

'Satan' Browne and his Extraordinary Rock

By Diane Oldman

Thomas Henry Johnson 'Satan' Browne, convict #7340 was baptised as Thomas Samuel Browne at the Meeting in Christ Church, the Independent Church of Buntingford in the Parish of Laystone, Hertfordshire on 19th August 1822. William Chaplin, the Independent Protestant Dissenting Minister, recorded that he had been born on 7th April 1822. The church was quite new at that time, a replacement building on the High Street, for one burnt down earlier. I will use the nickname 'Satan' because it is the shortest of his many names to come.

Satan's father was a Dissenting Baptist minister named Thomas Bulman Browne who died aged 44 in October 1825 and was thus spared the drama in his son's life. Satan had a younger sister named Mary Salter Browne who features prominently in the family's interesting history. She founded the Royal Leamington Spa Ladies College and High School, Warwickshire in 1852 where all three of Satan's daughters were teachers.

Satan was trained as an architect and civil engineer. He worked on the London to Birmingham railway from 1832-1839, then as a civil engineer in Manchester for over ten years [Dr John J. Taylor]. During this period Satan met and married his first of three wives.

Satan and Charlotte Brooks were married in Kensington, London, in 1843. I can find no background for Charlotte the mother of five of his children. They were all well-endowed in the name department and were scrupulously registered with the general registrar of births. The Dissenters – predominantly educated middle class professionals and merchants - were accustomed to the strictures imposed by the established church and revelled in the 'legality' of civil documentation. On the other hand, perhaps Satan was tired of the Dissenters' cause. I can find no church baptisms for these children: Charlotte Mary, Thomas Brooks, Alice Maud, Charles Augustus Giles, and Emily Annie.

From 1854-1862 Satan allegedly had his own architectural/engineering practice in London. Did Charlotte decline to move to London with him – was that Satan's later definition of 'desertion'? IF he had charge of his children, not yet teenagers, in London, he soon found them a step-mother.

On 7th November 1855 Thomas Henry Johnson Brown, architect, married Bethia Charles Stephens, he a widower and she a widow both living in Praed Street. The groom's father was Thomas Bulmann Brown, clergyman. The new Mrs Brown seems to have also collected a good many names including a father recorded as John Ball, farmer. They were married after banns at Saint John's church, Paddington, Middlesex.

My Australian source somehow missed Satan's change of profession from architect to builder who, on 5th October 1859, had a petition of bankruptcy filed against him. He had two places of business: Cannon Street in the City of London and Blythe Lane, Hammersmith [*London Gazette*].

In December 1861, Satan and Bethia baptised a son in the parish of St Martin in the Fields. Frederick Oliver Charles Napier was born on 10th November 1860. There could have been two other children of this union as Satan is later recorded with eight children [Erickson:64]. In one source it has been suggested that Henry York Lyell Brown, a government geologist in Adelaide, may have been Satan's son. This is not the case, H Y L Brown was born in Nova Scotia, Canada in 1844 [BISA:187].

In 1862 Satan was tried and sentenced to ten years transportation for forgery in the Old Bailey, Central Criminal Courts, leaving behind two wives and his children. on *Lord Dalhousie*, on a voyage that arrived at Fremantle in 1863.

In early 1866 Satan would apply to the Comptroller General for passage to the Colony of the five children by his first wife Charlotte [CO18-147-264]. None of them came here. Somehow none of his statements on the application match reality.

After obtaining a Conditional Pardon and Certificate of Freedom he married his third wife, Mary Ann (Polly) Glassbrook Letch. at the Fremantle Congregational Chapel. Their daughter, Caroline Mary Hatzfeld (Hatfield), was born in May 1877 and died five months later from sunstroke.

Satan's story as a 'man of enterprise', and examples of his talent as an architect, engineer and artist (sketcher) in Western Australia, are more than adequately covered in publications below. His story is one of bureaucratic bungling, personal animosity in the workplace, certainly defamation; a man doomed to financial and relationship failure ending in bitterness. He committed suicide by strychnine poison in Perth Gaol on 12th January 1882.

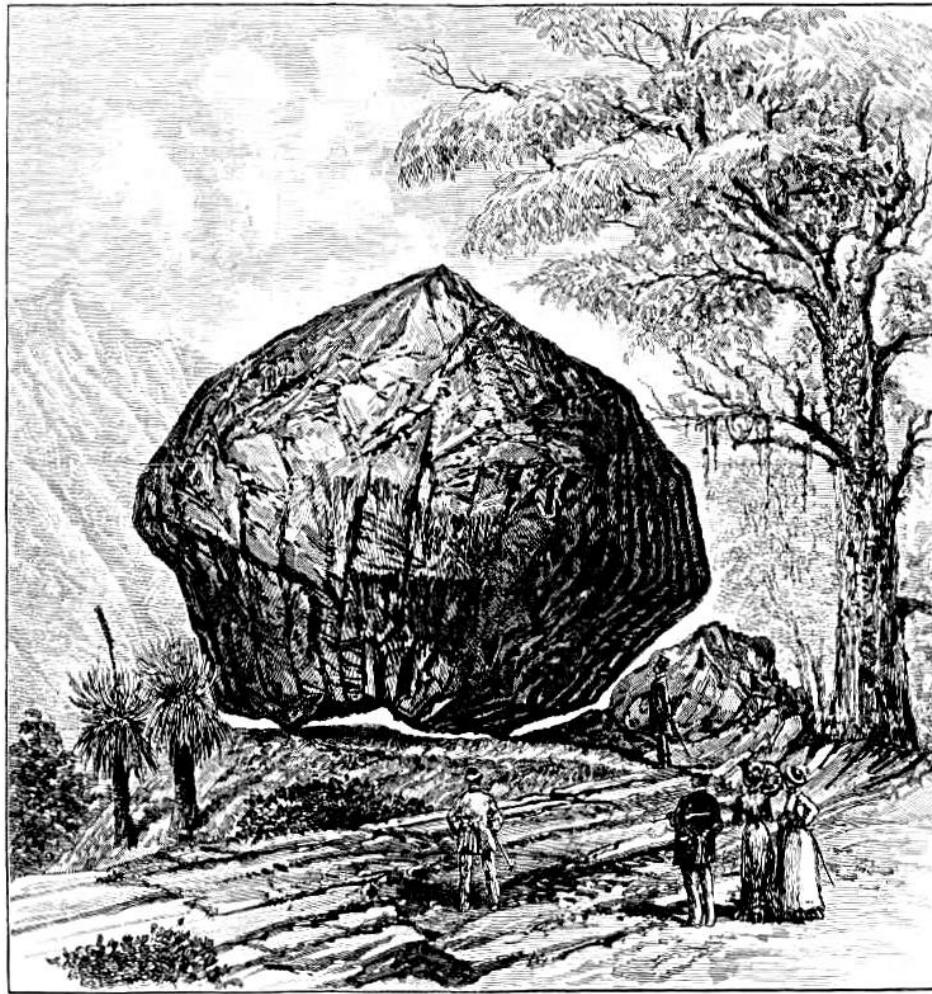
The Extraordinary Rock

Peter Bridge of Hesperian Press alerted me to this story, following which I found the man who found the rock! I do have serious reservations and many questions about this.

EXTRAORDINARY ROCK, VALLEY OF THE HELENA RIVER, WESTERN AUSTRALIA. This singular rock stands on one of the spurs of the Darling Range, about 15 miles from Perth, and 4½ miles from the small but pretty town of Guildford, at an elevation of about 800 feet above sea level. It consists of a block of primitive stone of feldspar character, and is about 25 feet high, and 26 feet in diameter at its greatest width. Its weight has been estimated at 160 tons. This rock rests upon a bed of bright-coloured ironstone conglomerate, which crops up through a mass of flat shelving rock which has the appearance of having been washed by the floods of the ages immemorial. One great peculiarity of the rock is that it is supported entirely by two knobs or points scarcely bigger than the knuckles of a man's hand, and which are but slightly imbedded in the conglomerate. Nevertheless, the rock appears to be immovably fast in its position. Attempts have been made to "rock it," but they have been ineffectual. The character of the surrounding country is wild and bleak, save on the adjacent banks of the Helena, a tributary of the Swan, where the alluvial flats, chiefly the property of Commodore Stirling, have been brought into a high state of cultivation. This extraordinary rock was first brought into public notice by **Mr. Thos. H. J. Browne**, of Perth, civil engineer, whose attention was drawn to it while making some inspection surveys for a railway from Perth to York in 1870-71. Mr. Browne submitted sketches of the rock to Governor Weld, who subsequently went to see it, since when the rock has been frequently visited. Even this rock is not without its "bit of romance." Some years back a boy herding goats managed to scale it, but once up could not get down again. On the summit he passed one night and part of two days, and was rescued from his perilous position by a warden and party of prisoners, who were forwarded to the "scene" with ropes and other tackle suitable for the occasion and purpose [*Australasian Sketcher* 10th May 1879].

1. WHO was the sketcher and supplier of survey/geological data to the *Australasian Sketcher* and when?
2. If Satan Browne sketched the rock when **he** initially 'found' it why did he offer it to a SA newspaper?
3. In 1979 (when the article appeared) Satan was working as a land/immigration agent and restoring the Alta Gardens Hotel, not working for the government on railway plans.
4. Why was a search of WA State Record Office records for Governor Weld's visit to the rock unsuccessful?
5. Why did Satan Browne's discovery of this extraordinary formation not appear in any biographies of the man.
6. The means to photograph such a unusual rock formation had been available from the time it was 'found' until its unknown disappearance, why have we only seen a sketch appearing in an Adelaide newspaper?

I have theories, of course. Satan has been described as many things – but was he a prankster at heart?



EXTRAORDINARY ROCK, VALLEY OF THE HELENA RIVER, WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

Sources in England

Church (established and non-conformist) and Civil Records of birth, death, marriages, probate, census: original copies and indices, from churches, General Registrar of England & Wales and PCC Calendars, Census 1851-1911, The National Archives, Kew.

Leamington History Group website 10th October 2013.

London Gazette 14th October 1859, Issue 22316.

Sources in Australia

WA General Registrar's birth, death and marriage indices. East Perth Cemetery records.

FHWA Convict Special Interest Group records.

Australasian Sketcher (Adelaide) 10th May 1879 and *Eastern Chronicle* (WA) 7th June 1879.

West Australian 17th January 1882 p.3 (Inquest).

Dictionary of Western Australians 1829-1914, Vol. 2 (Bond), compiled by Rica Erickson, UWA Press 1979.

The Brand on His Coat, Men of Enterprise, edited by Rica Erickson pp.249-266, UWA Press 1983.

Ever Flowing Forward: the Story of Belmont, pp. 59, 76, 77, Maxine Laurie, City of Belmont 1999.

Biographical Index of South Australians, South Australian Genealogy & Heraldry Society 2007.

Design and Art Australia Online updated 19th October 2011.

Thomas Henry Johnson Browne, Dr John J. Taylor Biographies. Australian Institute of Architects, Nov 2013.

The Extraordinary Rock, *A lost tsunami erratic*, Peter J Bridge, Hesperian Press, 2025.