

ART. XIV – *Mislet, the Braithwaites, and the Black Drop*

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**M**ISLET Farm, a National Trust property since 1987, lies about one and a half miles north-east of Windermere Station, on the far side of Banner Rigg. Its long history probably started as a *saetr*, a shieling or summer pasture, as the place-name was rendered in the thirteenth century as *Micheleslet* or *Micheleset*, the *saetr* of Michel or Michael.<sup>1</sup> The shieling evolved over time into a permanent settlement in the Richmond fee of the barony of Kendal and manor of Applethwaite.

No medieval records are known to survive. By 1574 Mislet may be identified as the tenement and eleven acres of land for which Robert Braithwaite and Thomas, probably his son, paid a yearly manorial rent of 11s. 11d..<sup>2</sup> Thomas Braithwaite was buried at Windermere parish church in 1621 and was almost certainly the father of Robert and James Braithwaite who are both known to have been “of Mislet”. James may have lived at the other holding there, Low Mislet, not at the main farm.<sup>3</sup> He died in 1642, deeply in debt, leaving property in Hugill and a share of a fulling mill in Over Staveley to be sold by his son Thomas to settle more than £111 of debts.<sup>4</sup>

His brother, Robert Braithwaite of Mislet, died in 1664 and was buried at Windermere. He had evidently made over the farm to his son Richard before he died, as his goods consisted only of clothes and bedding and £30 13s. 3d. which was owed to him.<sup>5</sup> Richard was baptised at Windermere early in 1628 and baptised four of his own five children there between 1662 and 1672, but by the date of his death in 1679 he had become a Quaker. His conversion probably took place about 1675. In 1678 he and his wife were fined 10s. for attending a Quaker meeting for which they lost “one pott and one kettle worth thirteen shillings sould for nine shillings tenn pence”<sup>6</sup> and his son Thomas, baptised in 1672, was buried as a Quaker in the same year.<sup>7</sup> His family followed him into the Society of Friends and his daughter Elizabeth, baptised in 1667, was imprisoned for her beliefs and died in custody in 1684. His youngest child, Ann, was born after her father’s conversion and was not baptised in the Church of England; in 1692 she married a Quaker, Joseph Airey of Dillicar. Richard’s will shows him to have been a prosperous man and his inventory recorded goods valued at £195 8s.

Richard Braithwaite’s heir at Mislet was his son John, baptised in 1663. In 1685 he married Rebecca Wilson (b.1661), one of the two daughters of that well-known and widely-travelled Quaker preacher, William Wilson of Chapel Stile, Great Langdale.<sup>8</sup> Between 1686 and 1707 they had seven children. Two of their daughters were married to Friends: Rebecca (b.1699) to Robert Goad of Baycliffe in 1725, and Elizabeth (b.1703) to Daniel Hall or Hawe of Witherslack in 1736. John’s wife died in 1734 and he went to live with the Halls, dying at Witherslack in 1754 when he was over ninety. He was buried at the Height, the meeting house at Cartmel Fell.<sup>9</sup>

John Braithwaite built a meeting house at Mislet, close to his farm. It was first registered at Quarter Sessions in 1706, but was probably built in 1703.<sup>10</sup> Before that

meetings were still held at the farm. In 1700 James Braithwaite of Loanthwaite, near Hawkshead, was married to Margaret Dixon of Heaning "in John Braithwaite's house at Misset". However, the adjoining burial ground was older than the meeting house and its walls have stone seats set into them, which suggests "that the enclosure may have been used . . . for meetings as well as for burials" before a permanent building was erected.<sup>11</sup> There was also a stable to accommodate the horses of visiting Friends.

In 1725 John Braithwaite made over the farm to his eldest son Richard for £150.<sup>12</sup> Richard was admitted in 1727 but then predeceased his father, dying in 1733. He left his main tenement at Misset to his only son John (b.1730), a minor in the care of his mother Mary, the former Mary Airey, the daughter of Joseph Airey of Dillicar, and hence Richard's cousin. They were married in 1729. Richard's inventory revealed very considerable debts of £314. set against goods valued at only £184 11s. 6d. He also owned the other tenement, Low Misset, which his father had bought in 1717 and this he gave back to his father.<sup>13</sup>

After Richard Braithwaite's death a neighbour, Thomas Braithwaite of Holling Hall, Staveley, and a cousin by marriage, Margaret Backhouse, paid £160 to John Braithwaite to cover Richard's debts, taking Misset as security. The debt was repaid in April 1752 and the farm was restored to the younger John. His mother had renounced her dower in 1751 and John was admitted in May 1752 by which time he would have come of age.

The Braithwaites exhibited a strong tendency to fall into debt. In June 1768 the property at Misset was transferred into the hands of Joseph Gough, shearman-dyer of Kendal, and others in trust, with authority to sell or mortgage it for the payment of John Braithwaite's creditors. They chose to mortgage, not once but several times. In February 1769 Gough and the other trustees raised £600 on the property from Isabella Holme of Kendal, widow. That mortgage was unpaid in 1772, when it, with the accrued interest, was transferred to the Revd Browne Grisdale of Maryport for £651. In 1775 there was another transfer, this time for £800 to Thomas Bedford of Red Lion Square in London, and three years later another to Elizabeth Jackson of Duncombe Park, Yorkshire. By that time the sum had increased to £1,222 11s. 7d.

Some efforts were then made to pay off the debt. By 1785, when the mortgage was again transferred, this time to the Revd William Barton, the rector of Windermere, it had been reduced to £741 19s. 6d. and by 1819, when Mr Barton assigned it to John Braithwaite's daughter Margaret, of Kirkland, Kendal, it was £720.

John Braithwaite had died in 1792. Although he was buried in the Friends' burial ground at Misset the records indicate that he was a non-member, as was his wife, the former Margaret Backhouse, who died in 1817. Evidently the family's links with the Friends had to some extent lapsed, although the meeting house was still in use. His son Richard, however, still affirmed when proving his father's will. John and Margaret Braithwaite had six children, none of whom farmed at Misset, and it was surely the poor state of the family's finances which caused them to seek occupations elsewhere. Two daughters, Mary and Margaret, died unmarried in 1791 and 1825. Three sons, Richard (b.1761), James (b.1769), and Thomas (b.1772), became prosperous ironmongers in Kendal.

Richard Braithwaite, who was mayor of Kendal in 1791-2,<sup>14</sup> died on the last day

of his office, leaving an only daughter Emma. James married a Unitarian, Eliza Cookson, and both died young, she in 1799 aged 29 and he in 1806 when only 37.<sup>15</sup> They had no children. Thomas married Jane, daughter of Thomas Bindloss of Greenside, near Milnthorpe, and was buried at Misset in 1822, again recorded as a non-member, as was James. Thomas and Jane left an only daughter, Hannah, born in 1811.

John and Margaret Braithwaite's eldest son, John Airey Braithwaite, was born in 1758 and became a surgeon in Lancaster. He inherited Misset from his father, together with its mortgage, and had instructions to pay considerable and optimistically large legacies to his mother, brothers, and surviving sister. John Braithwaite's goods, however, were valued at under £20. His eldest son's fortunes were to be very different.

John Airey Braithwaite, surgeon and apothecary, practised for all his working life in Lancaster where he invented (or perfected) the opium-based medicine which was known as the Black Drop and from which he made a considerable amount of money. When he died in 1810, his goods were valued at £7,500. He made his will in 1807,<sup>16</sup> leaving Misset and the mortgage to Dr Barton to his mother for her lifetime, with reversion to his brother Thomas and sister Margaret; his brothers Richard and James and sister Mary being already dead. Thomas died in 1822 and Margaret in 1825 and Misset therefore passed to Thomas's only child Hannah.

Margaret Braithwaite had also inherited the ironmongery business from her brothers Richard and James and she evidently played a considerable part in running it.<sup>17</sup> She also, although it was not specifically mentioned in John Airey's will, inherited the recipe for the Black Drop. At her death in 1825 the business, the recipe, and shares in the Kendal-Lancaster canal all came to her sister-in-law Jane, Thomas's widow, and Jane's daughter Hannah, then aged 14.<sup>18</sup> The two found themselves possessed of considerable wealth, with the potential to expand their assets.

Opium-based cure-alls like the Black Drop were not uncommon in this period and were especially popular in the north-west of England. The opium was dissolved in spirit or "vegetable acids" and whilst the medicine was undoubtedly useful in certain conditions such as coughs and diarrhoea it was also highly addictive. Samuel Taylor Coleridge was not the only man to fall victim to such drugs, which could be used either as stimulants or sleeping draughts.<sup>19</sup> The Braithwaite recipe survives: "Dissolve one Pound of Opium in a Gallon of Virjuce very hot – two Ounces of Saffron, and an ounce of Nutmegs bruised, after the Opium is well dissolved pass it thro a Cloth into the Vessel where the Saffron & Nutmegs are when it is Cold work it with Yeast then strain it thro a Flannel strainer and Bottle it let it stand several weeks then thicken it in a sand heat<sup>20</sup> to a Sufficient Thickness a Piece of Lump Sugar should be put in every Bottle".<sup>21</sup>

Although John Airey Braithwaite was held to be the originator of the Black Drop as a more effective and less dangerous remedy than neat opium, and the family to have regarded his recipe as both secret and their own closely-guarded property, at least two other Quakers sold a specific of the same name in Kendal at the same period. Ann Todd, advertising in the *Lancaster Gazette* in 1802 claimed that her "original recipe" was "superior in quality to an article advertised as the Black Drop by a member of the Royal College of Surgeons" as well as being much less

expensive. She repeated her claim in 1811 when her “Genuine Quaker’s Black Drop” was being sold at 1s. 6d. a bottle. The Braithwaite version cost 11s. Anne Todd died in 1820.<sup>22</sup> The following year another Friend, Hannah Backhouse, marketed another version, said to have been invented by a Quaker doctor at Bishop Auckland “upwards of one hundred years ago”.<sup>23</sup> Secret or not, recipes were published quite openly in the *Lonsdale Magazine* for March 1821.

About 1833 Jane and Hannah Braithwaite moved from the Bindlosses’ old house in Kirkland<sup>24</sup> to Stramongate, where they continued to prepare the Black Drop, probably until the late 1850s, and where a certain mystique attached to them as well as to it. The process took about a week. The fumes were thought to damage the complexion, so the women wore masks. “Persons with a relish for the supernatural, will find a not inapt parallel for these two females, strange enough under normal conditions, but still more weird and witch-like in their grimy gowns and masked faces, flitting about at dead of night, and tending the slowly boiling drug over the ghost of a fire”.<sup>25</sup>

Jane Braithwaite died in 1862, leaving Hannah as the sole heir to the family’s by now substantial wealth. It did not, of course, all come from the profits of the Black Drop. Hannah inherited not only Misset, but the house at Greenside which had belonged to her mother’s family, her uncle John Airey Braithwaite’s property in Lancaster, and that of her father and her uncle James in Kendal. She also owned land in Skelsmergh. Her mother was said to have left her £10,000. She was said to have been “unusually fortunate” in her investments and lived very economically, “at the rate of not more than £200 a year”.<sup>26</sup>

After her mother’s death, Hannah moved to Greenside, and there she died on 2 March 1872, at the age of 61.<sup>27</sup> Her will caused a sensation. After bequests to the new church at Skelsmergh, an annuity of £100 to her old friend, Dr Edmund Tatham, £500 each to her three executors, and the forgiveness of arrears of rent owed by her tenants, she left the whole residue of her property to Thomas Rogers, a retired baker from Penkridge in Staffordshire, whose sister was Mrs Sharples, wife of the headmaster of Heversham Grammar School. The estate was estimated at £100,000. This was a considerable sum, though a far cry from the “large estate in Cumberland, a mansion in Belgravia, picture galleries, horses, broughams, and a suite of servants” which Mr Rogers was said to have inherited by the author of an article in the *Birmingham Morning News*. According to that, Hannah Braithwaite had, in 1868, a leap year, indicated to Thomas Rogers “her willingness to bestow upon him her hand, heart, and heritage”, but he had declined. She nevertheless made him her heir.

Her Bindloss relations took steps to have the will declared invalid and in November 1872 the case came before the court of probate. Four first cousins once removed, with the heir at law in attendance,<sup>28</sup> contested the will, claiming that Hannah Braithwaite was incapable, through unsoundness of mind or addiction to drink, or even to the Black Drop itself, of making a valid will. It was said at the hearing that Thomas Rogers had indeed met Hannah in 1868, but that *he* had proposed marriage to *her*, had received a series of equivocal answers, and withdrawn his suit. Her solicitor, Joseph Swainson, stated that she had expressed great affection for him. She was, quite evidently, both eccentric and domineering, but both her doctor, Octavian Royle of Milnthorpe, a witness to the will, and the solicitor denied

the other allegations absolutely. Counsel for the plaintiffs suggested that her eccentricities of dress and her behaviour towards her servants (in giving them putrid meat to eat, and so on) were well known, but the solicitor stood his ground manfully under an abusive cross-examination. He also disputed the suggestion that she suffered from *delirium tremens* and was in the habit of complaining of “blue men in the curtains, and persons being under the bed”.

In the event, although the will was upheld, the matter was settled reasonably by agreement between the parties, the heir at law receiving £3,000 and the relations £17,000. Mr Rogers received about £80,000, including the farm at Misset to which he was admitted in 1890.<sup>29</sup> He left it to a nephew, Thomas Rogers Shaw, admitted in 1898. At some point between then and 1907 the farm was bought by Joseph Crosthwaite of Orrest Head House.<sup>30</sup> It descended to his nieces and great-nieces and came to the National Trust in 1987 under the will of Miss Winifred Frank.

The Braithwaites never farmed again at Misset after the death of John Braithwaite in 1792. Under his son John Airey Braithwaite and subsequently, it was let. In 1815<sup>31</sup> it was described as a “desirable Grain and Sheep Farm, with a good Dwelling-House, Farm-House, and Suitable out-Buildings, a very good Orchard”, and about 115 acres of land with common rights on School Knott and Applethwaite Fell. A map of 1826, made by the Braithwaites’ relation, Robert Goad of Stainton,<sup>32</sup> has a picture of the house which, as the description of 1815 implies, was divided for much of the nineteenth century. “Misset House” appears in the census returns for 1851 and 1861 as a separate unit. By 1871, and later, only the farmhouse and a cottage, the former meeting house, are indicated. A singular feature of the farmhouse is the large room on the first floor, now divided but clearly visible. On stylistic grounds it must date from after the death of John Braithwaite in 1792, but why any of his heirs should have wished to construct such a room is mysterious. It looks like some sort of assembly room, but its intended purpose must remain a matter for speculation. Two songs about a famous hare hunted, frequently but unsuccessfully, at Misset in the 1830s were printed by Blezard in 1868<sup>33</sup> and it is possible that the later and more prosperous Braithwaites were persuaded to add a room in which hunt suppers or the like might take place. It was certainly in existence in 1826, its windows being clearly indicated in the picture which decorates Robert Goad’s map.

The meeting house remained in use until 1821 when it was closed and converted into a cottage.<sup>34</sup> Hannah Braithwaite bought it for £10 in 1833 and it has since descended with the farm, inhabited in the nineteenth century by agricultural labourers. Isaac Black paid 1s. per week for it from 1850,<sup>35</sup> was listed in 1851, and was still there ten years later, with his wife and six children, apparently with enough room to house Jane Coward, aged 75, as well. The only sign of the former status of the cottage is the reconstructed and partly-removable panelling in the sitting room, which was the women’s meeting, but the stable and burial ground remain.

For much of the nineteenth century the farm tenants were successive members of the Dixon family. Thomas Dixon, born in Orton, was at Misset by 1829. He was succeeded in 1856 by his son James (1821-84), by James’s widow Isabella, and by their eldest surviving son, another James (1855-1923). Misset inspired at least one member of the family to reminiscential verse from exile in London in 1860.<sup>36</sup>

Oh! The home of my parents, the scene of my birth,  
 Old Misset I love thee more than words can relate;  
 In my eyes thou art faultless, to me thou art worth  
 All palaces and grandeur to be found in the state.

I love thy neat garden in front all repose,  
 With its small wicket gate 'tween the two holly trees,  
 Whose boughs intermingle with woodbine and rose,  
 And whose fragrance is sought by industrious bees.

Thy orchard so pleasant, with its fruits most rare,  
 Whose qualities and tastes from a child I knew well,  
 The large ribstone pippin, the sweet little pear,  
 The much-priz'd russet and famed nonpareil.

And so on. The writer ends “Old Misset by me, thou shalt ne'er be forgot”. He may not have been aware of all that Misset had to remember.

### Notes and References

- <sup>1</sup> A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of Westmorland*, English Place-Name Society, i (1967), 195.
- <sup>2</sup> J. F. Curwen (ed.), *Records relating to the Barony of Kendale*, ii (Kendal, 1924), 84.
- <sup>3</sup> Details of baptisms and burials are from the Windermere parish registers, CRO(K), WPR61. Low Misset, probably the home of James Braithwaite in 1641, had, by 1705 when he died, passed to Thomas Salkelt. He seems to have divided the property. One half, called Birkhow and which possibly never had a house, was given by Salkelt in 1696 to his son-in-law, Thomas Knipe, who sold it in 1717 to John Braithwaite (d.1734). Salkelt leased the other half, known as Low Misset, to his grandson, Thomas Satterthwaite, son of William Satterthwaite of Crofthead, Colthouse, and in 1717 he sold it to Richard Braithwaite (d.1733). It is marked as “Old House with Orchard” on Robert Goad’s map of 1826. Only its barn now remains.
- <sup>4</sup> Lancashire Record Office (= LRO), WRW/K.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, as are subsequent wills cited, unless otherwise indicated.
- <sup>6</sup> I owe the reference to Mr J. R. Dixon of Little Sutton.
- <sup>7</sup> Details of Quaker births, marriages, and baptisms are from the Quaker digests in CRO(K), WDFC/F1.
- <sup>8</sup> For William Wilson (c.1625-82), see “Dictionary of Quaker Biography”, typescript at Friends’ House, Euston Road, and references there cited; J. Whiting, *Memoirs* (London, 1715), 65-67; N. Penny (ed.), *The First Publishers of Truth* (London, 1907).
- <sup>9</sup> There is a microfilm of the Height meeting house register in Cumbria Record Office, Barrow. His will is in CRO(K), WD/NT/acc.4626, bundle KK; inventory in LRO, WRW/K.
- <sup>10</sup> D. Butler, *Quaker Meeting Houses of the Lake Counties* Friends Historical Society (1978), 117.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> CRO(K), WD/NT/acc.4626, bundle KK, contains the Misset deeds from which subsequent details of the descent are taken.
- <sup>13</sup> See n. 3.
- <sup>14</sup> CRO(K), WD/PW/acc.2181: J. Campbell (ed.), *The Braithwaite Will Cause and History of the Black Drop* (Kendal, 1872), 4-5. Richard Braithwaite was baptised in 1791 before becoming mayor, to enable him to take the oath of office. His ironmongery premises were in front of the White Hart: J. F. Curwen, *Kirkbie-Kendall* (Kendal, 1930), 99.
- <sup>15</sup> F. Nicholson and E. Axon, *The Older Nonconformity in Kendal* (Kendal, 1915), 484, 524.
- <sup>16</sup> LRO, WRW/A.
- <sup>17</sup> Thomas and Margaret Braithwaite also manufactured marble chimneypieces at a workshop in Capper Lane. Margaret is said to have been in charge of this part of the business. “Arrayed in her quaint Quaker dress and cap, with a basket of provisions on her arm, she was an object of mingled curiosity and admiration; and thus equipped she would trudge off to Hawes Wood to attend to the getting of the marble”: *The Braithwaite Will Cause*, 5. The ironmongery business would have sold iron fireplaces.

- <sup>18</sup> She also owned her brother James's former house in Kirkland.
- <sup>19</sup> The history of the Black Drop is rehearsed in *The Braithwaite Will Cause*, 3-4. *OED* equates it with the later Godfrey's Elixir, used by unscrupulous nurses to quieten fretful babies, often with disastrous results; cf. the death of Flora Rivers's baby in C. M. Yonge, *The Daisy Chain*. For Coleridge, see M. Lefebure, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Bondage of Opium* (London, 1974), especially App. 1, 493-495.
- <sup>20</sup> Sand heat is the application of heat by means of hot sand, used here as a method of reducing the mixture to a syrup, probably in a sand bath, "a vessel of heated sand used as an equable heater for retorts, etc.": *OED*.
- <sup>21</sup> CRO(K), WD/K/112. A pencil note at the foot reads "Miss Braithwaite's remedy of Kendal".
- <sup>22</sup> Curwen, *Kirkbie-Kendall*, 166.
- <sup>23</sup> *The Braithwaite Will Cause*, 4.
- <sup>24</sup> According to Curwen (*Kirkbie-Kendall*, 99), Thomas and James Braithwaite occupied no. 45 Highgate, although he also places Thomas (and his family) and his sister Margaret at nos. 25-27 Kirkland (*ibid.*, 165). That is confirmed in *The Braithwaite Will Cause*, 5, where it is stated that Thomas had a dispute in 1809 about a doorway which he had opened into the churchyard. The house belonged to the Bindloss family. Thomas and his sister must have moved there after the death of their brother James in 1809. After Margaret and her sister-in-law moved to Stramongate, Thomas Bindloss, also an ironmonger and twice mayor of Kendal, lived there himself until he built Castle Green in 1848.
- <sup>25</sup> *The Braithwaite Will Cause*, 6.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 8.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 7. All details of the will and the legal proceedings are from the same source. There is a copy of the will in CRO(K), WD/AG/Box 112. Hannah Braithwaite's probate papers, including particulars of the family history, are in *ibid.*, WD/MM/Box 113.
- <sup>28</sup> The heir at law was William Goad Threlfall, grandson of Robert Goad (1767-1824), whose daughter married James Threlfall of Lea, Preston. For the Goads, see J. D. Martin, "A Westmorland surveyor", *CW2*, xcii, 285-288.
- <sup>29</sup> CRO(K), WD/NT/acc. 4626, bundle KK.
- <sup>30</sup> Joseph Crosthwaite (1849-1930), of Orrest Head House, Windermere, succeeded in 1873 to the estate of his kinsman John Braithwaite (1782-1854), a busy and influential local figure. Braithwaite acted as High Constable, Bridgemaster, and Treasurer of the Kendal ward, and was a benefactor to St Mary's church, Applethwaite, and to local schools. The property to which Joseph Crosthwaite succeeded when he came of age consisted of Orrest Head House and the farms at Bannerigg, Causeway, and Orrest Head, and Low Longmire Farm at Bouth. Causeway and Low Longmire were bequeathed to an earlier John Braithwaite (1749-1818) in c.1780 and 1819 respectively (the latter in fact inherited by his son), and he bought Bannerigg in 1776. Orrest Head Farm was bought in 1828. Joseph Crosthwaite added Low Green Head, Troutbeck (1883), Grove Farm and Grove Cottage (1889), and Misset (c.1900). The National Trust succeeded to the whole estate except Orrest Head House, sold in 1972, Alice Howe Farm, sold in 1979, and Droomer Style, sold in 1952 and 1965.
- <sup>31</sup> *Westmorland Advertiser*, 5 August 1815.
- <sup>32</sup> The map is in CRO(K), WD/NT/acc. 4626. For Robert Goad, see Martin, "A Westmorland surveyor". Another Goad map has now been identified: CRO(K), WDX 140/13 is of "Holeslack in Helsington, belonging to Mr Christopher Garnett". It has a fine longhorn cow pictured at the bottom corner.
- <sup>33</sup> T. Blezard, *Original Westmorland Songs* (Kendal, 1868), 37-40, 45-47.
- <sup>34</sup> Butler, *Quaker Meeting Houses of the Lake Counties*, 117; Parson & White, *Directory of Cumberland and Westmorland* (1829), 336; illustrated in S. Denyer and J. Martin, *A Century in the Lake District* (London, 1995), 94-95.
- <sup>35</sup> CRO(K), WD/NT/79, account book of Thomas Dixon.
- <sup>36</sup> The origin of the printed copy *penes* the National Trust is unknown. It is signed J.C.D., London, 1860. The farm inspired affection among visitors too: see their contributions to the Dixons' visitors' book in CRO(K), WD/NT/79.

