

Solving a 100 Year Old Braund Mystery

Branches 2 & 5

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Michael Braund of Canberra first alerted us to a story that appeared in *The Brisbane Telegraph* of 17 November 1910. This had no Australian connection but read as follows:

“Romances, of fortune are in the air (says *Lloyd’s News* of 2nd October), for in the prosaic district of Redfield, Bristol, there has just been found a lost heiress to an estate worth £10,000. For the past four years; the house, 65, Church Road, has been occupied by Mr and Mrs Angle, the former an engineer employed at a leading confectionery manufactory in the city, and it is Mrs Angle who has had the great stroke of good fortune. A *Lloyd’s News* representative called on her on 27th September, to ask whether the story was true and if so, to congratulate her. ‘Oh, yes, it’s true enough,’ she said, ‘but, you see, it’s a very complicated story. It goes back sixteen years.’ ‘A legacy from a relative?’ asked the visitor. ‘That’s what it is, most decidedly,’ she continued, ‘but as I say it’s very complicated, and you had better come inside, if you don’t mind. It is a working man’s dwelling.’

The house differs from others in lying a little back from the busy street, and being covered with Virginia creeper. Mrs Angle is a woman a little more than 50 and anyone can see that she is a woman of some refinement. The story she has to tell is of a most extraordinary character, she states that she is the daughter of the late Mr. Theophilus Fry and that she was christened at the parish church of Easton in Gordano. She was brought up by Miss Henrietta Fry at Brake Hermitage, Bucks Mills near Clovelly and was sent from there to be educated at the Friends’ school at Sidcot. In due course she was married, rather against the judgment of her protectress as one gathered, and thus her association with Brake Hermitage was interrupted. Her children by this marriage are grown up and doing well in the world.

Mrs Angle was left a widow, and being highly qualified to teach — she mentioned that she can speak French fluently — she took charge of some little gentlemen and also engaged in

nursing. She accompanied a lady to America, remaining there a considerable time and it was during this period of her absence that the event occurred upon which the whole story hinges. Mr Theophilus Fry died, and left the Clovelly property which included, besides the Brake Hermitage, a place known as the Bungalow, to a nephew, Mr Arthur Braund, subject, however to the life interest of Emily Edith Griffin Reed (now Mrs Angle). Mr Braund is a gentleman of high standing in Devonshire and has been Mayor of Bideford.

The usual methods were employed to discover the missing heiress. She was advertised for, but she saw no advertisements, and remained in total ignorance of her good fortune. Then she came back to England and married her present husband, Mr Angle. Then comes the extraordinary part of the story. Mrs Angle had interested a Miss Fry in the case of a sick person whom she had been visiting and this led Miss Fry to interest herself in Miss Angle, whom she observed, was possessed of breeding and education. Naturally enough, Mrs Angle told her story, and then the missing links in it were supplied."

There are well documented links between the Quaker Fry family and the branch 2 Braunds of Bucks Mills but this story did not quite add up. Anne Elizabeth Fry married Joseph Braund and their son William George Braund married his first cousin Isabella Fry. Could they be connected to the Theophilus and Henrietta Fry mentioned in the newspaper?

Emily's life as Mrs Angle could be traced in the census returns. She was a little inconsistent about her age but gave her birthplace as Pill near Bristol. It turned out that her birth was registered in 1857 in Bedminster district as Emily Griffin Reed; her mother's maiden name was Griffin. In 1876 she married John Bailey Rowland as Emily Edith Reed and they had four children. In 1895 Emily Rowland remarried to John Angle and she died as Emily E Angle in 1914. In the 1861 and 1871 censuses Emily was living with her mother and stepfather Edward Comerford in Bristol. How then could she be the daughter of Theophilus Fry?

Further investigations found almost identical accounts in the UK press and then the *Hartland Chronicle* took up the story. They seem to have had access to additional information and reported:

"We have made enquiries at Barnstaple and can gather no information bearing on

the case. Some of the statements which have been published in regard to the claim are obviously incorrect. Thus one paper stated that the fortune included two residences in Clovelly, situated close to the famous Hobby Drive. As a matter of fact, all the property in Clovelly parish, with the exception of the glebe, belongs to Mrs Hamlyn of Clovelly Court, to whose family the property has belonged for centuries. Then Brake Hermitage is today unknown at Bucks Mills. Inquiries at Bideford also failed to throw any light on the matter." This is true. The properties Brake Hermitage and The Bungalow are not now known in Bucks Mills. There is a property known as The Hermitage in nearby Welcombe but it was not built until 1891 and it does not seem substantial enough to have been worth £10,000 in the 1890s.

"The fortune is said to have been left by a Mrs Busbie, whose husband was connected with the Sidcot Quaker School near Wells." Mrs Harriet (not Henrietta) Busby was Anne Elizabeth Fry's aunt and as a widow, lived with her in Bucks Mills. Her husband, Charles Busby, was a Baptist Minister and although earlier generations of the Fry family were Quakers, no connection with Sidcot School can be found. Harriet Busby died in 1893 but her estate was only worth £33.

"About sixteen years ago Mrs Angle went to America and during her absence abroad a relative died at Barnstaple, under whose will she has now inherited this fortune." No departure has been found on the outward Passenger lists for Edith or her children by Mr Rowland. One of her sons did live in British Columbia, Canada.

"This Brake Hermitage has been in the occupation of the nephew of Mrs Busbie and the latter is the residence of Mr Arthur Braund, a former Mayor of Bideford. The next portion of the romance is that which draws in a Mr Arthur Braund, described as one time Mayor of Bideford and 'a gentleman of high standing in Devonshire'. To quote the words of a London contemporary's interviewer. There certainly was a Mr Braund who was Mayor of Bideford and whose sons reside in that town today but that was Mr William Braund, the son of a Bidefordian Mr Jesse Braund. Mr William Braund often visited Bucks Mills and Clovelly, as do the family now but the latter have knowledge of Mr Theophilus Fry, who is stated to have owned the Brake Hermitage and the Bungalow, Bucks Mills and to have left these properties to the Mr Braund who was

Mayor of Bideford, subject to the life interest of Emily Edith Griffin Reed now Mrs Angle, the present claimant.”

The *Hartland Chronicle* have got this right. William Braund, mayor of London is part of branch 5 of the family and nothing to do with Bucks Mills or the Frys.

“Inquiries at Bucks Mills itself go even further to confuse the story. In that little fishing hamlet—a mere cluster of cottages at the foot of a stream which follows a tortuous path down to the sea—no one had any knowledge of Brake Hermitage, one of the ‘mansions’ described in the fortune. True there is a bungalow but hardly a ‘mansion’ for the rental is only some £4 a year and that belongs to Mr Ernest Braund, left him by his father, the late Captain Joseph Braund.”

Interestingly, Ernest Braund is the son of Anne Elizabeth Braund née Fry and the great-nephew of Harriet Busby. Ernest lived at Corner Cottage, next to the Bucks Cliff Hotel. There is no record of it being called The Bungalow and it has two stories!

“Our representative’s inquiries carried the news of the supposed fortune into Bucks Mills, or Buckish as it is locally known but the whole of the village failed to unravel the mystery. Braunds of course could easily be found, for the nomenclature of the inhabitants is practically limited to Braunds, mostly men of swarthy complexion, following the sea for a livelihood and believed to be descended from shipwrecked Spaniards, who landed at Bucks when their vessels, forming part of the Spanish Armada encountered the rocky shores of North Devon”

This is an often perpetuated myth. Bucks Mills was not inhabited at the time of the Spanish Armada (1588). At this time the Braunds were living inland at Black Torrington, they did not arrive in Bucks Mills until the early 1800s, when most of the village was built. There is no record of any ships of the Spanish Armada being wrecked off the coast of North Devon. What is interesting though is that this account of the myth is in 1910, eighteen years before the story appeared in *The Evening Standard* and got retold in many branches of the Braund family down the decades.

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“A direct descendant of the Braunds recollected the name Fry but it was many

years ago and then it was a lady not a Mr Theophilus. Miss Fry she remembered as a lady visitor who came to Bucks Mills with her aunt and shocked the latter by marrying a certain Captain Braund, who was then 65, whilst the bride was a young lady of 25.”

Anne Elizabeth Fry, niece of Harriet Busby, became the second wife of Joseph Braund in 1860. She was 27 and he was 59.

“A descendant of this particular Captain Braund is living in Bucks at the present time but like most of the menfolk of the village had gone out with the fishing fleet, so was unable to give his opinion of the supposed fortune. His wife, Mrs Ernest Braund, was found at home but in common with the rest of the villagers, she was ignorant of any mansions in the neighbourhood in which there was any family interest. Her remembrance of the only Frys associated with the village was that they had property in the North of England and connections with Bristol. No trace of them however was known in Bucks.”

This lack of knowledge of the Frys in 1910 was odd as, only two years before in 1908, William George Braund, son of Joseph and Anne Elizabeth Braund née Fry and brother in law of the Mrs Ernest Braund who seemed to know so little, married his cousin Isabella Fry. She did indeed come from ‘the North’ - Darlington—and the family were connected to the chocolate making Frys of Bristol. True the marriage took place in New Zealand and ended tragically after only a few weeks, with the suicide of Isabella but it seems unlikely that no one in Bucks Mills knew of it.

This leaves us with Arthur Braund and Theophilus Fry. A Theophilus Alfred Fry was born in Stroud, Gloucestershire in 1852, much too late to be Emily’s father. He was the son of Alfred and Elizabeth Fry née Goulding and appears to have no connection to the Frys who married the Braunds. Another Theophilus Fry was a foundling baptised in London in 1757 but too he seems unlikely to be connected. Harriet Busby née Fry was the daughter of Thomas Rutter Fry. Could Thomas Rutter have been corrupted to ‘Theophilus’? Thomas Rutter died in 1885 in Bath. No details of a will have been traced.

Finally, Arthur Braund. There is no Arthur Braund connected to Bucks Mills however the eldest son of Joseph Braund and Anne Elizabeth Fry was Charles Arthur Braund born in 1862. Charles emigrated to South Africa in the 1890s. So, although we have progressed a little further than *The Hartland Chronicle*, there are still some anomalies in the story and it seems very unlikely that Mrs Angle had a legitimate claim to properties that cannot now be identified.