

**AUSTRALIAN JOINT COPYING PROJECT**

**ROBERT BROOKS & COMPANY**

**Records, 1822-90**

**Reels M582 – M583**

**Robert Brooks & Company  
Adelaide House  
King William Street  
London Bridge London EC4**

**National Library of Australia  
State Library of New South Wales**

**Filmed: 1964**

## HISTORICAL NOTE

Robert Brooks (1790-1882) was born in Laceby, Lancashire. He was apprenticed to a Hull timber merchant, John Barkworth, who later diversified into shipping and shipbuilding. In 1814 Brooks sailed on a trading expedition to Mauritius on Barkworth's ship *Elizabeth* and in 1818-19 he was sent to India. After 1820 he traded on his own account, although he remained closely associated with Barkworth for several years. By 1823 he was the sole owner of the *Elizabeth* and he sailed to New South Wales and Van Diemen's land and established links with local merchants such as Robert Campbell Junior, John Rickards, and Raine and Ramsay. This was the only occasion on which Brooks visited Australia.

The main interests of Brooks were initially shipping and the import of timber from Australia and New Zealand. He exported goods to local merchants such as Robert Campbell in Sydney, James Cain in Melbourne, and William Campbell & Co in Launceston. Local merchants were used as commission agents and from 1830 onwards he had a resident agent in Sydney: Ranulph Dacre, succeeded by Robert Towns (1794-1873) in 1843. Octavius Browne was his agent in Melbourne from 1847 to 1855. By the 1830s the wool and whaling industries were Brooks's priority and by the end of the decade he was one of the largest London importers of wool, whale oil and whalebone. In 1837 he was one of the founders of the Union Bank of Australia and he remained a director until 1873. He was also a director of the Southern Whale Fishery Company and a number of insurance and mining companies. In 1846 he was elected chairman of the New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land Commercial Association, which regulated London wool auctions.

In 1841 Brooks set up a small office in St Peter's Chambers, off Cornhill in the City of London. In 1855 he took on Robert Spence as a partner and the firm of Robert Brooks & Company was established. It remained one of the largest importers of wool for the rest of the century. In the 1840s Brooks owned up to 12 vessels, but in the early 1850s he abandoned his active involvement in shipping. From then onwards his main priority was financing the wool trade and other Australian ventures, including gold mining. He greatly expanded his credit facilities, especially to Robert Towns.

Brooks retired in 1872 and three of his sons took over the management of the company. It continued to handle wool consignments from Australia and to finance pastoral activities in Australia until well into the twentieth century. Its principal business, however, was the ownership and management of tea plantations in Ceylon. Robert Brooks & Company was liquidated in 1968.

Reference: Frank Broeze. *Mr Brooks and the Australian trade: imperial business in the nineteenth century* (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1993)

The records of Robert Brooks & Company, with the exception of the file of letters (1861-90), were acquired by the National Library of Australia in 1969 (MS 2381). They include an 1872-76 letterbook that was not filmed by the AJCP.

## ROBERT BROOKS & COMPANY

### Reel M582

1. File of letters received by Robert Brooks & Company mainly relating to a cotton plantation owned by Captain Robert Towns on the Logan River in Queensland, 1861-90.

The letters are not filed in date order. They include a letter from Towns on the selection of a property suitable for cotton growing (1862), letters from W.T. Walker, the manager of the plantation, and several reports by C. Lett of his inspection of the property, together with his views on its management and the economic position of the colony (1873-77) and financial statements on cotton-growing. There are also letters from Lett, Alexander Stuart and Edward Knox concerning the health and death of Towns in 1873, the administration of his estate, negotiations with the executors, the valuation and sale of his cattle stations and other properties. These letters were mostly written to Herbert Brooks, the son of Robert Brooks. The final papers in the file relate to litigation in Christchurch, New Zealand, between Robert Brooks & Company and King & Company in 1890.

2. Journal of Robert Brooks, 1 January 1822 – 19 July 1826.
3. Journal of Robert Brooks, 19 July 1826 – 30 September 1828.
4. Ledger of Robert Brooks, 1826-30. (217pp)

The ledger refers to transactions with Thomas Barkworth, John Bisdee, Robert Campbell & Co., Ranulph Dacre, Joseph Dowson & Co., Henry Mitchison & Co, William Walker and various ships and ship captains.

5. Ledger of Robert Brooks, 1831-32. (245pp)

The ledger refers to transactions with Robert Campbell & Co., Captain Thomas Collins, Joseph Dowson & Co., Ranulph Dacre (Sydney), Lancelot Iredale (Sydney), Solomon Levey (Sydney), Simeon Lord (Launceston), Henry Mitchison, H.H. Mortimer & Co., Thomas Reibey (Launceston) and various ships.

### Reel M583

5. Acceptance book, 1846-53

The volume records cheques accepted for payment.

7. Cash book of Robert Brooks, 1 January 1855 – 3 September 1859 (157pp)
8. Letterbook of Robert Brooks, 18 February 1841 – 4 May 1843. (792pp)

The book contains copies of letters written by Brooks. Among the recipients are Thomas Archer, Archers, Gilles & Co. (Launceston), Robert Campbell (Sydney), James Cain (Melbourne), Ranulph Dacre (Sydney), Capt. Thomas Harrington, Luscombe Driscoll & Co., Thomas Reibey (Launceston), Robert Towns (Sydney), Williams, Campbell & Co. (Launceston), W.C. Wentworth (Sydney) and Capt. A.S. Weddell.