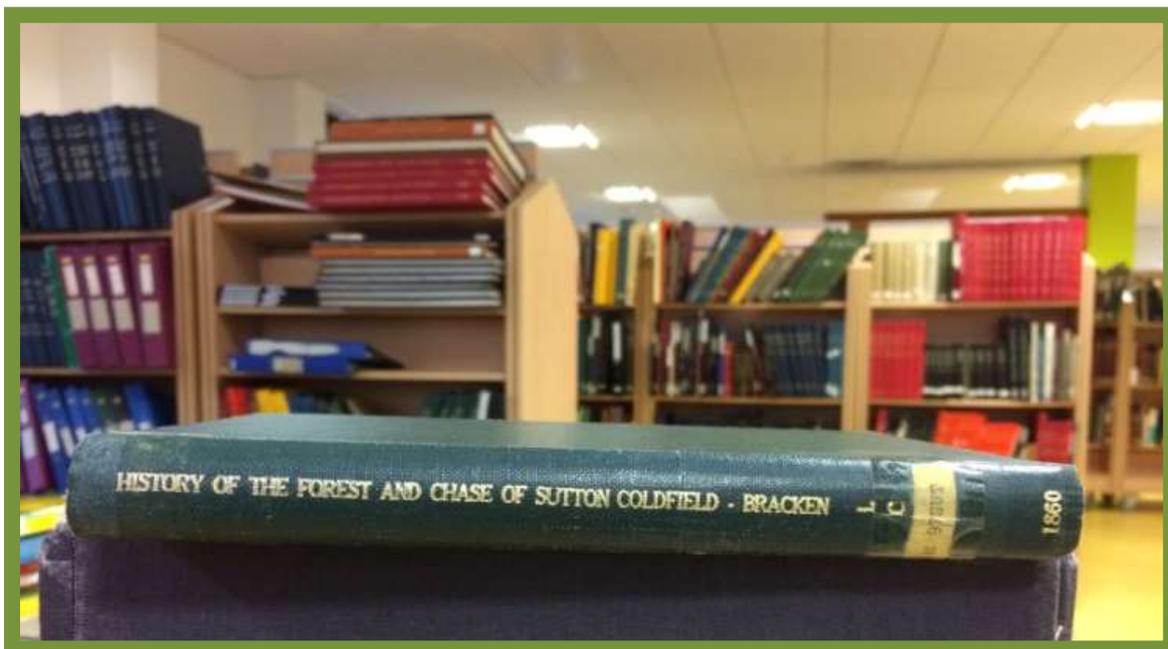
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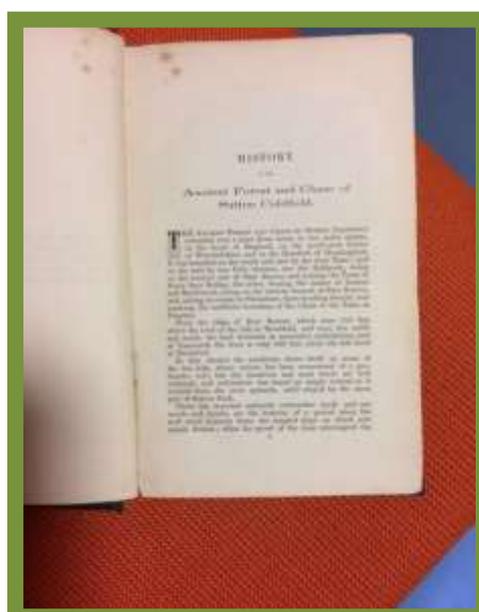
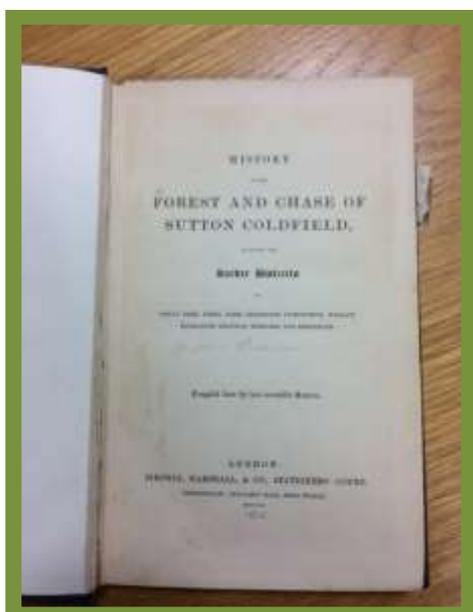


Introduction

On Saturday, 7th July 1860, an advertisement appeared in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* for the sale of a publication called *The History of the Forest and Chase of Sutton Coldfield*. The author's name was not mentioned; perhaps the prestige of the town was enough to promote the book! Priced at Five Shillings, it was to be published by Simpkin, Marshall and Co of London and Benjamin Hall of 71 High Street, Birmingham.



History of the Forest and Chase of Sutton Coldfield in Sutton Coldfield Reference Library (QSH97SUT)



The following description of the book by Roger Lea, a local historian, appears on the website of the Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group (www.sclhrg.org.uk, under *History Spot, Bracken 2*[406]).

*Miss Bracken's history, published in 1860, was the first printed history of the town. It was the result of long study, the first chapter using the **Anglo Saxon Chronicle** and the Domesday Book for an account of the likely state of Sutton in those distant times. Thereafter she follows the account of Sutton given by Sir William Dugdale in his "Antiquities of Warwickshire" of 1651, a vast scholarly work based on quantities of source materials, many of which no longer survive. Miss Bracken gives translations of the latin charters quoted by Dugdale, and adds some information of her own, particularly her eye-witness account of the ruins of the manor house as they were in her day.*

For the later history of Sutton Miss Bracken is mainly concerned with the stories of the principal families who had occupied the great houses - Moor Hall, Four Oaks Hall, Langley Hall, New Hall, and the Rectory - having access to the relevant records. She also used sources shown to her by the Rector, by the Warden, and by the Grammar School solicitor, enabling her to bring the history of the town up to date, but largely ignoring the social and economic history. Although she was involved in charity work and in the work of the elementary schools which gave her first-hand knowledge of Victorian Sutton, she preferred to characterise the town as a rural utopia, where "the cottager, rambling in search of his depastured cattle, feels the pleasure of possessing rights, not the less acceptable that he shares them with his richest and his poorest neighbour".

Roger Lea

It may be that the author, we now know to be Agnes Anne Bracken of Sutton Coldfield, chose to remain anonymous, although the townspeople of Sutton Coldfield were well aware of her standing in the town as a member of the gentry. Her book undoubtedly was awaited with eager anticipation, her accomplishments already well regarded.

Not only an historian, she was also an artist and her paintings then adorned many a wall of the local houses. Donations by collectors of her work continue to find their way to Sutton Coldfield Library and further details of her remarkable life appear in diaries and books written by her contemporaries.

It follows, therefore, that she was a lady of great significance to the history of Sutton Coldfield and deserves to take her place with the likes of Bishop Vesey, WK Riland Bedford, Benjamin Stone, etc.

This article is an attempt to give as much information as possible about her life and that of her immediate family members. I have found so much overlapping information that it is difficult to create a simple narrative of their lives, so I have decided just to present all records that I have in some sort of chronological order.



AGNES ANNE BRACKEN

A Brief Outline of her Life

- *Baptism of Agnes Anne Bracken took place in the Parish of St. Peter & St Paul's, Aston on 17th December 1800 (Wednesday) when she was 5 weeks old - therefore she was born between the 7th and 13th November. Her Baptism record states that she was the daughter of Richard and Anne Bracken of Erdington*
- *Came to live in Sutton in 1816*
- *Moved to Vesey House, High Street in 1820*
- *Her mother died in 1843*
- *Wrote a history of Sutton in 1860*
- *Was an artist and historian*
- *Died February 26th 1877. Entry No. 274 in Parish Burial Register*
- *Buried in Holy Trinity churchyard March 6th 1877. Ceremony performed by W.K. Riland Bedford*
- *Lived in Vesey House, High St. with her three sisters, Everilda, Caroline and Emily. None married*

Roy Woodward-Clarke

Agnes was born in Erdington, although the exact address of where the family lived has yet to be discovered. Her father, Richard Bracken, as a resident of Erdington, had been on the Gamekeepers' Register in 1795 and was still in receipt of a Game Certificate in 1810 .

It would appear, therefore, that it was then that the family moved to Aldridge, where her father died in 1816.

This was when her association with the town of Sutton Coldfield began. Her mother brought her and her three sisters, Catherine, Emily and Everilda, to live in "Mrs Duncomb's house", according to Sarah Holbeche in her diary (BCOLQ942.496081HOL).

Mrs Duncumb was the widow of Joseph Duncumb who lived at Moat House. In his Will of 1773 (QSH 77.31) he bequeathed funds for her to purchase furniture for an alternative property should she wish not to live with her daughter after his death..

Not long after Joseph's death in 1792, their daughter Elizabeth married Shirley Farmer Steele Perkins and he became the owner of Moat House, leading one to surmise that Mrs Duncumb then moved to another house.

It is believed that Mrs Duncumb's new home was a property known at some time as *The White Hart* in High Street. This has yet to be verified. It was situated opposite No. 58 High Street, the home of Sarah Holbeche and her sisters, which itself was demolished to make way for the railway in the 1870s.

The Bracken family remained there until 1820 when they moved into *Vesey House* in the High Street. Sarah Holbeche recalls in her diary:

"**1820:** *Acorn House* divided for Dr Pearson and Mrs Bracken, each taking up their separate residences. They were son and daughter of Pearson bookseller in Birmingham and the descendant of *Aris* - *Aris's Gazette*."

Acorn House was originally named after a stone acorn on its parapet overlooking High Street, but later named *Vesey House*.

Five years later, a notice appeared in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* on the 16th May 1825:

"To be let, and entered upon at Midsummer, a very genteel House, situate in a pleasant part of the town of Sutton Coldfield, and late in the occupation of Richard Pearson, Esq, M.D."

Many years later, Agnes was to purchase the whole property, but one wonders if a new tenant was found for Dr Pearson's half of the house at this stage? This was one of the most prestigious properties in High Street and it would have cost a lot of money to maintain.

Records show that Agnes was employed as a teacher, amongst her many other skills and she was, no doubt, a very confident young woman. The following letter by Ray Woodward-Clarke to the *Observer* newspaper on Friday, June 13, 2008 refers to a rather remarkable incident in her life which took place in 1827.

I have a fascinating long letter written by Agnes Bracken

Re: The Formidable Miss Bracken.

I enjoyed reading Roger Lea's excellent article about Miss Agnes Bracken but I would like to point out that Agnes had three sisters not two.

Richard Bracken and Anne Pearson, who were married on October 3, 1799, in St Martin's Church in Birmingham, had four children, all girls, born in Erdington.

Agnes Anne, born 1800, Everilda born 1802, Caroline born 1803 and Emily born 1805.

Agnes' father died when she was 15 years old.

He was buried on April 5 1816, at St Peter and St Paul's Aston.

The burial ceremony was conducted by Henry Nab, the Curate of Aldridge where Richard was living at the time of his death. His wife did not re-marry and none of the daughters married either.

