

Alexander Brodie.

A highly successful iron founder, who was born in Traquair in 1732 and was apprenticed to a blacksmith before leaving for London to seek his fortune in 1759, apparently with 17s 6d in his pocket. He began manufacturing fire grates and other ironwork and, in 1767, with a partner, Richard Williams, obtained a Royal patent for a fire stove and register. A further patent was obtained in 1780 for a Ship's Stove.

His London premises were in Carey street, Holborn, in the 'Liberty of the Rolls' but his business interests extended much further. He had premises in Calcutts, Broseley, Shropshire, where he was later forced by Boulton and Watt to pay £602 compensation for infringing their patent on engines. In the 1790's he established, in partnership with McNiven and Ormerod, an iron foundry in Manchester and in the nineteenth century he took a share in the Hazeldine Foundry in Bridgenorth in Shropshire. He was also a considerable philanthropist, - providing assistance to the people of his native Peebleshire and establishing a mill at Innerleithen for the benefit of local people displaced by agricultural improvement rather than for profit.

At the time of his death in 1811, he was living in Upper Tooting and his estate was left to his nephews and nieces, who, in 1818, erected memorial plaques in the church at Chiswick, where he was buried and at Traquir, his birthplace:

'In memory of Alexander Brodie Esq Iron Master Late of Carey Street In the Liberty of the Rolls of London And Calcut in the Country of Salop A Native of Traquaire First Inventor of The Register Stoves and Fire Hearths for Ships Had the honour of Supplying The whole British Navy with the later For upwards of thirty years To the preservation of many valuable lives Since their introduction And was a great saving to the government Died 6th of January 1811 Aged 78 years.'

Sources:

- 1) Watson, W. N. B. 1968 *Alexander Brodie and His Firehearths for Ships*. *Mariners Mirror* 54(4):409-412.
- 2) Website - <http://www.uwf.edu/fpan/mardigras/artifacts/brodie/>
- 3) Science and Technology in the Industrial Revolution, By A. Albert Edward Musson, Eric Robinson, publ. 1969, University of Manchester.
- 4) Musson, A. E.; Robinson, E. (June 1960). "The Origins of Engineering in Lancashire". *The Journal of Economic History* (Cambridge University Press on behalf of the *Economic History Association*) 20 (2): 228–229.

The Liberty of the Rolls.

A description of this semi-autonomous district, in the parish of St. Dunstan in the west, in Middlesex, is given in 'London; being an accurate history and description of the British metropolis and its neighbourhood: to thirty miles extent, from an actual perambulation', by David Hughson, (Volume 4, p. 128), published in 1807:-

'The LIBERTY OF THE ROLLS is a district exempt from the power of the sheriff of Middlesex or other officer except by leave of the master It commences at the corner of Cursitor Street next to Chancery Lane taking in the Rose wine vaults where it crosses into White's Alley which it wholly takes in except two or three houses on each side next Fetter Lane and there it crosses into the Rolls garden it likewise takes in from thence running into Chancery Lane by Serjeant's Inn it crosses to Bell Yard which takes in almost to Fleet Street except a few houses on the back of Crown Court which is in the city liberty It then runs across the houses to Shire Lane taking in all the east side and again crossing over to Lincoln's Inn New Square runs to the pump at the corner of the garden whence it crosses to where it commenced at Cursitor Street.'

Symond's Inn, not one of the regular Inns of Court, housed for a long period the offices of the Masters in Chancery and the records, or 'Rolls' of their cases. The Master of the Rolls, a Royal Appointment, was the principal officer of the court, with the power of appointing Six Clerks in Chancery, two Examiners of the Court, and the Clerk of the Chapel of the Rolls. Symond's Inn was finally demolished in 1874.

The Fire and the Silver Plaque.

Newspaper reports:

The 'London Chronicle'. 22-24/06/1786.

'This Morning about four o'clock a Fire broke out in the Chancery Office, Symond's-Inn, which consumed the same, several Books and Papers, and likewise damaged three sets of Chambers with most of the furniture.'

'London Chronicle'. 1-4/07/1786.

'The Masters in Chancery have had a Meeting with the Master of the Rolls and they are to attend the Lord Chancellor on Saturday next, to consult on the necessity of Government appointing some safe and convenient place for the Chancery Offices. The late attempts to set fire to Symond's-Inn have made it apparent that the Title Deeds and other Papers relating to Estates are by no means safe in places so exposed to the designs of wicked Men.'

The 'Morning Post and Daily Advertiser.' 17/07/1786.

'To the honour of the inhabitants of the Rolls Liberty. - On Thursday evening last, July 13, the Overseers and Gentlemen of the Committee of the Rolls Liberty waited on Mr. Alexander Brodie, in Carey-street, to present him with their thanks and a silver plate, as a token of respect for the bravery of his men in extinguishing the fire which happened at the Masters in Chancery's Office, in Symond's-Inn, on the 24th of June last. -The Plate was delivered to Mr. Brodie by the Overseer, with the following words:

SIR,

"The Gentlemen of the Committee, and the Overseers of the Rolls Liberty wait on you in the name of the inhabitants with their sincere thanks for the neighbourly assistance of your men and engines, who totally extinguished that most alarming fire on the 24th June last, in Symond's-Inn: and as a further testimony of their thanks, we are desired, by many of the inhabitants, to present to your Manufactory this silver plate, to be worn on any occasion you may think proper, by one of your men. [The plate was then delivered to Mr. Brodie, who kindly received it.] Your receiving this plate is a sufficient answer to the inhabitants of your respect to them.

"We are, Sir,

"Your much obliged,

"And most humble Servants, "

Mr. Brodie's reply was, That while he had engines complete, and upwards of an hundred hands always ready to man them, he should be happy to oblige the Rolls Liberty, or any other of his neighbours that wanted assistance.

Mr. Brodie and the gentlemen afterwards retired to Symond's-Inn Coffee-House, wher the following toasts were given:

Success to Brodie's Manufactory by the Overseer.

Success to the inhabitants of the Rolls Liberty, by Mr. Brodie.

The Master of the Rolls, with the Masters of the Court of Chancery.

Honourable Board of Directors of the Hand in Hand Fire Office.

George Wilson, Esq, of Symond's-Inn.

Richard Holford, Esq. Proprietor of Symond's-Inn.

Mr. Kenderly of Symond's-Inn.

The plate was manufactured in the shape of a shield, hung with three chains, and well engraved with the following device: The arms of the Rolls Liberty in the center, a figure of fame over it, blowing success to Brodie's Manufactory, at the bottom an inscription for what purpose given.'