

Brooking, Thomas Holdsworth. merchant and leader in the campaign for Representative Government in Newfoundland during the early decades of the 19th century.

1
Born: Stoke Fleming , South Devonshire England and baptised in the ~~the~~ ~~Anglica~~
2
St Petrox Church Dartmouth 8 August 1790. son of Thomas (gentleman) and

~~Hannah~~
3
~~Hannah~~ (Hannah) Brookings of Stoke Fleming , Tidewater in Her Majesty's customs
4
at Dartmouth. Came to Newfoundland as a mercantile Clerk in 1806-7

5
possibly with the firm of Hunt, Stabb Preston and Company of Torquay , but
6
more probably with ~~the~~ Messrs Hart, Eppes Gaden and Robinson of St Johns ~~AND LONDON.~~
7

~~The firm later re-organised under the name of Hart, Robinson and Company~~

and ~~when~~ in 1818 ^{with} the Newfoundland partner George Richard Robinson retired
8
to the head office in London England, Brookings became ~~the~~ the resident
junior partner in Newfoundland and the Company traded as Hart Robinson and

Compnay In 1816 married in St Johns Anglican Church Frances, daughter
9
of Kenneth Mclea of Greenock Scotland, merchant and later had two sons

10-
George thomas, and Marmaduke Hart. In 1822 the senior partner
Marmaduke Hart retired and the firm became known as Robinson Brookings

11
and ~~Company~~ Garland , the newcomer being Jos Bingley Garland of Poole
who had a large independent trade to Trinity and Bonavista Bays in

12
Newfoundland. in 1831 it became Brookings's turn to retire to
"Head Office" and the local establishment was left in the hands of

13
a new Junior partner Wm J Hervey. ~~From this time on wards~~ Brookings
never again returned to the Island and the local bussiness was run

14
by a succession of agents and partners who included for a while, his sons.

~~At the time of his death in Newfoundland and his partner was Frederick Joseph~~
15

~~Wyatt~~ The ~~the~~ death of Garland in 1840 , and retirement of Robinson

16
in 1850 ,m left the ~~the~~ firm completely in the hands of Brookings and his
sons, but at the time of his death a St Johns man Frederick Joseph Wyatt

held a number of shares as the "Newfoundland Partner" 17 However

expensive litigation between the two sons resulted in the ~~rapid~~ disappearance
of the ~~Family~~ Company. 18

This brief account shows only that Brooking was typical of the mercantile elite who dominated Newfoundland during the first half of the nineteenth century - coming out as a young man with little wealth but good connections, apprenticed to a flourishing concern and eventually ~~owning~~ owning it. Every branch of British commerce contained ~~thousands~~ numerous ~~of~~ similar cases during this era. However in the Newfoundland fish trade most of the young mercantilists failed to make good for after 1815 the Newfoundland fishery entered a period of severe and prolonged depression and the collapse of ~~many~~ merchant houses forced young agents to strike out on their own. Many of them eventually acquired modest fortunes, but Brooking, lucky in the choice of Hart, Robinson and Company moved quickly into a position of prominence and power which he never lost. 19

From the outset Brooking was assured of a respectable place in the social structure of St Johns- dominated as it was by a small and fluctuating elite of fish merchants and the beginnings of a professional class of lawyers and doctors. Almost invariably the older members of the elite tended to retire in middle age to Head Office in England, Ireland or Scotland and thus young and literate men were given an unusual freedom and authority. Newfoundland itself was in a state of transition from a "Migratory Fishery", visited by thousands but inhabited by few, to a populous and dynamic community which in 1815 numbered up to 60,000 souls. Before 1800 hardly any merchants ~~had~~ settled in the Island and thus when Brooking came out he found a young man's paradise. There were hardly any institutions of Government and the St Johns middle class naturally assumed every function of responsibility and power it could get its hands on. This inevitably brought them into some degree of conflict with the Governor and his small group of civil servants, and the period of Brooking's residence in Newfoundland was one in which his elite gradually ~~was~~ wrested authority from the rules, and with a high

and a founder of the "Newfoundland Fisherman's and Shoreman's Association."³¹
In 1825, his social prominence was recognised by his appointment as Colonial
Aide de camp to the Governor with the rank of Lt Colonel in the Militia.³²

However there was more to Brooking than this mundane if strenuous pursuit
of worthy causes might suggest, for he ~~thought~~ gradually
became identified with the cause of social and political ~~progress~~ ^{change} on the Island.

In this he may not have diverged from the views of his fellow merchants, for
by 1832 ~~many~~ almost everyone in Newfoundland supported the idea of representative
government³³; however he together with one of two other merchants such as
Patrick Morris and William Thomas, were ahead of their fellows in seeing the
need for change and for mobilising the "middle class" shopkeepers, tradesmen
and planters of St Johns behind the banner of reform. They were also the
only people in Newfoundland who could put up with the politically brilliant
but personally ~~sharp~~ abrasive character of Doctor William Carson- first
and best propagandist for the cause of reform.