Anne died in 1843, aged 75, and was buried at the same church as her husband.

I have in my possession a long fascinating letter written in 1827 by Agnes Bracken to her mother when Agnes was on holiday in London.

The letter gives a very detailed description of her activities with her friends in London including a very graphic account of a visit to the Thames Tunnel, then under construction.

The next but one day after her visit the River Thames broke through the roof of the Tunnel completely flooding it.

The workmen barely escaped with their lives.

One wonders what chance Agnes and her friends would have had, hampered by their long dresses, if they had been caught in this catastrophe.

A flood occurred again the following year in which six workmen were drowned.

I have deposited a copy of this letter in the



Agnes Bracken: Ray Woodward-Clarke says she had three sisters, not two.

Sutton Coldfield Reference Library together with a transcription of Agnes's will which is also very interesting.

To read these documents just ask for the Agnes Bracken folder.

Agnes and her sisters Caroline and Emily all died in Sutton Coldfield, and lived to good ages.

Agnes' sister Everilda, however, was not

so fortunate.

This sister never received a mention in local records apart from the 1841 census where she is recorded living in the High Street with her mother and sisters, all described as 'ladies of independent means'.

In the autumn of 1849 Everilda was paying a visit to London where she stayed at The Rectory adjacent to St Mary Church, Rotherhithe which was just a few hundred yards from the entrance to the Thames Tunnel.

At that time the tunnel was in use for pedestrians only, accessible by staircases, as the funds for building approach ramps for wheeled vehicles were not yet available.

During the six years it had been open conditions in the tunnel had deteriorated and had become distinctly unsavoury.

Whether or not Everilda had ventured into the Tunnel is not known but she did become seriously ill with 'an inflammation of the lungs'.

The unfortunate Everilda succumbed rapidly to the infection and died after three days aged just 47 years.

Everilda's will gives us further small insights into her life. She left her topaz brooch to her sister Emily and her pearl necklace and her writing desk to her sister Caroline.

To her sister Agnes she left her rings and her share in the Old Union Mill in Birmingham.

She also owned a guitar which she stipulated was to be sold for a sum not less than £8, a sizeable amount in those days.

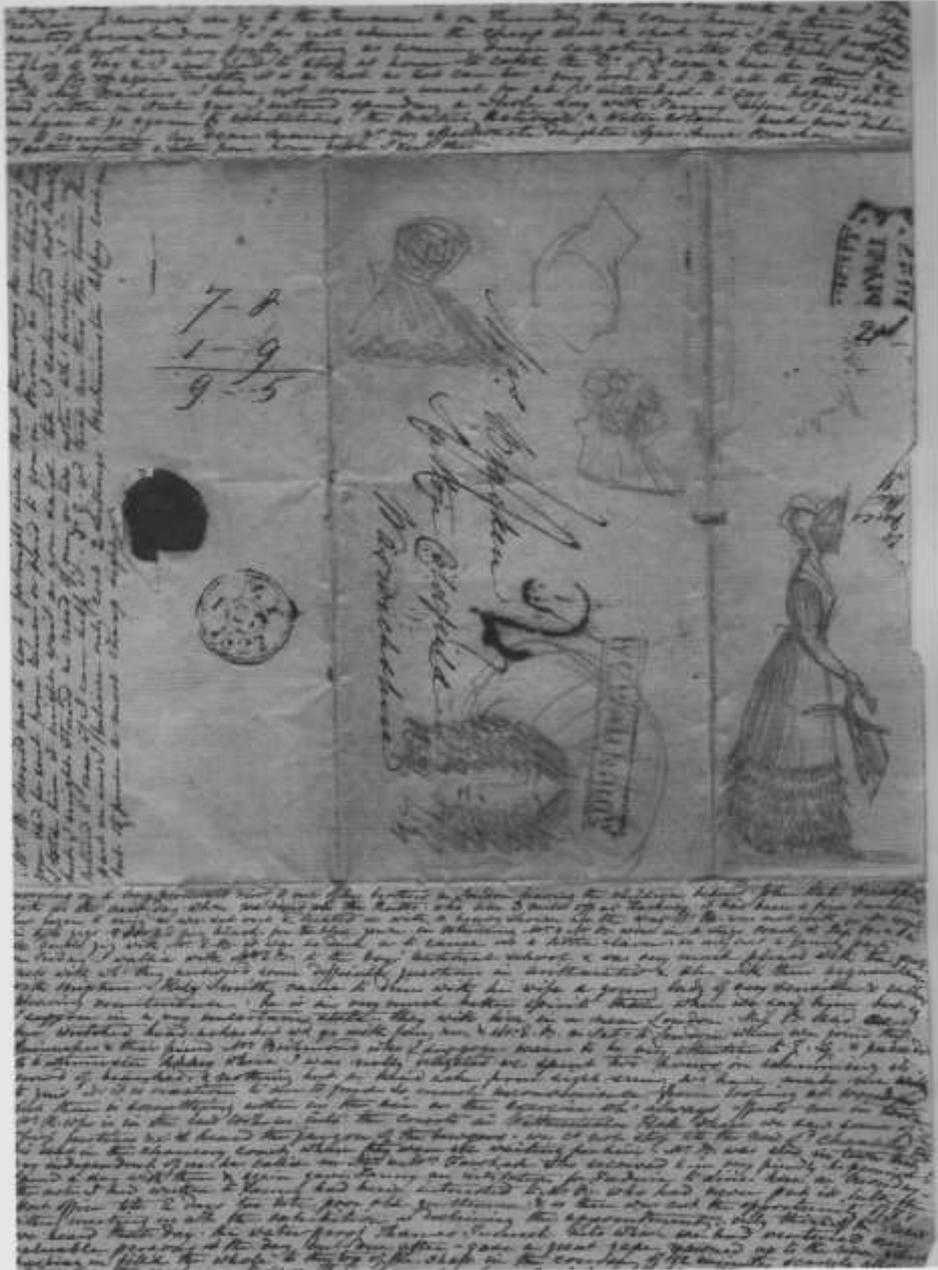
I hope these further facts about Agnes Bracken and her family will be of interest to your readers.

Ray Woodward-Clarke, Sutton Coldfield.

Ray Woodward-Clarke, Sutton Coldfield

A copy of this "fascinating long letter" and a transcription of the same are as follows:-

The "fascinating long letter" of May, 1827



Walthamstow May 16th 1857
 Sunday May 21st morning

My dear Emma

I think a leisure day too good an opportunity of making good in a letter to you not to take advantage of it though I have not heard from you since I wrote last but I have been always desirous of writing to you as you may suppose it is very cheerful on my side but I must be less directly & continuously than I do seem to be happy as possible upon the subject of matrimony & which she subjects her & gives us a little more of his temper than formerly as had just found in the paper I sent you letter to P. when to your surprise & pleasure I & Mr Guinness found Eliza came to be like then to get home long in London & having passed thro' Ipswich had learnt to take the whole view that looked very well & I was very glad to meet them of whose appearance I thought quite improved & it is a most agreeable lively middle aged woman slender & taller than her daughter. Whilst talking to each as I thought I should have said the arrival of Mr E. B. caused an accelerated movement he had been expected at some point & was looking so well as soon he did. The Guinnesses laid several plans for some joint parties on light evening & these I gave me some most interesting accounts of the projects of reformation in Ireland: not a quarter of which she says find its way into the public prints. She says the public discussions between Mr Fox & the poor & the poor are exciting universal attention that we had nearly forgotten to state that in the middle of the day Mr Whisker made us leave town from Bath on his gig & the next morning after breakfast he & Mr. Carter the groom we were accompanied by the appearance of Mr Charles to he stayed but in home or two we took him in the train to look at the gates to see he set off with us on his own we took a lively trot that I could not but imagine whether such small movements corresponded with his report at Cambridge. Sunday 6th was so very wet the rain coming in heavily that we were obliged to a good coach for conveying our party to church in the morning & again in the evening in the forenoon Mr B. preached he is very much liked here & always more when he comes up. On Monday morning we set forth to London from driving to the top of the one gig Mr E. B. gave us in the other we delighted in Kettle's & Pappe's at the Guinness's lodgings & with them & 2 young men with whom they were acquainted proceeded to what is called the horse parade at I had seen before & thence to the Regent's Park to the Diorama wh. I have for the month been desirous to see in vain & after losing several parties on the road this fatigue wh. tired them both instead of providing we found the Diorama closed & not to be reopened for a fortnight. My satisfaction the notes then decided the party that remained towards the Museum & passing thro' Russell's Square we kept up St. Lawrence's house to look at his pictures for which there is only required to knock at the door & appeared. Now the servant half a crown I was very much gratified that we had our promised picture of a fine full length of Mr. Garrison but there were ~~three~~ beautiful heads in different stages with the figures sketched in one of the part of our party & a set for whose portrait was amongst them when we reached the M. I talked on Friday whilst they went thro' the town.

part of the forest is scattered all perhaps you have taken there a very fine
 view of 8 or 7 miles from St. B. was in bed at that time & was
 I believe but soon the best in good spirits on Thursday the plan
 visiting the big old Somerset house on Sat. 11 & clock being just
 I wrote to Henry that she might inform & request him to go
 as there is he had proposed. On Friday the old gentleman again
 took me in his eye for an excursion to Waltham Abbey 12 miles
 off the town of that name is very poor & old chiefly of houses
 projecting upper stories & modern view of wood which is a
 very possible material in the neighbourhood for building
 houses for the poor & indeed trades people & for out houses
 & I shall not be surprised if the whole country is done in
 in a place. I suppose the forest occasions wood to be cheap
 the Abbey walls of Norman architecture support a modern
 roof to the ch. & make a curious building. There is an old
 garden gateway I took a few sketches. Four miles lay
 a ridge of rising ground on the right skirted by the forest
 in the left giving us a fine view of the flat meadows & wood
 country that stretches without a hill to the horizon wh.
 as level as the sea & the forest as you perhaps know runs
 the place 10 or 12 miles & 2 or 3 miles in breadth very much inter-
 sected with cultivated ground & great houses. Had being it to
 by the trees being almost all lopped into pollards. The town of Epping
 & Waltham Abbey lying at the northern corners I wished to be
 passed towards Epping but not knowing what style of road
 there that morning Sunday St. B. was afraid of his cheeks. We
 returned from Jam. that day the following morning we breakfasted
 at 10 past 9 & at 10 past 10 we on the London road in an open car
 for Dr. Keble's. E. P. C. 1-2 & 3. I stopped on Fleet St. part of it & to pass
 a short cut to shop outside surrounded by mirrors it was
 splendid only a few shades being displayed. The cold greatly
 took us before we reached Somerset house but we were highly
 compensated by the heat there. I think I shall have particular
 description of the paintings to my relation home. I particularly
 the coloring & admired some portraits more than those of St. B.
 there was much to entertain & to profit & to divert. What with the
 rooms below & the rooms above & the increasing crowd I feared
 I should miss it if he came but I took especially exhibiting
 of some heads that was not in a room but for nearly 3 hours
 I did not know the heat grew more oppressive & the chimney was
 & eye to the pictures exhibited in giving me an agreeable head ache
 & accompanying so that I was glad to get down to look to St. B.
 who was also done for & coming in a half shaped state. We
 took about 10. 15. then walked with Jam. & me round the quadrangle
 of Somerset house & on one of the houses on the outside tower
 the room & the pith he enabled me to see & admire the best
 I might say magnificent building after departing from the ch. &
 shopping a little we called on Jam. who was able to see what
 she told me that my note had never reached her & that it
 been the morning before both Keble's to the exhibition. The
 the Henderson's two of us were with her father but she & her
 had not been able to learn we did not remain long my head
 was bad but we then took to drive in the park & this it was
 had & it was too early for the fashionable however. I could not
 have seen much of them if they had been there & was missed
 it with an alternative before I reached home when I instantly
 lay down as did also St. B. with a distracting head ache &

