

## Charles William Brebner (1852-1922)

brebner.com

Researching Brebner / Bremner Families Worldwide

**Charles Brebner** was a well-known ship captain of Jamaican descent. I had a letter in October from his grandson, **John L. Brebner** in Mauritius, parts of which are excerpted below with my own additional footnotes and commentary.

“May I introduce myself, I am also **John Brebner** from the island of Mauritius. Last week my daughter Stephanie and I were talking about my late Grand Dad **Charles William Brebner** Master Mariner FRGS – FRSA, a Catholic and a Freemason, he was also the first **Brebner** to set foot and settled here....”

“On my side our roots came to a dead end in Jamaica, but I am sure it goes beyond the shores of Jamaica. Based on local experience, I believe that in the distant past a British European colonizer, a **Brebner**, settled in Jamaica, married or lived in concubinage with a native woman there and gave his name to his offspring and my Grand Dad was his descendent. I do not believe that a name like **Brebner** could be an ancestral native name of Jamaica.”<sup>i</sup>

“I have not known my Grand Dad, as per his photograph I could see that he was a strong well built coloured Guy, most of his children and great grand children have fair complexions with blue/grey eyes...”

“**Charles William Brebner** was born in 1852<sup>ii</sup> in the County of Cornwall, Lucea, Jamaica. He died in Mauritius on the 5<sup>th</sup> June 1922 and was buried at Port Louis West Cemetery, Grave Section 11 N. 318”.

“As the story goes when he was a child his parents immigrated to the United States, one day he and his little sister were playing in the back garden. By mistake he left its back door open, a wild beast came in and killed his little sister. His Father was so cross with him that at the age of twelve he embarked on a sailing vessel never to return home. Frankly speaking, we do not know when he first set foot on the Mauritian soil or when he settled down here.”

“His first marriage was with a lady **Diesel** and had no children. His second marriage was **with Margaret Oxenham** and they had seven children, five sons and two daughters: **Charles, Jim, Luc, George, Philippe, Mary** and **Nancy**. Today only **Mary** and **Philippe** are still alive.”

“Grand Dad made a very brilliant and fruitful career in the maritime world, he was a very well known ship’s captain and for a very long time was in command of the famous tea clipper, the *Sir Lancelot*. Known



as the Yacht of the Indian Ocean, she was built in 1805 in Greenock, Scotland<sup>iii</sup> Having upward of 46,000 square feet of canvas, she accomplished the swiftest passage on record of any sailing vessel between China and England. Just after being sold I believe to a Persian ship owner<sup>iv</sup>, she foundered with a loss of all hands in 1892 in the Bay of Bengal during a tropical storm.”

Left: The *Ariel*, sister ship to the *Sir Lancelot*.

Derek M. Gardner print<sup>v</sup>

“I strongly believe that **Captain William Brebner** could have settled somewhere else before finally settling down here and making Mauritius the country of adoption. He was very well known in the Indian Ocean, especially in India, Madagascar and Rodrigues... he had land and various properties in those countries.”

“I would say that he was a self-made person. He left his parents home with nothing and became somebody in this world. He made and left a fortune but upon his death one did not see fit to give him a proper gravestone, when I was a kid I went to visit his grave and I was shocked to see a massive boulder there. I had the impression that at that time the boulder meant something to somebody as if saying “You in there... you stay there”. But on the contrary the grave of his wife was beautifully fabricated together with a life-size marble guardian angel. And it is still being looked after by a descendant of his late wife.”

“As I understand, when he was ashore he did a lot of social and charitable works; the town of Rose Hill where he resided honoured him by naming one of the streets after him, and the name plate is still there today”.

“ I am the son of **George** and **Angelle Marie**. I was born on the 4<sup>th</sup> October 1940 in the town of Curepipe Road in the District of Plaine William. I also have an elder sister **Clency** two years my senior now residing in Melbourne, Australia. She married **Nicos Psarianos**, of Greek origin, and they have two grown up daughters, **Flora** and **Angelle**....”

“In 1958 I completed my secondary education and went to England to further my studies and from April 1959 to April 1960 I pursued a Deck Cadet Officer training course at the Reardon Nautical College, Cardiff, New South Wales (sic...Wales??). In 1960 I joined the Merchant Navy and the Athel Shipping Line of London as a Deck Officer’s Cadet. Before completing my Deck Cadet training course on their tankers, I was promoted to an un-certificated third officer. I sailed with them until June 1963. From June 1964 to May 1979 I sailed for Common Brothers Shipping Company of Newcastle-on-Tyne. In 1970 I married **Miralla Cimiotti**, also a native of Mauritius, and “Italian descendent”..... In 1980 my daughter Stephanie was born... From February 1983 to April 1990 I sailed for the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines during the time Iran and Iraq were at war, and saw my fair share of action in the convoys and in Bandar Khomeini.”

