

### A 19<sup>th</sup> Century Tyneside Doctor

Dr. John Byrom Bramwell was born in North Shields on Thursday, 12th December 1822. His father was William Bramwell, born in Colne, Lancashire, c. 1792, also a doctor, and his mother was Elizabeth Tate, born in North Shields, c. 1789, the daughter of Robert and Mary Tate.

John Byrom had four siblings: William (b. 25/4/1819), George Tate (b. 7/2/1821), Charles Crighton (b. 1/3/1827) and Elizabeth (b. 13/11/1829), all born in North Shields. George Tate Bramwell died aged only 10 years old. He was buried in Tynemouth on 16 November 1831.

The family were Wesleyan Methodists: the births of all the children were registered at the Methodist Register Office, Paternoster Square, London. Methodism came from John Byrom's grandfather, the Reverend William Bramwell<sup>i</sup>, a rather controversial Methodist clergyman who was converted to Methodism following an encounter with John Wesley himself<sup>ii</sup>. William's wife was Ellen Byrom - the source of John's unusual middle name. The use of the mother's maiden name as a middle name for one or more of her children seems to be something of a family tradition, as illustrated by the names of John's own son, Thomas *Young* Bramwell, and his brother, George *Tate* Bramwell.

According to the London and Provincial Medical Directory 1853<sup>iii</sup>, William Bramwell became a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons England in 1815. He was also surgeon to Her Majesty's Sick and Wounded Seamen, North Shields and Senior Surgeon to the North Shields Dispensary. This information is supported by the 1851 census when William and Elizabeth were living at 5 Dockwray Square in North Shields with their daughter Elizabeth and a servant, Elizabeth Davison.

Based on the entries in the London and Provincial Medical Directory 1853 and The Medical Register 1859 onwards<sup>iv</sup>, John Byrom Bramwell had the following medical qualifications:

- Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, 1843
- Licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries, London, 1843
- Doctor of Medicine, University of Edinburgh, 1844.
- Entered onto the Medical Register: 1 January 1859 (its foundation)

Based on the entry in the London and Provincial Medical directory 1853, at that time John Byrom Bramwell was also:

- One of the Surgeons to the North Shields and Tynemouth Dispensary
- Lecturer on Forensic Medicine, College of Medicine and Practical Science, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

At the start of his career, possibly after graduation from Edinburgh University, John Byrom Bramwell appears to have entered into a partnership with Thomas Ingham in North Shields, where they operated as Surgeons and Apothecaries. However, this obviously did not last very long as in July 1846 a notice dissolving the partnership appeared in the London Gazette<sup>v</sup>. After this Thomas Ingham disappears from the records, although from local trade directories he appears to have been a co-worker of John Byrom's father, William, at the People's Dispensary as early as 1827.

C. A. Meades.

By 1850 John had his own practice at 38 Dockwray Square, North Shields, as listed in the Ward's Northumberland & Durham Directory, 1850<sup>vi</sup>, whilst his father William was living at Dockwray Square but had his practice in Church Street.

John's father, William, died in North Shields on the 30th March 1854. He left a will<sup>vii</sup> in which he mentioned his wife Elizabeth and three of his children: John Byrom Bramwell, Charles Crighton and Elizabeth. There is no mention of William so it is likely that he had also died by this date. The burial of a William Bramwell, aged 18, at Tynemouth Christchurch on 22 April 1837 may be his.

Amongst the various bequests in his will, William Senior left "*my Microscope, Air pump and philosophical instruments And also my two thirds parts or shares of the Surgical Instruments Medicine Books and other medical Stock (now in the possession of myself and of my Son John Byrom Bramwell as partners) unto and equally between my two sons John Byrom Bramwell and Charles Crighton Bramwell.*" This shows that at the time the will was prepared (3rd March 1852) John Byrom and his father were in partnership, with William holding the major share. Charles was also a doctor, although he had his practice in Nottingham rather than the North East.

Also mentioned in William's will is that fact that at his death "by virtue of the arrangements I have made" his share of their practice went to John Byrom, in return for which he was to give his mother either £300 as a lump sum or £50 per year for the rest of her life.