Transcription by Mrs Diane Woodward-Clarke

Transcription of a letter written by Agnes Bracken to her mother

(Transcribed by Mrs Diane Woodward-Clarke)

Walthamstow May 15th 1827

Finished May ^{21st} ~~27th~~ Thursday

My Dear Mama

I think a leisure day too good an opportunity of making progress in a letter to you not to take advantage of it though I have not heard from you since I wrote last but I have always been ashamed of sending hasty scrawls to you in return for your very kind and well filled pages. Our party as you may suppose is a very cheerful one Miss Blick supporting by her vivacity and continued laughter. Dr B. seems as happy as possible under the system of tormenting to which she subjects him and gives us a little more of his company than formerly. We had just dined on the Friday I sent my letter to C. when to our surprise and pleasure Dr & Mrs Guinness, Jane and Eliza came in to tea. They had not been long in London and having passed through Tamworth had learnt where the Blicks were. They looked very well and I was very glad to meet Eliza G. whose appearance I thought quite improved. Mrs G. is a most agreeable lively middle aged woman, slender and taller than her daughters. Whilst talking as fast as I thought speech could run another arrival of Mr E. B. caused an accelerated movement. He had been expected at time uncertain and was looking as well as ever he did. The Guinnesses layed several plans for our joining their party in sight-seeing and Eliza G. gave me some most interesting accounts of the progress of reformation in Ireland not a quarter of which she says finds its way into the public print. She says the public discussions between Mr Pope and the priest MacGuire are exciting universal attention. I had nearly forgotten to state that in the middle of the day Mr Blick reached us having travelled from Bath in his gig and the next morning after breakfast expecting to see Dr B. enter the room we were astonished by the appearance of Mr. Charles B. He stayed but an hour or two. We took him in the rain to look at the grotto to which he set off with me on his arm in such a lively trot that I could not but enquire whether such rapid movements corresponded with his dignity at Cambridge. Sunday 6th was so very wet the rain coming in torrents that we were obliged to a glass coach for conveying our large party to church in the morning and again in the evening. In the first service Mr. B. preached. He is very much liked here and always invited when he comes up. On Monday morning we all jaunted to London the groom driving Mrs & Miss B. in one gig, Mr. E.B., Jane & me in the other. We alighted in Hollis St. Oxford St. at the

Guinness's lodgings and with them and 2 young men with whom they were acquainted proceeded to what is called the horse bazaar which I had seen before and thence to the Regents Park to the Diorama which I have for three months been about to see in vain and after loosing several of our party on the road through fatigue which carried them back instead of forward we found the Diorama closed and not to be reopened for a fortnight. To my satisfaction the votes then decided the party that remained towards the museum and passing through Russel Square we stopped at Sir T. Lawrence's house to look at his pictures for which it is only required to knock at the door and afterwards give the servant half a crown. I was very much gratified. There was but one finished picture (a fine full length of Mr Canning) but there were many beautiful heads in different stages with the figures sketched in. One of the gentlemen of our party has a sister whose portrait was amongst them. When we reached the museum I called on Fanny whilst they went through the rooms. She was not in order for receiving company but in very good spirits and even proposing to go to the Tower as she said F. was waiting to hear when I could come to London for that purpose. We returned to dinner in the gigs as before half perished with cold and Mrs B. who can bear but very little fatigue quite knocked up. Mr B. had been to town ? coach and met F. in the city. Mr B. breakfasted the next morning with the Bishop of Lichfield with Mr E. B. who thence proceeded to the Cambridge election. On Wednesday Mr B. took me a drive to a pretty church entirely covered with ivy of ancient structure and in a picturesque situation. And then we crossed through part of the forest to Woodford which perhaps you know taking thus a very pretty drive of 6 or 7 miles. Poor Mrs B. was in bed all that day in consequence of fatigue but rose the next in good spirits. On Thursday the plan for meeting the G's. at Somerset House on Saturday, 11 O'clock being just past I wrote to Fanny that she might inform F. and request him to join us there as he had proposed. On Friday the old gentleman again took me in his gig for an excursion to Waltham Abbey 10 miles off. The town of that name is very poor and old chiefly of houses with projecting upper stories or modern ones of wood which is a very favourite material in this neighbourhood for dwelling houses for the poor and indeed trades people and for outhouses and I shall not be surprised if the whole country is some night in a blaze. I suppose the forest occasions wood to be cheap. The Abbey walls of Norman architecture support a modern roof to the church and make a curious building and there is an old Gothic gateway. I took a few sketches. Our route lay along a ridge of rising ground on the right skirted by the forest on the left giving us a fine view of the flat marshy & wooded country on the other side of the Lea river that stretches without a hill to the horizon which is as level as the sea.

The forest as you perhaps know runs North of this place 10 or 12 miles and 2 or 3 miles in breadth very much interspersed with cultivated ground and gentlemen's houses but losing its beauty by the trees being almost all lopt into pollards. The towns of Epping and Waltham Abbey lying at its Northern corners I wished to have crossed towards Epping but not knowing what style of road ran through that uneven country Mr B. was afraid of his wheels. Mr E. B. returned from Cambridge that day. The following morning we breakfasted at 1/2 past 7 and at 1/2 past 8 were on the London Road in an open carriage Mrs. B. and E. - Mr E. B. - C. - J. and I. We shopped in Fleet Street first of all and to purchase a shawl entered a shop entirely surrounded by mirrors, it was quite splendid, only a few shawls being displayed. The cold greatly annoyed us before we reached Somerset House but we were amply compensated by the heat there. I think I shall leave particular description of the paintings to my return home. I particularly noticed the colouring and admired some portraits more than those of Sir T. Lawrence. There was much to entertain and to profit a student. What with the rooms below and the rooms above and the increasing crowd I feared I should miss F. if he came but I took especially criticising views of every head that was not in a bonnet for nearly 3 hours & I never observed him. The heat grew more oppressive and the raising one's head and eyes to the pictures assisted in giving me an agreeable head ache and swimming so that I was glad to sit down at last by Mrs B. who was also done for and remain in a half stupid state till the rest went. Mr E. B. then walked with Jane and me round the quadrangle of Somerset House and on one of the terraces on the outside towards the river and the fresh air enabled me to see and admire the beautiful I might say magnificent building. After separating from the G's and shopping a little we called on Fanny who was able to see Misses Blicks. She told me that my note had never reached her and that F. had been the morning before with Heathfield to the exhibition. That she understood two of us were with her father but which two she had not been able to learn. We did not remain long my head was very bad but we then took a drive in the park and though it was past 4 it was too early for the fashionables. However I could not have seen much of them if they had been there and was miserably ill with an all-overness before I reached home where I instantly lay down as did also Mrs. B. with a distracting head ache and there we remained till the next morning. I have been in a little bed in Miss B's room since Mr B's arrival who was put into the state room where I had before abode. Miss B's most fortunately were perfectly well after all our fatigues and made me very kind nurses. Mrs B. however could not rise the next morning and I was not well enough to go to church till the afternoon when Mr B. preached and again in the evening when Mr Woodrough the Church ? secretary gave us an

excellent sermon. Mr W. Wilson lost his sister last week who was the wife of his cousin Mr D. Wilson the rector of Islington. Yesterday Dr B. came into lunch and at length was seized upon past escape by his sisters who worried him and pulled him until he sat down patiently in the back Drawing room where is all my painting apparatus. Jane has been engaged almost every day in arranging some of his accounts and bills relative to his Walthamstow business of the last 3 years and for which he can never find time himself and for which Mrs B. cannot induce him to give her instructions, but Jane by perseverance and positive force compels him to an occasional attention and thinking this an excellent opportunity to get through some business and keep him at the same time quiet introduced the papers Mrs Roulston's little sister hovering about to see that he sat in a becoming way. Miss B. holding his head. Mrs B. coaxing Mr B. coming in to have a peep. Mr Dalgleish with a portfolio containing about 1000£ worth of bills not yet sent out. The doors locked and the room properly darkened for painting his highness sat or was rather incarcerated for his picture for the space of an hour and a half. Sometimes laughing sometimes scolding and altogether very much like a just entrapped wild animal. Considering my fear of his escape and the very few moments I could catch his head in right position I succeeded tolerably in the 1st painting. Whether I shall ever complete it with satisfaction is at present very doubtful. They say the portrait of Mrs B. is very like. I confess I cannot think so but they are easily satisfied which is quite agreeable to me. On Tuesday 15th at 6 in the evening we all went to the Walthamstow Bible meeting held in the infant school room and were much pleased by the speeches of Messrs Woodrough, B. Noel, Carey nephew of the Baptist Carey, Phillips from the Cape, Blick and Dr Steinkoph, and two or three others. Mr B. Noel with his usual refined eloquent sweetness and piety. He lives near here having married a lady of property and is to be invited to dine an early day. Wednesday 16th by appointment Mr B. drove me to the Tower to meet the Guinnesses at 12 O'clock with whom and a gentleman before seen with them I went over three rooms of the armoury, by which I saw several different parts of the tower. The ancient armour is highly interesting and the room 145 feet in length curiously stacked with arms enough for all England one would think surprised one. The Tower (or as I should call it the citadel for it is ? a little fortified town) pleased me very much. I delight in seeing the mixture of low timeworn towers, new ramparts, broad moats, old bridges, new roofs and chimneys, rows of half timber houses, dungeon like doors, cannons, the centre square tower, courts up and down hill, flights of steps, soldiers on duty and soldiers lounging and children hopping about under the trees and up the ramparts and officers stalking about and beekeepers idling under the portcullises and then on the tower hill which almost ?

May 16
1827

looks it, this pile of morsels of every century has so different an appearance to any of the streets which approach it. Whilst the ? shopping and fine day and a fine air added much then to the ? . Dr B. had been very anxious I should see it and had settled all the plans himself that I might not return into the country without having seen it as he said you would scold. We had not time to see more but were obliged to leave in Dr.G's hired barouch to join the whole Blick party at the Tunnel where also Mr John Hall joined us. Mr B. met us and we were conducted by Mr Beenish 2nd engineer to the works which is a part not generally shewn. I scarcely know whether to describe now the shaft the cylinder of which was built and then sunk in the ground now filled with woodwork - steam engine for raising the loads of mud and water - with stair cases and echoing to various noises. After descending we were conducted through one of the two passages of the tunnel oozing with water in which the men were running backwards and forwards with barrows on rail roads - till faintly lighted from the apertures into the yellow gas-lighted passage we advanced half way under the Thames and saw the method of working within an iron case containing 36 divisions for 1 man each which being shoved by means of screws a few inches at a time protects the men from all danger of irruption from the earth. The brickwork being constantly continued up to it as soon as its removal permits. There are two passages of sufficient width for 1 carriage and a footpath each with door ways of communication every few yards are driven side by side. When completed to the proposed openings at both ends they will be about the length of 1200 feet the Thames being 1000 feet across. I shall bring you home a better description. I own we felt a little awe when we entered this sub aqueous cavern of apparently interminable length in something more approaching darkness than what they called gas light, slipping in the mud and sprinkled with dirt from the roof or the workmen. Whilst the hollow sound of the voices at a distance sometimes like shouts of alarm were confusing on our intellects. This days sights have particularly gratified me. In returning Mrs B. took my place in Dr G's carriage which brought them to dine at Walthamstow and I came back with the party who recrossed the river in a boat so that I saw some of the shipping and then we got into the 3 gigs one in which Mr E.B. drove Misses B's and me being a double one holding 4 which they have hired whilst Mr B's is repairing. We had rain before we reached home and indeed have not had any very nice weather since the Blicks came and very cold. Warm rain is very much wanted. Mr & Mrs Woodrough dined here as also Mr Hall. Jane and Eliza G. sang very sweetly together. Mrs Rolston being unwilling to see strangers took alarm at the prospect of company and went in the morning on a long promised visit to one of her brothers in London leaving the children behind. John Hall

breakfasted with us the next day when we dined at the Rutts who live 3 miles off at Hackney. It had been a fine sunshine but began to rain as we set out and treated us with a heavy shower all the way. Dr B. was not with us. We went in two gigs. I swopped my black for the blue gown. In returning Mr & Mrs B. were in a stage coach and Misses B's and I in the double gig with Mr E.B. It was so dark as to cause us a little alarm. We only met a family party. On Friday I walked with Mr E.B. to the boy's National School and was very much pleased with the quickness with which they answered some difficult questions in arithmetic and also with their acquaintance with scripture. Hedy Smith came to dine with his wife a young lady of very sensible and rather pleasing countenance. He is in very much better spirits than when we saw him last & I suppose in a very uncertain state. They will live in or near London. Miss B had one of her wretched head-aches but would go with Jane, me, and Mr E.B. on Sat. to London where we joined the Guinnesses and their friend Mr Richmond who I suppose means to be very attentive to J.G. and proceeded to Westminster Abbey where I was really delighted. We spent two hours in examining its crowd of beauties and nothing but a head-ache from sight seeing would have made me willing to quit it. It is vexatious to me to find so much inconvenience from looking at wonders but there is something either in the air or the exercise which affects me in towns. Mr R. who is in the law took us into the courts in Westminster Hall where we saw some of the chief justices etc and heard the jargon of the lawyers. We could not stop till the new Lord Chancellor took his seat in the Chancery Court where they were all waiting for him. Mr B. was also in town that day independent of us. He called on Mr & Mrs Forshaw who received him very friendly. He promised to spend a day with them and again gave Fanny an invitation for Frederic to dine here on Monday. The note I had written to Fanny had been entrusted to Mr B. who had never put it into the post office till 2 days too late poor old gentleman and so there was not the opportunity of F's either meeting us at the exhibition or declining the appointment. Only think of the news we heard that day. The water-proof Thames Tunnel into which we had ventured our valuable persons - the day but one after - gave a great gape yawned up to the river which rushing in filled the whole to the top of the shaft in course of 12 minutes scarcely allowing time for the workmen to save their lives. You have most probably seen the account in the papers. The head engineer has been in a diving bell to the spot at the bottom of the river and finds it to be a hole about a foot and a 1/2 square which had sunk in admitted the water. They are repairing it by sinking bags and loads of clay, and making an artificial bed to the river. The water will then be pumped out of the Tunnel in a few days and the works continued. I suppose from different rumours that it has alarmed the workmen.

May 1827

When we were there the strata at which they had arrived was all mud and the water coming in more than at any previous time. I am very glad we had the opportunity of seeing it. Miss B's must be down by Sunday 3rd June and I believe Saturday is the day we shall leave here. So in less than a fortnight I hope to see you quite well. I can hardly believe that the time is so short but it will be well if we have enough to do during that time to keep me from growing impatient. I am to go with Miss B some day this week to Mr Parkinson the dentist whose skill I hear is not inferior to any one's. One day we are all to visit Richmond. Today the Rutts dine with us and as I hope Frederic. Tomorrow we go to the Truemans and on Thursday they come here. Is there anything wanted from London? I do not advise the cheap shoes and shall not I think purchase any. I do not see any pretty thing as evening dresses excepting silks. The Blicks are gone to shop today and I am glad to stop at home to catch the Dr. if I can and here he comes and only to fly off again directly. It is hot as hot can be. My love to A. H. all the others and the Dr. & to Miss (Barlow?). I have not room as usual for all I intended to say. Hope I shall find Sutton in status quo. I intend spending a whole day with Fanny before I leave. We have to go again to exhibitions the British National and Water Colour.

And now believe me to remain my Dear Mama
 your very affectionate Daughter
 Agnes Anne Bracken.

I rather expected a letter from home before I sent this.

Mr B. desired me to say a fortnight-since that the money he acquired for you should be sent from ? or paid to you in Birmingham as you liked but I told him it might wait as you said till I returned not knowing but I might stand in need of one or two notes which however I do not intend to use if I can help it. Dr G. would treat me through the Tower the part we saw I believe only cost 2 shillings. Westminster Abbey cost me but 15 pence a most cheap sight.

The account of Agnes's trip down to London makes one realise that travel was not necessarily a thing to be feared in the early 1800s, particularly if one had the funds to pay for reasonable transport and to be able to enjoy the sights.

The Census of 1841 shows the Bracken family to consist of ladies of independent means living in High Street, Sutton Coldfield. Caroline Bracken's Will suggests that they possessed an abundance of stocks and shares between them, thus explaining the degree of wealth they must have had to afford their independent lifestyle.

This did not protect them from human frailty and in 1843 their mother, Anne, died, followed by Evanilda in 1847. The remaining three continued to live in the town, engaging in all sorts of social and charitable work, being staunch members of Holy Trinity Parish Church.

One assumes that Agnes earned an income from the teaching positions she was known to have held, but these were hardly necessary for her to purchase *Acorn House* (later to be called *Vesey House*) on 29th September 1860.

The following year, about the time her book was published, Agnes was called upon to perform an unexpected legal task. For some reason, it became necessary to wind up the estates of both her father, Richard, and that of an infant sister, Barbara, who died at 7 weeks of age. Agnes dealt with both estates within a fortnight of each other around the beginning of 1861.

Her sister had died in 1808 and her father in 1816. Both estates were valued at under £450 (approximately £53,000 in 2018). The strange thing was that Agnes's mother Anne, as her husband's Widow and Relict, had not bothered to deal with either estate in her own lifetime, leaving Agnes to deal with them. The question remains as to why this all became necessary?

Details relating to the Letters of Administration for Barbara and Richard follow:-

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ADMINISTRATIONS. 1861.

rington aforesaid were granted at **Durham** to John Brack of Farrington aforesaid Farmer the Father of the said Deceased he having been first sworn.

BRACKEN Barbara.

Effects under £450.

10 January.

Letters of Administration of the Personal estate and effects of Barbara Bracken late of Erdington in the County of **Warwick** Spinster deceased who died 12 September 1808 at Erdington aforesaid were granted at the **Principal Registry** to Agnes Anne Bracken of Sutton Coldfield in the said County Spinster the Administratrix of the Personal estate and effects of Richard Bracken the Father of the said Deceased she having been first sworn.

ON the 29th day of December 1860.

Letters of Administration of all and singular the personal Estate and Effects of Richard Bracken

formerly of _____

and late of Aldridge in the County of Stafford Merchant

who died on the 29th day of March 1816 deceased at Aldridge aforesaid

were granted at the Principal Registry of Her Majesty's Court of Probate to Agnes Anne Bracken of Sutton Coldfield in the County of Warwick Spinster one of the natural and lawful Children

of the

said deceased, having been first sworn duly to administer Agnes Anne Bracken the lawful Widow and Relict

and next of Kin of the said deceased, having ~~first consented~~ or having survived the said deceased, but died without having taken upon her the Letters of Administration of his personal Estate and Effects.

its under £ 450.

In 1861, the Census shows Agnes to be visiting a family member, Catharine Blick, in Bonehill, Fazeley, Tamworth and in 1871 she was in lodgings in Penzance, staying in Clarence Street . Her sisters were staying in the same street but in other lodgings - so perhaps they could only get separate accommodation for their holiday!

They socialised with such wealthy families as the Holbeches, the Riland Bedfords and the Chavasses. Across the road at No. 3 Coleshill Street lived the young Holbeche son, Richard, His diary written in 1892 recalls his early life in the town in the 1860s. He called it *My Recollections of Sutton Coldfield* (Q726.50942496HOL) and this is what he had to say about Agnes Bracken:

*In Vesey House were three sisters, the Misses Bracken. The eldest was Agnes, the like of whom I do not know or have ever known. A woman first, authoress, artist, antiquarian, philanthropist, of the strongest individuality, with the softest heart, such was **Agnes Bracken**, and I speak of her with respect and affection.*

Her delightful book on the place she loved so well, is a local classic, her pictures adorn many of the drawing room walls of what few old Suttonians remain, and record the park as it was, the town as it was, and many friends as they were.

She was thorough, her mission work, her activity in every thing that was likely to benefit others or animals, are not likely to be forgotten till the old Sutton folk have quite died out, which will perchance be ere long.

She took great pains in trying to teach me water colour drawing, and would take me for long walks in the park, telling me of the Roman roads, barrows and cromleches. She went to her rest in 1877.

Her two sisters, Caroline and Emily, the former my god mother who had a great deal of quick wit were good ladies, proud of dress and sterling withal.

Richard Holbeche

Another teenager, Francis James Chavasse, who subsequently became a Bishop of the Anglican Liverpool Cathedral and whose family then lived in Wylde Green House on the Birmingham Road, was also on good terms with the Bracken sisters. He, too, left memories of the sisters in his diary (SH78.1CHA)

Nov 19.1863 Thursday. Did not feel any better, went to town as usual. Sat nearly all the time in the Reading Room & had a good read at the Magazines. Mr Ridgeway gave me a short lesson. Mrs Webster from Hill & **the Misses Brackens** came to dinner.

Oct 8.1865 A miserably wet day. Aunt Wyld came. Mamma & Hetty went into Birmingham to meet her. They were both wet through. I walked to Sutton, & payed a farewell call on Miss Holbeche, **Miss Bracken** and Mrs Holbeche.

Jan 18.1866 Went with Bertie, **Miss Bracken**, my Mother, Miriam & Maggie to a C.M. Meeting in the Christ Church School Rooms in Pinfold St. There was a good attendance, & the proceedings most interesting. Dr Miller took the chair & Mr Venn of Hereford spoke. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I was very sorry to hear that the funds of the Society were not increasing as they ought to do. No young men too were now offering themselves either from Oxford or Cambridge. May God stir up the hearts of his people. We came home by the 9.10 train.