“In 1988 my wife and I decided to return to our native Mauritius but I continued to sail for the Iran shipping line until 1990. In 1991 I took a small job in Port Louis harbour as a skipper pilot while looking after the maintenance of the port’s crafts. I was also a part-time lecturer at the Sea Training school, teaching Ocean Navigation and Seamanship. From 1996 to 1997 I was in command of foreign going fishing vessels, the last of my career.

In 1998 I worked as a marine surveyor for the French Classification Society, the “Bureau Veritas”, and finally in 2002 I retired.”

The above letter was forwarded to me by **John’s** daughter **Stephanie** in October, 2007 after **John’s** sudden death, and it is so unfortunate that I had no chance to reply.

Tracing genealogies in this part of the world is difficult as few of the resources of statutory registrations are available on-line. (<verify Mauritius reg>)

However, the connection with the **Brebner/Brebner** families in Jamaica today might be useful. *The Daily Gleaner* has several articles concerning a Brebner family in Lucea from 1901 through 1971, and it might be assumed that they share the same ancestry as **Charles William Brebner**.

These transcriptions are available on my web-site:

- 1901 [House fire of Christiana Brebner](#)
- 1923 [Arsenic poisoning of James Brebner and his family](#)
- 1971 [Assault charges against John Brebner](#)

While civil registration only began in 1880 in Jamaica, and it should be possible to research some of those **Brebner** families back at least until that date.

The Registrar General's Department, Government of Jamaica<sup>vi</sup> has a Genealogical Research Section that can be contacted by e-mail at [genealogy@rgd.gov.jm](mailto:genealogy@rgd.gov.jm) . Research services are provided at a rate of 600 J\$/hr.

There is also a fairly active newsgroup for Caribbean genealogy.

Living descendants that may well have photographs, log-books, family bibles and other memorabilia that could help add information about the family. The Mauritius White Pages shows three Brebners in 2007:

<b>BREBNER, J. Philippe Edmond</b>	42 Hugnin Road, Rose Hill	4650938
<b>BREBNER, Josiane</b>	Remono St., Curepipe Road	6981587
<b>BREBNER, Lancelot</b>	M. Osman Lane, Saint Paul-Phoenix	6969033

Certainly the forename of this last **Brebner** suggests a connection to this family!

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<sup>i</sup> There was indeed a **Dr. William Brebner** in Jamaica from at least as early as 1820 and as late as 1861. In 1820 he lived at Green Island and had four slaves (1820 Jamaica Almanac). By 1840 he owned the 138 acre plantation Pedro in Cornwall County, and by 1861 he is noted as living in Lucea, which neatly coincides with the birthplace of the above **Charles William Brebner**. **Dr. William Brebner** is noted as deceased in the death notice of his only daughter, **Rebecca** (wife of **Charles Phillips, Esq.**) in November 1873.

Looking at possible connections in Scotland, the probability of this being **William Brebner**, son of **William Brebner** and **Margaret Simpson** in Boharm, Morayshire is very likely. **William** is noted on the Dundurcas gravestone of his parents (1820) as being a doctor in Jamaica.

[The compiled genealogy of that family...](#)

<sup>ii</sup> It may be possible to find **Charles** birth record in the Jamaican Parish Registers (New Series). That film with entries from 1848 to 1860 is available through the LDS FHL film 1291754. As to other BMD records, civil registration in Jamaica did not begin until 1880. While that precludes finding any siblings to **Charles**, the death records may reveal information about relatives.

<sup>iii</sup> Vessel *Sir Lancelot* was built in Greenock by Robert Steele & Co. in 1865, and was the sister ship to the *Ariel* pictured above.

<sup>iv</sup> In 1886 the vessel was sold to **Visrahim Ibrahim** and put on the India/Mauritius trade under **Captain Charles W. Brebner**. In 1895 the ship was again sold this time to Persian owners, the ship was presumed lost during a cyclone at Sands Head Calcutta with a cargo of salt from the Red Sea on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1895.

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<sup>v</sup> **Derek M. Gardner** (1914-2007) [www.jackfineart.com/gardn.htm](http://www.jackfineart.com/gardn.htm)

<sup>vi</sup> The Registrar General, Vital Records Information, Twickenham Park, Spanish Town St. Catherine, Jamaica (876) 984-3041-5; web-site at [www.rqd.gov.jm/](http://www.rqd.gov.jm/)