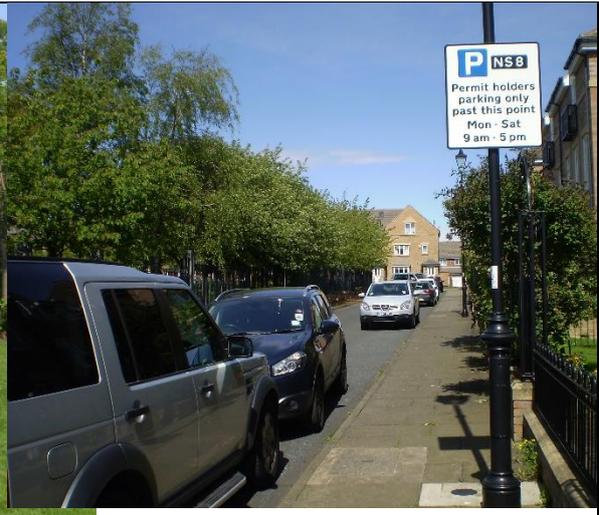
By 1858 John Byrom Bramwell MD was one of the medical officers at the North Shields and Tynemouth Dispensary, Church Street, North Shields<sup>viii</sup>, the same establishment where his father had previously been senior surgeon. The dispensary was a charitable organisation established in 1802 for "the relief of the lame and the sick poor of North Shields and Tynemouth". He was also in private practice at Dockwray Square - something he appears to have continued for most of his life - as shown in local trade directories<sup>ix</sup>. From Kelly's Directory 1879, John was still practicing at Dockwray Square - although his home address - shown by the Court Directory - was 1 Manor Terrace, Tynemouth.

The Pigot's Directory of 1834 gives a listing of all the residences and premises on Dockwray Square at that time and it is clearly an up-market part of town with gentry, schools, attorneys, a physician, John's father - a surgeon, and no less than 15 ship owners. The latter clearly shows that North Shields was a port town. Dockwray Square is still there in North Shields, although it has been completely rebuilt. The only things still there from John Byrom's day are the lighthouse at the open end of the square and the magnificent views over the Tyne estuary.

Dockwray Square is now most famous for the fact that Stan Laurel, of Laurel and Hardy-fame, lived at No. 8 from 1897-1902 - there is even a statue of him in the park that forms the centre of the square.



Dockwray Square - with statue of Stan Laurel



Dockwray Square looking towards where No 38 used to stand



High Light lighthouse at the Southern end of Dockwray Square



Views over the Tyne estuary from Dockwray Square, Low Light Lighthouse and the Fish Quay

C. A. Meades.

In addition to his successful medical career, John Byrom had a very busy family life. In 1847 he married Mary Young of North Shields and together they had four children:

	Birth (all North Shields)
Byrom Bramwell*	18 December 1847
Mary Young Bramwell	1848
Thomas Young Bramwell	1851
John William Bramwell	1852

Unfortunately, Mary died in June 1852, leaving John Byrom, then aged c. 30, a widower with 4 very young children to raise and a medical practice to run. However, at this time his father and mother were both still alive and perhaps they were able to help.

It is perhaps surprising that John took so long to re-marry - which he did on the 30th October 1855, in Glasgow. His new bride, who was eight years younger than John, was called Hughina Margaret Fairlie Nicolson. Hughina was born in Aberdeen on the 21st July 1830. Her father was Thomas Balfour Nicolson, a retired collector for HM Customs and her mother was Hughina Forbes Nicolson, nee Anderson. John and Hughina went on to have 11 children together:

	Birth (all North Shields)	Death
William Balfour Bramwell	1856	1860 (North Shields)
Charles Byrom Bramwell	1857	
Hughina Forbes Bramwell	1859	1860 (North Shields)
Hugh Bramwell	1861	
Herbert Bramwell	1863	
Fairlie Bramwell	1864	
Balfour Bramwell	1866	
Hilda Bramwell	1867	
Hughina Bramwell	1869	
Lilian Hope Bramwell	17 February 1871	
Elizabeth Bramwell	1872	

Thus, John Byrom Bramwell had at least 15 children from two marriages, of which 13 appear to have survived to adulthood. John's seven surviving sons were all educated at Cheltenham College, Gloucestershire. This is over 250 miles from North Shields, so one must assume that the boys didn't spend a lot of time at home with their family. It must also have been very expensive putting all 7 boys through the school - so John Byrom's practice and other business affairs must have been successful.