Ap 13.1866 My last day at home. Came over in the carriage which came up to Sutton to fetch Maggie & Miriam from **Miss Bracken's**. And so ends my Easter Vac.

Francis James Chavasse

It is interesting to note that in those times the eldest daughter of a family was addressed on paper simply as Miss Bracken, whereas younger daughters were addressed as Miss Catherine Bracken or Miss Emily Bracken.

Mention has been made of Agnes's water colour drawing and the fact that some of her pictures have been donated to Sutton Coldfield Local Studies Library in the past. She signed her pictures with a piece of bracken, thus:-



A SELECTION OF AGNES BRACKEN'S PICTURES

Agnes Bracken's Pictures are in Sutton Coldfield Library Local Studies Department
(These come from Keith Jordan's Photograph Collection)



A view of Sutton Coldfield, 1863



Blackroot Pool, Sutton Park, 1863



Blackroot Pool, Sutton Park, 1863



Bracebridge Pool, Sutton Park, 1863



Keeper's Pool, Sutton Park, 1863



Manor Hill, 1868



Sutton Coldfield from Railway Embankment, 1863



Sutton Coldfield from Sutton Park, 1854



Sutton Coldfield from Sutton Park, 1863



Little Bracebridge Pool, Sutton Park, 1841

Sadly, Agnes's life came to an end on 26th February, 1877. We know from the Parish Register that she was buried in the churchyard of Holy Trinity Parish Church on the 6th March, 1877, aged 76 years, the ceremony performed by W.K. Riland Bedford. However, no trace has been found of her grave or a headstone. These were probably removed with the alterations to the graveyard in the past. Her death certificate is lodged under Ref: Aston, 6d, p264.

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**BURIALS in the Parish of Sutton Coldfield, in the County of Warwick,
in the Year 1877**

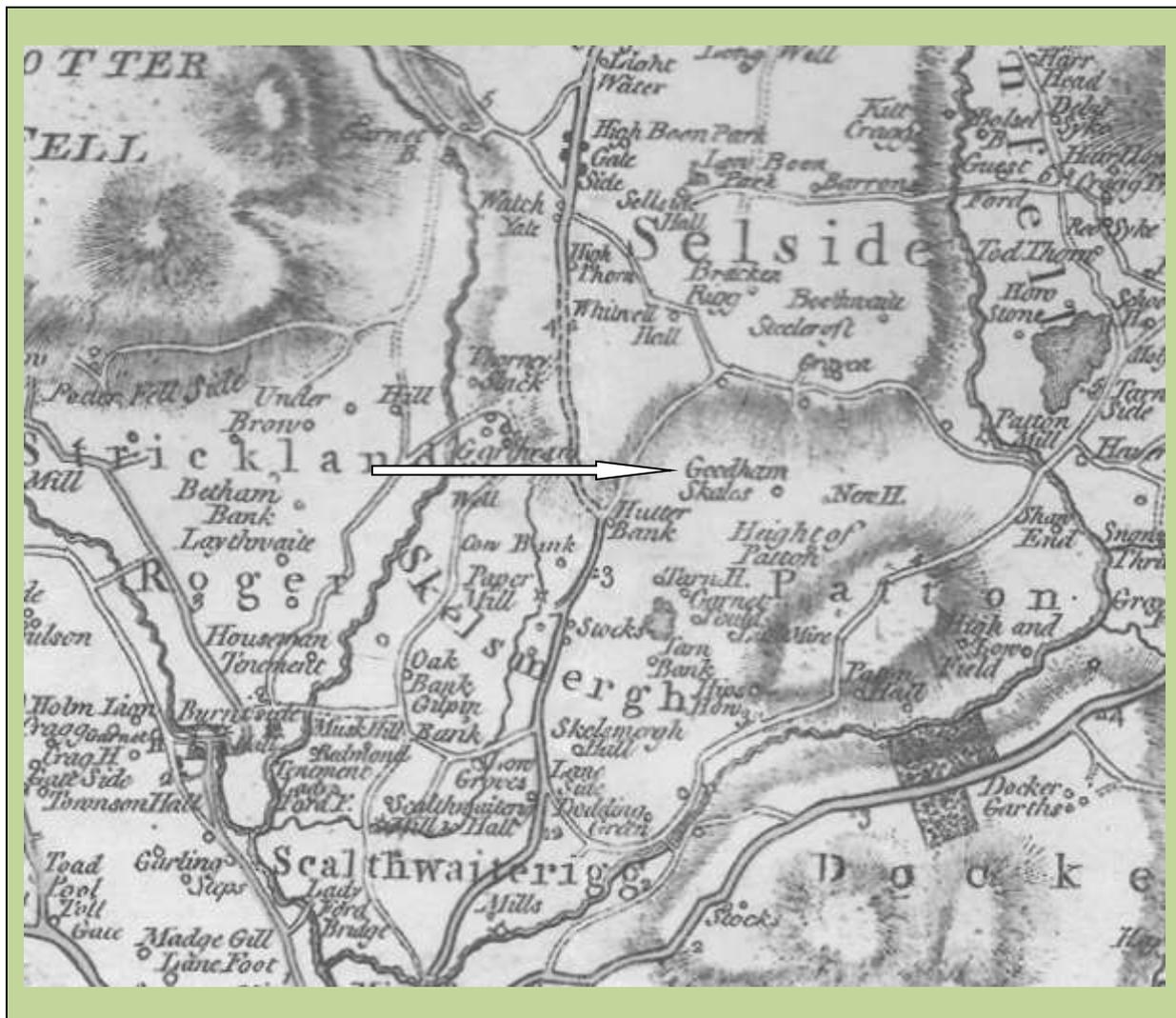
Name	Abode	When Buried	Age	By whom the Ceremony was performed
<i>Beatrice Milkins</i> No. 272	<i>Sutton Coldfield</i>	<i>Feb. 14th</i> <i>1877</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>George F. Beag</i>
<i>Edward Jones</i> No. 273	<i>Sutton Coldfield</i>	<i>Feb. 11th</i> <i>1877</i>	<i>70^{yo}</i>	<i>George F. Beag</i>
<i>Agnes Anne Bracken</i> No. 274	<i>Sutton Coldfield</i>	<i>March</i> <i>6th</i>	<i>76</i> <i>72</i>	<i>W.K.R. Bedford</i>
<i>Miss Annards</i>	<i>Sutton Coldfield</i>	<i>March</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>W.K.R. Bedford</i>

Agnes's death in 1877 was reported in several newspapers including the London Evening Standard of the 5th March 1877. This reads:

" Death on February 26th at her residence, Sutton Coldfield, Agnes Anne, eldest daughter of the late Richard Bracken, and great granddaughter of Alan Bracken, of Goodhan Scales, in the country of Westmorland."

This confirms the origin of the Brackens (although Alan was Agnes's grandfather not her great grandfather).

The following Old Cumbria Gazeteer, Scalthwaiterigg Parish 1770 map published by Thomas Jefferys of London (www.geog.port.ac.uk/webmap/the_lakes) shows the location of Goodham Skales in the Southern Lake District.



Holy Trinity Parish Church, too, paid a fitting tribute to her in the Parish Magazine a month after her death.

Extracted from "The Sutton Coldfield Parish Magazine." No. 76. April, 1877.

IN MEMORY OF AGNES ANNE BRACKEN

It is impossible to allow the death of this long-respected inhabitant of Sutton to be recorded in the Parish Magazine without a brief summary of the virtue and talents which obtained for her the place which she held in the esteem of her neighbours. Although so long a resident among us, Miss Bracken was not a native of Sutton, but was born at Erdington, November, 1800. Her family removed to Sutton in 1816 and in 1820 she came to live in the house in High Street which she never afterwards quitted; in which her mother died in the year 1843. Miss Bracken had for many years been imbued with sincere religious sentiments; and she commenced active work as a teacher in the schools of Sutton as far back as the year 1820 - a work only interrupted by her last illness; and in the same year she began to act as a cottage visitor in the remote hamlets of Roughley and Little Sutton, the latter of which, after a regular district visiting association had been organised, became her specific charge. When the Corporation first opened a school at Walmley, it received for several years her unremitting attention, and she assisted in the charge of that district also. She was chief manager for many years of a penny bank for the children of the Sutton schools, by which habits of economy and providence have been much encouraged among them. Indeed, her religion was of an active, practical kind; ever busy for the welfare of those among whom her lot was cast, and not unmindful of the wider bond of sympathy by which we are united to all the nations of the earth. For the furtherance of this latter object she supported the Church Missionary Society in various ways, particularly by the proceeds of an annual sale of work, &c., by which a considerable sum was realised in aid of its funds. A Female Friendly Society, first established many years ago, found in her an able and zealous manager; and all the charities and useful institutions of the parish have much to thank her for.

Her talents were also usefully and happily employed in the portraits of her friends, which placed on canvas by her skilful hands, are to be found in many neighbouring homes. Her views of Sutton and its environs are not only valuable as works of art, but as records of scenes now disfigured or swept away. But a more permanent memorial of her attachment to this place is to be found in her History of the Forest and Chase of Sutton Coldfield, a topographical and historical work of not trifling value, and of peculiar interest to all who wish to be acquainted with the chronicles of their ancient town. This volume, involving not a little labour and research, first appeared in 1866 (sic). The author sank to her rest on February 26th in her 77th year, beloved and respected by all around her, and was buried in the churchyard of that church for which she had done so much, and where for so many years she had worshipped in spirit and in truth.

Note. Presumably compiled by the Rector, Rev. W.K.R. Bedford

Her sisters, Caroline and Emily were named as her Executrices and they must have been somewhat surprised to see how many beneficiaries were to inherit under her Will. This is a transcription of it:-