What made this wealthy merchant and pillar of the community pursue the
paths of agitation and reform? ~~Unexpectedly~~ ^{automatic} Much of the explanation
can be found in an ~~instinctive~~ ^{automatic} pre-action to the rapidly ~~changing~~ changes which
were taking place in the society around him - every man recognised that some
reform was necessary³⁴, ~~however~~ and a man of drive and ambition like Brooking
would always be found in the lead of any organisation which he identified himself
with. We must also remember that his senior partner George Richard Robinson
who had been elected Tory Member of Parliament for Worcester in England in 1824
was the man who, ~~was~~ ^{organised} represented the Newfoundland reformers
in the English corridors of power. There was thus a mercantile as well as a
personal ~~interest~~ ^{aspect} ~~within~~ to the campaign. However Brooking became
deeply involved in the chaos and poverty of life in post Napoleonic Newfoundland
and, in contact with almost every element in St Johns society gradually became
convinced that only radical change could cure her ills.

early

His first introduction to wider social problems came in 1817 when following the great fire in St Johns, followed upon two years of depression and bankruptcy in the fishery to create unimaginably misery to the poorer inhabitants of St Johns³⁴. The depression continued and in 1820 the Grand Jury made a presentment advocating government action to relieve distress, and the necessity for emigration from Newfoundland either back to Great Britain, or to the mainland of North America. Brooking was Foreman of the jury, and the address ~~was~~ was probably drafted by him.³⁵ The immediate distress was alleviated but the deeper problems of poverty remained and in 1822 Brooking was inevitably appointed to yet another committee to alleviate the condition of the poor³⁶, and also began his long and deep interest in education by forming a committee to establish a charity school.³⁷

By this time ~~Carson and Thomas~~ with a few lesser supporters were beginning to agitate for the establishment of some kind of representative government as the only means of improving the minds, morals and (above all) ^{prosperity} ~~wealth~~ of Newfoundland.³⁸

Brooking was not yet directly involved, but in 1824

By now he together with Carson ~~and~~ Thomas, and Morris were becoming convinced that only the introduction of some form of representative government could alleviate the moral and material condition of ~~the~~ Newfoundland, although as yet they knew more about the particular evils they wished to reform, than what precise institutions they would wish to see introduced. In 1819 he seems to have wanted only some kind of municipal body in St Johns which could control "nuisances" and deal with the ever present menace of fire³⁸, but he soon found himself following the lead of Carson and Morris in agitation for wholesale reform of the laws as they related to Newfoundland.

In 1824 the agitation resulted in three new pieces of Imperial Legislation which swept away the ancient system of government and introduced reforms in the judicial and administrative structure of the Island.³⁹

The new legislation was hardly revolutionary, ~~far from revolutionary~~
~~the Government rather than merely a local measure and provided for a more regular~~
~~judicial system~~ although it ~~did~~ ⁴⁰ was of symbolic importance in signalling
the end of the British Government's age old policy of dealing with Newfoundland
as a fishery rather than a colony. It did provide for the establishment
of a non-elective executive council to which Brooking was appointed, ⁴¹ but
neither he nor anyone else were satisfied with the measure, and agitation for
~~further~~ further reform continued. However the nature of the battle had now
changed from convincing the British Government of the need for reform to that
of overcoming divisions in Newfoundland society, and above all for overcoming
the apathy of the vast majority of the inhabitants- especially outside St Johns
towards the whole question of Government. ⁴¹ For example the new legislation
provided for the establishment of a municipal corporation in St Johns and
Brooking was prominent in trying to persuade the inhabitants to support it.
However the proposal was heavily defeated by men who still thought that no
government was best government. ⁴² Indeed St Johns had to wait until
for a municipal council, but unable to solve a local problem, the reformers
turned to the larger question of obtaining "Local" government for the entire
Colony. Brooking and his partner Robinson ~~only~~ played a continuous and
vital role in the campaign - especially since their wealth and prominence
give it much needed respectability in England. ⁴³ Robinson presented petitions
in Parliament whilst Brooking chaired the increasingly numerous ~~meeting~~ reform
meetings which were held in St Johns. ⁴⁴ In 1832 Brooking, following tradition,
retired to England on the eve of the attainment of Representative Government.
He sailed with the plaudits of all ranks and classes, Irish and English, Protestant
and Catholic, in his ears, ⁴⁵ and must have felt very pleased with the results of
his sojourn on the Island. ~~Only a few years later~~ Everyone basked in the
feeling of amity and cooperation which the campaign had created. Four years

later Newfoundland Society was divided bitterly and the protestant merchants, now become the Conservative party, who had so staunchly supported the advent of local Government were now strenuously demanding that the experiment be abandoned on the grounds that Newfoundland was not fit for freedom.⁴⁶ Thomas Holdsworth Brooking shared their view from his office in London.⁴⁷ Many men perhaps regret their actions once the results appear; it is ~~surprisingly~~ less common to find political leaders admitting it.

Brooking's life was of course by no means over; he was only 42 when he left Newfoundland for ever and his business continued and flourished for nearly forty years more. However his days of political agitation were over. He seems to have played little or no political or even humanitarian role in England. The excitement of politics was replaced by the ^{quiet private} affluence of Victorian commerce.