Three of John's sons - Byrom, John William and Herbert - followed in their father's footsteps and also became doctors. Thomas Young Bramwell became a solicitor, whereas John's other sons went into more industrial occupations: Charles Byrom a colliery agent, Hugh a mining engineer and Balfour a mechanical engineer.

At that time the options for young women such as John Byrom's daughters were limited, typically being marriage or spinsterhood.

C. A. Meades.

Two of John Byrom's daughter's never married. His eldest daughter, Mary Young Bramwell died in Nottingham in 1938, aged 89, whilst Hughina Bramwell died in Bournemouth in 1944, aged c. 75.

Fairlie Bramwell married Charles Edward Winship in 1898 and by the 1911 census they had three children and Charles was a land agent living at Icknield House in Cambridgeshire. She died on the 20<sup>th</sup> August 1937 in Surrey, leaving an estate of £2667/12/9.

Hilda Bramwell married Barras Ramsey Reed, a brewer, in 1889 and they had three children. She died a widow on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 1941 leaving effects of £1644/10/-.

Lilian Hope Bramwell married Henry Edward Lambe, a widower and a solicitor from Devon, in Cheltenham in 1899. They had two children, Charles Edward, b. 1901 and Elizabeth Hope, b. 1905, before Edward's untimely death in 1908 following a polo accident aged just 49. On the 27<sup>th</sup> August 1914, Lilian remarried, this time to a Commander in the Royal Navy – Charles Laverock Lambe. She died in 1944, aged 71, and is buried in Semley, Wiltshire.

At the time of writing the fortunes of John Byrom's youngest daughter, Elizabeth, are still to be revealed. The last record of her that I have been able to trace so far is the 1901 census when she was staying with her sister and brother in-law in a hotel in Torquay, Devon.

John Byrom's mother, Elizabeth, died on 3rd April 1856, aged 67. The announcement in the Shields Daily Gazette 5 April 1856 indicated she was staying (or living) with John Byrom and his family at the time of her death, perhaps helping with the children or needing care herself.

In addition to his large family and his medical practice John Byrom Bramwell had many other interests and activities in the local area:

#### North Shields and Tynemouth People's Dispensary

This was a charitable institution founded in 1802 to provide free medical care to the poor people of the local community. Based on extracts from trade directories, John Byrom appears to have been one of the medical officers at this establishment for over 20 years.

Based on the annual accounts<sup>xi</sup>, this dispensary was a very busy institution: between April 1826 and April 1827 over 1000 people were admitted.

This dispensary, which operated from 1802 to 1949, would also have appeared to have generally been short of funds as there are numerous pleas for financial aid in the local newspapers.

In the Shields Daily News, 26th April 1902, there was a piece celebrating 100 years of the dispensary and it mentions the three generations of Bramwells that had supported the institution:

William Bramwell      1816-1854

John Byrom Bramwell   1847-1871

Byrom Bramwell        1871-1874

#### Tyne Port Sanitary Authority

C. A. Meades.

John Byrom was medical officer for the Tyne Port Sanitary Authority for some ten years, up to his resignation in 1881. This role involved ensuring that diseased people on incoming ships were not allowed to land and so infect the local population. The Tenth Annual Report of The Local Government Board 1880-1881 includes the annual report submitted by John Bramwell's deputy, his son, John William Bramwell. This lists 2 cases of smallpox, 8 of typhoid and 1 of measles.