Will of Agnes Anne Bracken

This is the last Will and Testament of me Agnes Anne Bracken Of Sutton Coldfield in the County of Warwick Spinster. I appoint my sisters Caroline and Emily Executrixes of this my Will and I appoint Frederick Pearson of Sutton in the County of Bedford clerk in Holy Orders and Francis Vere Hodge of Middleton in the said County of Warwick clerk in Holy Orders Trustees thereof - I give devise and bequeath all that messuage or Tenement formerly called the Brick House but now divided into two messuages situate in the High Street in the Town of Sutton Coldfield in the County of Warwick together with the yards gardens and appurtenances thereunto belonging for all the estate and interest that I have therein unto my said Trustees upon trust to allow my said Sisters Caroline and Emily and the survivor of them to have occupy use and enjoy or to let the same or any part thereof upon yearly tenancies and to have collect and receive take and enjoy the rents and profits of such part thereof which they may so let without molestation interruption or interference from or by them my said Trustees my said Sisters or the survivor of them keeping the same insured from loss or damage by fire in the sum of eight hundred pounds at the least in some good office of insurance and after the death of the survivor of my said sisters upon trust to let the same on yearly tenancies at such rents as can be reasonably obtained or if they my said Trustees in their discretion should think it well upon any term or terms not exceeding seven years and out of the rents profits and annua^l proceeds thereof after payment of all necessary expenses for such repairs as they my said trustees may consider it necessary to make to pay the sum of ten pounds annually to my cousin Mary Greaves Pearson of Bath in the County of Somerset during her life and the further sum of ten pound annually to my cousin Margaret Ryder Wylde Pearson of Bath in the said County of Somerset during her lifetime and upon trust to pay all the rest and residue of such rents and profits including the said annuities of ten pounds should both or either of them lapse during the lifetime of my cousin Caroline Pocock widow of William Innes Moreton Pocock unto the said Caroline Pocock absolutely for her own sole and separate use independently of the debts control or engagements of any husband she may have and upon trust after the death of the said Caroline Pocock to pay the said rents and profits subject nevertheless to the payment of the said annuities of ten pounds should the said Mary Greaves Pearson and Margaret Ryder Wylde Pearson or either of them be living then to William Innes Pocock, George Innes Pocock and Alfred Innes Pocock the sons of the said Caroline Pocock and the survivor of them equally share

and share alike should the youngest of such sons attain the age of twenty one years and if there should be only one survivor then to such survivor wholly. But in case any or either of such sons shall marry and die leaving issue living at their or his decease or born within due time afterwards before the time hereinafter appointed for conveying my said messuages and hereditaments situate at Sutton Coldfield to them and the survivors or survivor of them for such estate and interest as I leave therein I direct my said Trustees to apply the shares or share of such sons or son so departed to and for the benefit of such of their or his issue as aforesaid as they my said trustees should in their discretion think fit so that such issue respectively shall only take the share of the deceased parent and when and so soon as the youngest of the said William Innes Pocock, George Innes Pocock and Alfred Innes Pocock or the survivors or survivor of them shall have attained the age of twenty one years upon trust to convey transfer and assign my said messuages and hereditaments situate at Sutton Coldfield aforesaid unto the said William Innes Pocock, George Innes Pocock and Alfred Innes Pocock or the survivor of them for such estate and interest as I have therein as tenants in common and if only one of them shall live to attain that age then to that one wholly But in case any or either of the said William Innes Pocock, George Innes Pocock and Alfred Innes Pocock shall marry and die leaving issue living at their or his decease or born within due time afterwards before the youngest of them shall have attained the age of twenty one years I direct that my said Trustees shall stand seized and possessed of the shares or share of those or the one so dying upon trust to convey transfer or hold or otherwise to deal with the same for the benefit of the issue of such of the said William Innes Pocock, George Innes Pocock and Alfred Innes Pocock dying and leaving issue as aforesaid as they my said trustees shall in their absolute discretion think fit subject nevertheless to the payment of the said annuities of ten pounds should the said Mary Greaves Pearson and Margaret Ryder Wylde Pearson or either of them be then living and upon trust in case the said William Innes Pocock, George Innes Pocock and Alfred Innes Pocock and every of them should die without having lived to attain the age of twenty one years and without leaving any issue as aforesaid to convey transfer and assign my said messuages and hereditaments unto Francis Pearson Surgeon who is now in India absolutely and all my household furniture books plate linen pictures china glass and other effects of a like nature I bequeath to my said sisters Caroline and Emily absolutely and all other my personal estate and effects of what nature or kind so ever of or to which I may die possessed or entitled including all money in the funds stocks and shares or other securities for money I give and bequeath to my said

trustees upon trust to permit my said sisters Caroline and Emily and the survivor of them during their or her life to have collect receive take and enjoy the interest dividends or other the annual income arising therefrom as and when they may think proper without molestation interruption or interference from or by them my said trustees and upon the death of the survivor of my said sisters I bequeath the whole of my said residuary personal estate to my said trustees upon trust that they shall stand possessed of the same to divide the same into three shares of equal value in such manner as they in their absolute discretion shall think fit as soon as conveniently may be after the death of the survivor of my said sisters and to pay over transfer and assign one of such shares to my cousin Francis Mary Forshall for her own sole and separate use independently of the debts and control or engagements of her then present or any future husband and to stand possessed of a second of such shares upon trust to pay out of the income of the same the sum of ten pounds annually to Caroline Elliott wife of John Elliott for her own sole and separate use independently of the debts control or engagements of her said husband for which annuity her receipts alone shall be good discharges to my said trustees and after payment of such last mentioned annuity upon trust to pay the rest and residue of the annual income arising from such second share of my residuary personal Estate as aforesaid to my cousin Helen Ibbotson during the life of the said Caroline Elliott and upon her death then upon trust to pay over transfer and assign such second share as aforesaid to the said Helen Ibbotson to her sole and separate use independently of the debts control or engagements of her then present or any future husband and to stand possessed of the third of such shares upon trust to deal with the yearly income arising therefrom as they in their absolute discretion shall think fit for the use benefit and advantage of Beata Margaret and Anna Helen the twin daughters of my friend Catherine Hodge the wife of Henry Vere Hodge of Middleton aforesaid Clerk in Holy Orders and the survivor of them until they or she shall have attained the age of twenty one years or shall marry and when and so soon as the said Beata Margaret Hodge and Anna Helen Hodge shall have attained the age of twenty one years upon trust to pay over transfer and assign a moiety of the said third share to each of them the said Beata Margaret Hodge and Anna Helen Hodge to the sole and separate use of each of them and independently of the debts control or engagements of any husband whom either of them may have and if only one should live to attain thus age then to assign the whole of the said third share to such one and in the event of either of them the said Beata Margaret Hodge and Anna Helen Hodge marrying before they attain the age of twenty one years I direct my said trustees to pay

over transfer and assign the share of such of them as shall marry on that event happening in like manner as if they had attained the age of twenty one years and upon trust in the event of both of them the said Beata Margaret Hodge and Anna Helen Hodge dying before they have attained the age of twenty one years or shall have married I direct that my said trustees shall pay over transfer and assign the said third share of my residuary personal estate hereinbefore directed to be dealt with for the benefit of the said Beata Margaret Hodge and Anna Helen Hodge to Robert Vere Hodge and William Theodore Hodge the Brothers of the said Beata Margaret Hodge and Anna Helen Hodge their Executors administrators and assigns equally share and share alike I direct that notwithstanding the trusts aforesaid it shall be lawful for my said trustees at any time during the lifetime of my said sisters or the survivor of them at the request in writing of my said sisters or the survivor of them to sell and dispose of the whole or any part of my personal property as aforesaid and invest the proceeds thereof in manner hereinafter provided for the investment of trust moneys under this my Will and in case any such sale and investment shall take place I direct my said trustees to allow my said sisters and the survivor of them to deal with the income thereof in manner hereinbefore provided for with respect to the income of my personal estate during the lifetime of my said sisters and the survivor of them I declare that my said trustees shall have power at any time during the continuance of the trusts of this my Will if it shall be found necessary for the effectually carrying out of the said trusts to sell the whole or any part of my said messuages and hereditaments situate at Sutton Coldfield either together or in parcels and either by public auction or private contract and to convey and assign the same so sold unto or according to the direction of the purchaser or purchasers thereof with power to make any special conditions of sale as to the title or evidence of title or otherwise and with power to buy in the premises at any public sale and to rescind either on terms or gratuitously any contract and to resell without being answerable for any loss and I direct that all investments which shall be made under this my Will shall be made in or upon any of the parliamentary stocks or public funds of Great Britain or at interest upon Government or real or leasehold securities in England or in the purchase of any stock or securities of Her Majestys Indian Government and I empower my said trustees from time to time at their discretion to vary such securities for others of the same or a like nature I declare that the receipts of my trustees for such moneys stocks funds and securities as shall be paid or transferred to them by virtue of this my Will shall effectually discharge the person or persons paying or transferring the same from all liability to see to the application thereof and I declare that

my said trustees shall be answerable for their own respective acts receipts and defaults only and shall be irresponsible for any loss losses or damage which my estate both real and personal may sustain during the lifetime of my said sisters and the survivor or in consequence of any act or deed or default of these or either of them and further shall be irresponsible for losses accruing without wilful neglect or default and shall be at liberty to and allow such other out of monies coming to their hands by virtue of this my Will all expenses incurred in executing the trusts thereof and I declare that in case of the death in my lifetime of my said trustees or either of them after my decease on the death refusal unfitness incapacity or retiring from the trusteeship of my said trustees or either of them or if any trustees or trustee to be appointed under this clause or by a court of jurisdiction or otherwise according to law it shall be lawful for my said sisters Caroline and Emily and the survivor of them and after the death of such survivor for the capable trustee for the time being of this my Will whether refusing further to act or not and if none for the acting executors or executor for the time being or the administrators or administrator for the time being of the last deceased trustee from time to time by deed to appoint a fit person or persons to supply the place of the deceased refusing unfit incapacitated or retiring trustee or trustees and I declare that the clauses trusts conditions and powers contained in this my Will so far as they concern my trustees hereinbefore named shall and apply to the trustees and trustee for the time being of this my Will. As Witness to my hand the fifteenth day of February one thousand eight hundred and sixty seven, Agnes Anne Bracken. Signed by the said Testatrix Agnes Anne Bracken as and for her last Will and Testament in the presence of us present at the same time who at her request in her sight and presence and in the presence of each other have subscribed our names as attesting witnesses. Chas. B. Hodgson Solicitor Birmingham, Lewellyn Heard Clerk to Messieurs Hodgson & Son Solicitors Birmingham.

Proved at Birmingham on the ninth day of April 1877 by the oaths of Caroline Bracken Spinster and Emily Bracken Spinster the sisters the Executrices to whom administration was granted.

The Testatrix Agnes Anne Bracken was late of Sutton Coldfield in the County of Warwick Spinster and died on the 26th day of February 1877 at Sutton Coldfield aforesaid

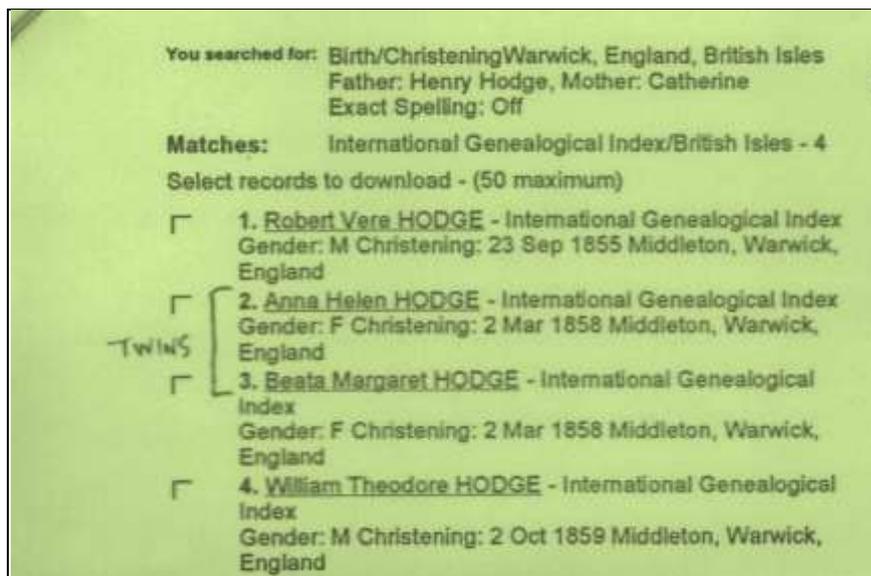
Under £4,000

Holbeche & Addenbrooke Solrs Sutton Coldfield.

The Will dated 15th February 1867, shows what a generous nature she had. She mentioned the following names in her Will:-

<i>Frederick Pearson, Sutton, Beds., Clerk in Holy Orders</i>)	<i>Trustee</i>
<i>Francis Vere Hodge Middleton, Warks., Clerk in Holy Orders</i>)	<i>Trustee</i>
<i>Mary Greaves Pearson, Bath, Somerset</i>		<i>Cousin</i>
<i>Margaret Ryder Wylde Pearson, Bath, Somerset</i>		<i>Cousin</i>
<i>Caroline Pocock (widow of William Innes Moreton Pocock)</i>		<i>Cousin</i>
<i>William Innes Pocock</i>)	
<i>George Innes Pocock</i>)	<i>Sons of Caroline Pocock</i>
<i>Alfred Innes Pocock</i>)	
<i>Francis Pearson</i>		<i>(Surgeon living in India)</i>
<i>Francis Mary Forshall</i>		<i>Cousin</i>
<i>Caroline Elliott (wife of John Elliott)</i>		<i>Cousin?</i>
<i>Helen Ibbotson</i>		<i>Cousin</i>
<i>Catherine Hodge (wife of Henry Vere Hodge), Middleton</i>		<i>Friend</i>
<i>Beata Margaret Hodge</i>)	
)	<i>Twin daughters of Catherine Hodge</i>
<i>Anna Helen Hodge</i>)	
<i>Robert Vere Hodge</i>)	
)	<i>Sons of Catherine Hodge</i>
<i>William Theodore Hodge</i>)	

Details of the Hodge Family were found, as follows (www.familysearch.org):-



In 1996 a blue plaque was affixed to *Vesey House* in the High Street, Sutton Coldfield, the house she lived in for most of her life, as a final accolade to a lady whose wonderful book gave the town's inhabitants a greater understanding of its history and whose beautiful pictures showed its full glory as it was in the mid-1800s.



HER PARENTS, RICHARD AND ANNE

RICHARD BRACKIN (Father of Agnes). Buried April 5th 1816. Age 54 years. Abode Aldridge. Ceremony conducted by Henry Jab, Curate of Aldridge. Entry No. 448 Page 56 Parish of St Peter & St Pauls, Aston

ANNE PEARSON (Mother of Agnes). Born 1767. (Christened 6/11/1767. Her father Richard Pearson. Her mother A?. Birmingham, St. Martins). Buried May 17th 1843. Age 75. Parish of Sts Peter & Paul, Aston. Entry No. 816. Page 113. Abode Sutton Coldfield.

RICHARD BRACKEN married **ANNE PEARSON** on 3rd October 1799 at St Martin, Birmingham

*Details from IGI and Parish Records
Ray Woodward-Clark*

The following document almost certainly relates to Agnes' father, Richard Bracken

*INDENTURE between John Gillam Welch formerly of the parish of Yardley but then of Smethwick, co. Staff., gent., Richard Vyse of Yardley, gent., William Litchfield of Yardley, gent., Samuel Litchfield of Birmingham, taylor, and **RICHARD BRACKEN** of Erdington, merchant, being a release of two closes of land and appurtenances in Yardley.*

Birmingham City Archives, Ryland Martineau Collection

MS 1587/Acc 1943-027/588224

6 February 1808.

HER SISTER, EVERILDA

It would appear that this sister's accomplishments went unnoticed in the town of Sutton Coldfield, but there is no doubt that she possessed the same charitable qualities held by the other women of the family, as evidenced by the following account:-

She is known as "the forgotten sister", because she died at an early age and details of her life have only been discovered in more recent times. Although born on 22nd February 1802, it was not until 17th May 1805 that she was baptised at St. Peter and St Paul's Church, Aston at the same time as her two younger sisters, Caroline and Emily.

Little has been recorded of her activities in Sutton, but it is likely she was involved, along with her sisters in their charitable work around Sutton Coldfield.

However, the circumstances surrounding her death and the Church Memorial erected in her memory show that she possessed the same qualities as her sister, Agnes.

She had been paying a visit to London where she stayed at The Rectory adjacent to St Mary Church, Rotherhithe. The Rector was Edward Blick, a friend of the family, who conducted her funeral service. The Rectory was situated only a few hundred yards from the entrance to the Thames Tunnel which was the first tunnel in the world to have been built under a river. At that time the Tunnel was in use for pedestrians only, as the funds for building the approach ramps for wheeled vehicles were not available. During the six years it had been open the conditions in the Tunnel had deteriorated and had become rather unsavoury. Twenty two years before, in 1827, her sister, Agnes, had visited the workings when the Tunnel was being built, as detailed in her written graphic account of the experience in the letter to her mother back home in Sutton. The Thames Tunnel is still in use but now carries Tube trains between Rotherhithe and Wapping on the East London Line (as at May 2004). It is not known if Everilda followed in her sister's footsteps and ventured into the Tunnel but what is certain is that she became seriously ill with "an inflammation of the lungs" (probably peripneumonia), a not uncommon complaint in mid-nineteenth century London Docksides. The unfortunate Everilda succumbed rapidly to the infection and within three days died in The Rectory on the 12th September 1849 age 47 years. Present at her death was Mary Short who lived nearby in 9 Albion Street. She was a shopkeeper and wife of John Short (a Lighter Man), according to the 1851 Census.

Everilda's Will gives us further small insights into her life. She left her topaz brooch to her sister Emily and her pearl necklace and her writing desk to her sister Caroline. To her sister Agnes she left her rings and her share in the Old Union Mill in Birmingham. Everilda may have had a musical talent as she owned a guitar; her Will stipulated that her guitar was to be sold for a sum not less than £8. It must have been a very good guitar as £8 then had the equivalent purchasing power of over £400 in 2004.

The Memorial states:-

EVERILDA BRACKEN
 OF SUTTON COLDFIELD
 SECOND DAUGHTER OF RICHARD AND ANNE BRACKEN
 OF A FAMILY OF THAT NAME FORMERLY SETTLED
 AT GOODHAM SCALES WESTMORELAND.
 DIED IN CHRISTIAN FAITH AND HOPE
 WHILE ON A VISIT
 AT THE RECTORY OF THIS PARISH ASSISTING TO
 RELIEVE THE SUFFERERS FROM THE CHOLERA
 SEPT 12 1849 AGED 47
 HER BODY IS BURIED IN A VAULT UNDER THE CHANCEL.



This simple memorial commemorates one who died caring for the sick during the second and most serious outbreak of cholera ever to affect England and Wales. In the period 1848-1849 over 53,000 deaths from this disease were registered, out of a population of about 14 million. The nature of this waterborne disease was quite unknown at the time.

Roy Woodward-Clarke

HER SISTER, CAROLINE

*Born 1802/3. Entry No. 534. Ceremony by L. Wood
Christened: 17th May 1805, Aston Juxta Birmingham, Warwick
Buried June 27th 1887, age 84*

On the Census night of 7th April 1861, the Bracken sisters were all away from home - Agnes visiting Catharine Blick in Bonehill, Tamworth, and Caroline and Emily visiting Jane Blick in Fazeley, Tamworth, a schoolmistress.

On the Census night of 2nd April 1871, the Bracken sisters appear to have gone together on holiday to Penzance, staying at difference addresses. Agnes was lodging with Mary Ann Harvey, a widow, at No. 13 Clarence Street, Caroline was with Mary Bosuston at No. 7 Clarence Street and Emily was with Charles Vibert at No. 12 Clarence Street.

Caroline was the last of the sisters to die, leaving an Estate worth £5,355.14 (in 2018 worth about £700,000.00)



A copy of the Probate of her Will follows-

This is the last Will and Testament
 of me Caroline Braeken of Sutton Coldfield in
 the County of Warwick I appoint my Cousins Doctor
 Francis Hyde Forshall of Highgate in the County of
 Middlesex and Mr. Thomas Thist Braeken of Kilkham
 Hall Yorkshire Trustees and Executors hereof Whereas
 I am possessed of the residuary Estate of my late Sister
 Emily Braeken which consists of Four hundred pounds
 Consolidated Stock of the Birmingham Canal Navigations
 One five pound Birmingham Corporation Gas Annuity
 Ten Shares in the Old Union Mill Company twenty shares
 in the General Steam Navigation Company Three shares
 in the Vancouver Coal Company Two one hundred pounds
 six per cent New Zealand Government Bonds nineteen
 shares in the Credit Company two shares in the Gloucester
 Abagon Company and ten shares in the Canadian Land and
 Emigration Company Now I give and bequeath the same to
 such of the Children of the said Thomas Thist Braeken
 living at my decease as shall attain the age of twenty one
 years I dispose of my own property excepting what I derived
 from my said Sister as follows To John Thist and Arthur
 Thist Sons of my late Cousin William Thist of Halifax
 twenty pounds each To the Church Missionary Society
 twenty five pounds to be paid out of my pure personalty
 and to my Godson Richard Holbeche One hundred
 pounds and I direct that such legacies shall respectively be
 paid free of legacy duty To the said Francis Hyde
 Forshall and Thomas Thist Braeken and the survivor of
 them the sum of Four hundred pounds Consolidated Stock of
 the Birmingham Canal Navigations now standing in my name
 In trust as to one equal third part of the annual income arising
 therefrom for my House maid Elizabeth Carlow for her life if in
 my service at the time of my decease And as to one other
 third part of the said dividends or income to our late Servant
 Frances Payne for her life and I request that the same may
 be remitted or paid to her half yearly through Mary Ann

Baylis (only Daughter of William Baylis late of Sutton Coldfield Tailor deceased) whose receipts shall be good discharges And as to the remaining one third part thereof for the said Mary Ann Baylis for her life And as each annuity ceases a corresponding share of the said Stock or of the investments for the time being representing the same shall fall into my residuary estate And as to all my property whatsoever not hereinbefore disposed of (subject nevertheless to the payment thereof of my debts and funeral and testamentary expenses and pecuniary legacies and the duty thereon) I bequeath the same unto the said Francis Hyde Forshall absolutely But in the event of his dying in my lifetime Then I bequeath the said residue (subject as aforesaid) in equal shares to such of his children as shall attain the age of twenty one years And I declare that all bequests hereinbefore contained in favour of females shall be for their respective separate use independent of any trust and their receipts alone shall be sufficient discharges As witness my hand this twentieth day of March One thousand eight hundred and eighty two

Caroline Bracken

Signed and published by the said Caroline Bracken as and for her last Will in the presence of us then present together and who in her presence and in the presence of each other have hereunto subscribed our names as witnesses

Henry Aldenbrooke

Solicitor Sutton Coldfield

Henry Baylis

his Clerk

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Proved at Birmingham on the 5th day of August 1887
by the Oath of Francis Hyde Forshall and Thomas
Hurst Bracken Esquires the Executors to whom
Administration was granted

The Testatrix Caroline Bracken was late of Sutton
Coldfield in the County of Warwick Spinster and

1st Sheet.



died on the 20th day of June 1887 at Sutton
Coldfield aforesaid
Gross Value of Personal Estate £5279. 4. 7.
Holbeche & Addenbrooke Sol^{rs} Sutton Coldfield

off

2nd Street.



It is possible that Caroline is one of these two beautiful young women portrayed in the copies of Agnes's paintings kept in Sutton Coldfield Library, but, if so, which is she?



HER SISTER, EMILY

*(Born 1st February 1805) Entry No. 349. Ceremony by WK Riland Bedford
Christened 17 May 1805 Aston Juxta Birmingham, Warwick
Buried July 23 1878, age 69 (actually 73)*

As with Caroline, on the Census night of 7th April, 1861 she was away from home visiting Jane Blick in Fazeley, Tamworth, a schoolmistress.

Similarly, on the Census night of 2nd April 1871, the Bracken sisters appear to have gone together on holiday to Penzance, staying at difference addresses. Agnes was lodging with Mary Ann Harvey, a widow, at No. 13 Clarence Street, Caroline was with Mary Bosuston at No. 7 Clarence Street and Emily was with Charles Vibert at No. 12 Clarence Street.

HER INFANT SISTER, BARBARA

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B U R I A L S.

Date.	Name of the deceased.	Names of the Father and Mother.	Aged.	Supposed Cause of Death.	Where buried.
11 th	Eliza D ^{ch}	Richard & Sarah Clark	11 Weeks	Pain in its Bowels	South side Edington
15 th	D ^{ch}	Richard & Anne Bracken	7 Weeks		South West Edington
23 rd	Jane D ^{ch}	Joseph & Hannah	3 Weeks		South

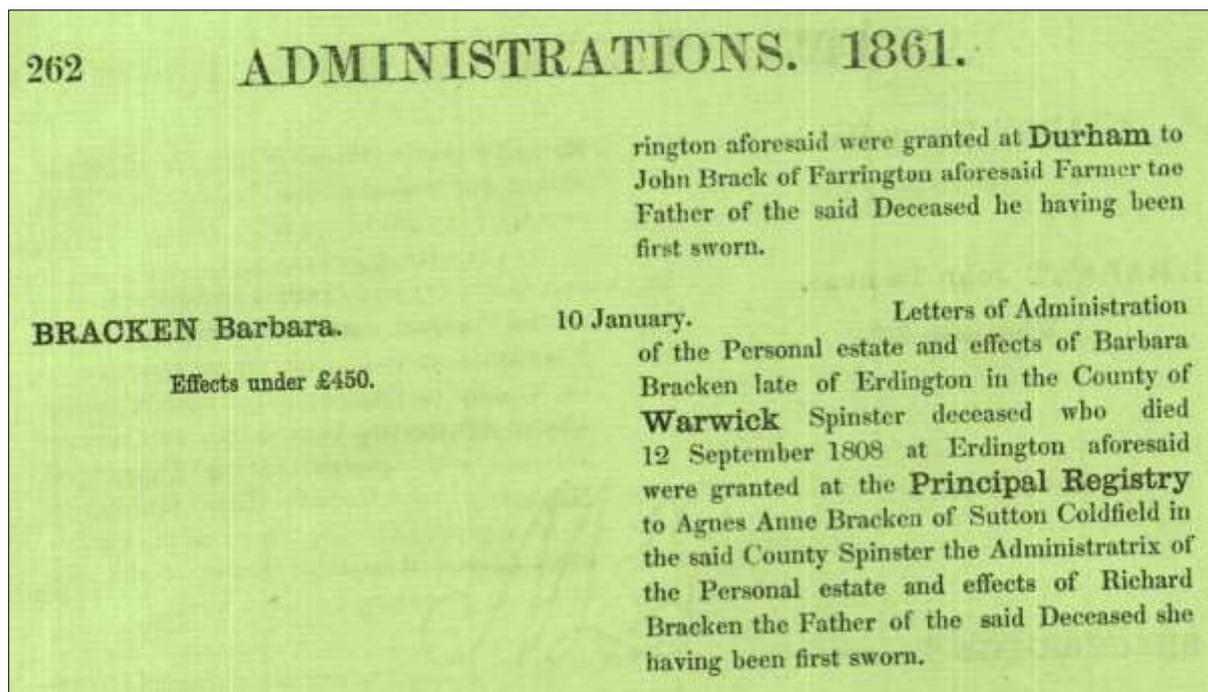
This little girl only lived for 7 weeks. She died on 12th September 1808 and was buried on the 15th September, presumably having been born about the middle of July 1808. The Burial Register states that she was buried on the South West, St Peter & St Paul, Aston. Her Christian name was not entered, but Letters of Administration granted to Agnes on 10th January 1861 confirm it as Barbara.

There are some unsubstantiated records in this connection. A monumental inscription at St Peter and St Paul in Aston was recorded as follows:-

Anne 1843 death
Everilda 1849 death
Richard 1816 death
Infant daughter 1808 death

This obviously refers to the Bracken Family. We know that Everilda died in the rectory at St Mary Church, Rotherhithe and her body placed in a tomb below the chancel in that church. The above inscription raises the question "was her body later brought back to Aston and buried with her parents and the infant daughter, presumably Barbara?"

Agnes wound up her estate in 1861.



HOUSES LIVED IN BY THE BRACKEN FAMILY

Erdington

There is a 'Bracken Road' (off the Kingsbury Road/opposite St Peter and St Paul Catholic Church) in Erdington. It is not known if this was named as the location of a house that the Bracken Family lived in. Apart from that, nothing has been discovered as to its whereabouts.

Aldridge

This property has not been found.

"Duncumb's House", Sutton Coldfield

This is thought to be the house known at some time as 'The White Hart' in High Street, opposite No. 58. Ongoing research may be able to verify it.

Vesey House

This was the house in High Street that the ladies of the Bracken Family occupied for most of their lives. An article in the *Observer Newspaper* called *History Spot* by Roger Lea describes the history of the house thus:-

*Taken from Roger Lea's 'History Spot' in the Observer Newspaper
(www.sclhrg.org.uk, History Spot No. 228)*

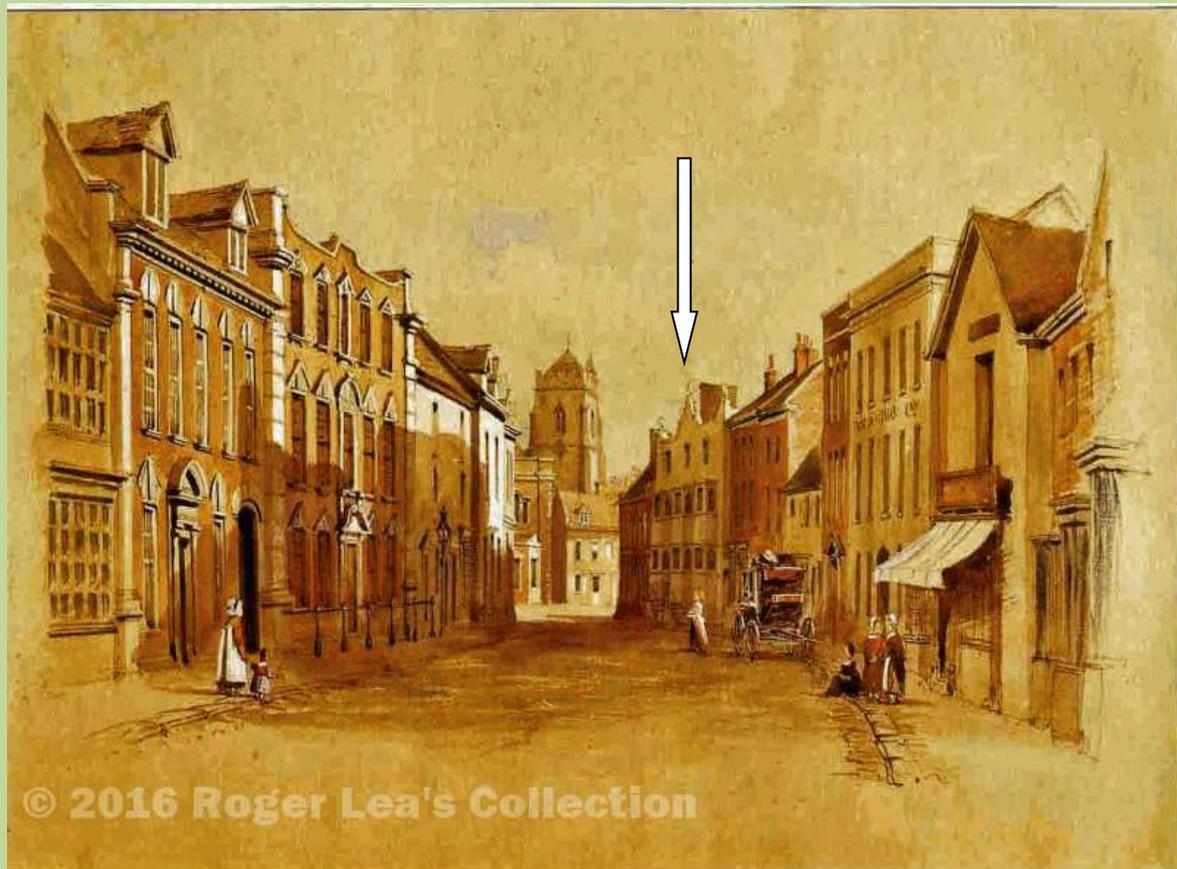
Vesey House in High Street was under construction in 1635, being built in brick by John Burges, the Rector of Sutton at the time. It was a two-storey house with stone quoins at the corners and seven regularly-spaced stone window frames on the first floor, presenting a flat regular frontage to the street. The house was built round a central courtyard, making it the grandest house on High Street. Burges built it for his wife Lettice - Lettice was the great-granddaughter of Hugh Harman, the brother of John Harman alias Vesey, Bishop of Exeter.

Thomas Willoughby inherited Vesey House, then known as the Brick House. He was a leading Parliamentarian in the Civil War, and an MP in one of Cromwell's parliaments in 1656. During the Commonwealth period marriages were conducted by Justices of the Peace in private houses, and many Sutton couples were married in the Brick House by Thomas Willoughby in the 1650s.

The 1674 Hearth Tax shows Mr. John Adis as the owner, paying tax on 16 chimneys (New Hall, with 17 hearths, was the only house in Sutton with more). The Addyes family of Moor Hall owned the house in the first half of the eighteenth century, a period when many of the big houses in High Street were having a face-lift to give them a smart Georgian frontage.

This made Vesey House look old-fashioned, but when it was modernised a different style was preferred - an extra storey was added as well as three two-storey bays, the whole frontage was rendered and a large stone acorn decorated the apex.

Hacketts succeeded Addyes as owners of Moor Hall and Vesey House - it was known as Acorn House in 1820 when new tenants moved in. The house was divided into two, Dr. Pearson living in one half and Mrs. Bracken in the other - they were brother and sister. Later the three Bracken sisters lived there, and Agnes Bracken the artist and historian purchased the house in 1860 from the Hackett estate. The diarist Sarah Holbeche noted in 1868 that Miss Bracken was upset because the stone acorn at Acorn House had been taken down as unsafe.



Acorn House, detail from Everitt's 1850 painting of High Street, showing the acorn on the pinnacle



Vesey House, c1970. (photo courtesy Sutton Reference Library)