### Disease

The above reminds us very clearly that during Dr Bramwell's time, he was dealing with a very different situation to that today in terms of the diseases and tools with which he was fighting. In a lecture on "The Exciting Causes of Disease<sup>xiii</sup>" delivered before the Edinburgh Health Society by John Byrom's son, Byrom Bramwell, Byrom recalls an episode when, as a medical student in Edinburgh during the Autumn of 1866, he was recalled to assist his father in a "North of England sea-port town" which was very severely attacked by cholera. He describes it as a "terrible three weeks experience."

A report entitled "The History of Cholera in Great Britain"<sup>xiii</sup> details a series of serious cholera outbreaks in the UK: 1831-1832, 1848-1849, 1853-1854 and 1865-1866. John Byrom was almost certainly involved in at least the 3 latter outbreaks. The report details the following figures for Tynemouth and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, respectively:

Place	Commencement of epidemic	Termination of epidemic	Total deaths
Tynemouth	Oct. 10 1849	Nov. 26 1849	815
Newcastle	Oct. 1849	Nov. 16 1849	295

These show the scale of the outbreak in the much smaller community of Tynemouth relative to the larger population of the City of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Details of the Cholera Inquiry Commission 1854 (Newcastle, Gateshead and Tynemouth)<sup>xiv</sup> indicate that there have been significant improvements to the sanitary conditions in Tynemouth since the pervious outbreak in 1849. This time only 12 people died out of a population of around 30,000.

### North Shields Water Works Company

According to John Byrom Bramwell's obituary in the Shields Daily Gazette, 24th April 1882<sup>xv</sup>, at the time of his death he was the Chairman of the North Shields Water Works Company, a position he had held for many years. Apparently "it was frequently said that he was the best chairman the company ever had".

Perhaps this involvement stems from John Byrom's wish to ensure that the town had a clean water supply for reasons of public health – diseases such as cholera being spread by infected water supplies.

### Justice of the Peace

John Byrom Bramwell was a Borough Magistrate (Justice of the Peace) for North Shields for many years.

### Tynemouth School Board

C. A. Meades.

John Byrom Bramwell was a member of the Tynemouth School Board from its start up until the end of 1873 when he decided not to stand for re-election.

### Religion

John Byrom was brought up a Wesleyan Methodist but a report in the Shields Daily Gazette, 3 February 1871 about the School Board Appointments describes him as an "Established Churchman", suggesting he had joined the Church of England.

The extract from "The Bramwells of Edinburgh" says that John Byrom was a deeply religious man and that he was not satisfied with the local Church of England. He therefore founded an independent church presided over by Dr Jack, a Scot.

### Health

The extract from "The Bramwells of Edinburgh" reports that John Byrom Bramwell suffered from arthritis and that after having obtained some relief from a Turkish bath he had one installed in his house!

John Byrom Bramwell died at home on the afternoon of 23rd April 1882. From his obituary he had suffered from breathing problems for two years or so but these had got markedly worse in the two months before his death. He is buried in the Preston and Tynemouth cemetery.

*I would be happy to hear from any of John Byrom's descendants, both to share my discoveries and to find out what happen to later generations.*

---

<sup>i</sup> "The Bramwells of Edinburgh: a medical dynasty", Bryan Ashworth, Published by: The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, 1986. (First 4 pages only available at North Shields Central Library)

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.wesley-fellowship.org.uk/Bramwell.html>

<sup>iii</sup> [www.familyrelatives.com](http://www.familyrelatives.com)

<sup>iv</sup> [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/20621/page/2553>

<sup>vi</sup> <http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/cdm/landingpage/collection/p16445coll4>

<sup>vii</sup> Durham University Library

<sup>viii</sup> Post Office Directory of Northumberland and Durham, 1858.

<sup>ix</sup> Newcastle City Library

<sup>x</sup> Byrom Bramwell received a knighthood in 1924.

<sup>xi</sup> North Shields Central Library

<sup>xii</sup> Bramwell, Byrom, British Medical Journal, Jan. 9, 1886

<sup>xiii</sup> E Ashworth Underwood, Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine, 1947, XLI, 165

<sup>xiv</sup> <http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/NBL/Cholera>

<sup>xv</sup> [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk)