

Misses Rogers Ladies' Establishment

Louisa Rogers 1805-1864
Elizabeth Parker 1813-1865



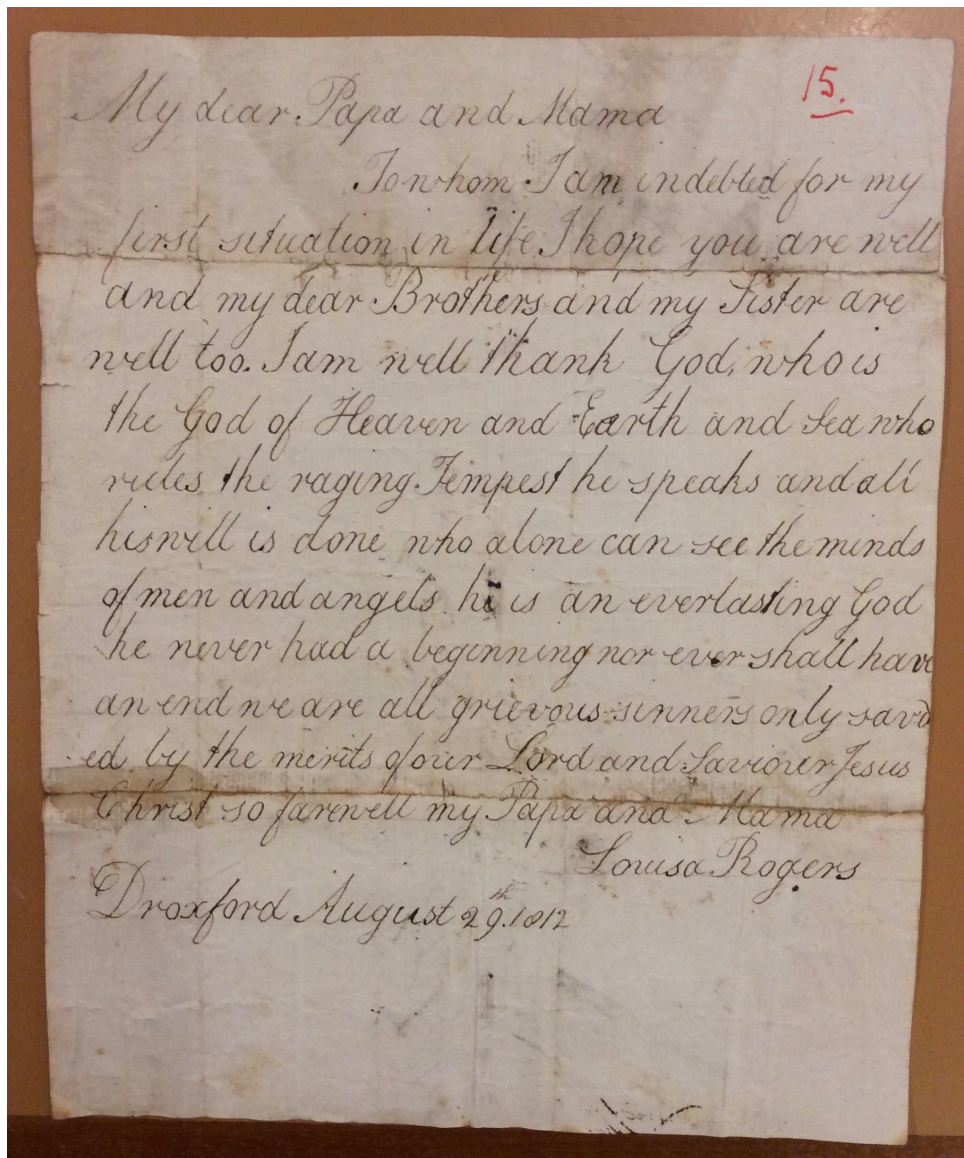
Louisa Rogers 1864 (right) and her sister Elizabeth Parker with son Robert George Vining Parker (left) c1860 Source: Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers

West Meon

Louisa Rogers was born at West Meon, Hampshire in 1805, the first daughter and fifth child of local doctor and surgeon **George Vining Rogers** and his wife **Mary Ann Blyth**. Louisa eventually was to gain nine more siblings, one of whom was her sister Elizabeth born in 1813, who would assist her in running a school in nearby Alton. The Rogers' children spent most of their childhood in West Meon before branching out into their own professional careers in Hampshire and elsewhere, some having more success than others.

In the year Louisa was born, the family had moved from Bishop's Waltham to West Meon where her great-uncle, Charles Heron, died in 1804. This left an opening for her father to take over the medical practice there. The Rogers first lived in a house that 'adjoined the present schools (in 1902)¹. I think this is probably one of the houses in Church Lane next to the West Meon Church of England Primary School. Then in about 1809 the family moved into a house in High Street, 'now the Post Office near the Cross'² now known as the Old Post Office, before finally taking residence at *The Cedars* (later known as *The Rectory*) in Doctor's Lane in 1811.

It is not known where or how Louisa and Elizabeth were educated, perhaps by their mother and a governess at home, as was often the practice in the 19th century for educating girls from professional families, or maybe boarding at a nearby girls' school. Some of their brothers were sent to school in Bishop's Waltham that had a free grammar school at that time.



A letter of 1812 the 7-year-old Louisa wrote to her parents from Droxford. Also, a demonstration of the importance attached to religion in a child's education at this time. Source: Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers

School mistresses

What led Louisa and Elizabeth to become schoolmistresses we can't be sure, however for educated, unmarried middleclass women, teaching was one of the few choices for a career and financial security. They may have begun by teaching their younger brothers at home before the boys were sent off to school, a common practice in these families at the time. Louisa and Elizabeth may have also been governesses at local schools prior to running their own establishment.

A letter written in 1831 from Elizabeth, then 18, to her older sisters Louisa and Mary Ann, reveals that she and Louisa were already working in the education field. Elizabeth writes from London on April 6th:

'.....As I am not at school for a few days and as Mrs S has so kindly offered to supply me with all things requisite to write with, I cannot allow so favourable an opportunity to slip without writing to you a few lines for when I write from school there is such a restraint put upon what you have to say, I am sorry to find that you could not get a situation but I hope that you will in a short time be enabled to, I went to Mrs Shelton's the other day and she told me that she wished me to write to you and say she wished to hear from you as the Paper I gave her was not explanatory enough that is it did not

sufficiently explain to her your attainments or rather what you profess to teach, well when I came home I told Marria Easton what Mrs S had said, it was all nonsense she told me and she said she should not allow me to write home but I think if it is the means of your not procuring a situation it was no more than right that I should tell you therefore my dear sister my advice to you is that you should write to Mrs Shelton(obsured)..... it must be in such a way that she should not imagine that you had heard from me perhaps Miss E might in some way hear of it for if she heard that I had written without her permission she should be very angry with me she will tell you when she writes the same thing that she has me I do this my dear sister that there should be no time lost.....'³



Part of the letter Elizabeth wrote to her sisters in 1831. Source: Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers

Alton

After gaining experience perhaps as junior governesses and pupil teachers, Louisa and Elizabeth eventually were able to establish their own school. Alton, a market town, is a little under 20 kms from the much smaller village of West Meon. Louisa and Elizabeth's older brother William Augustus Rogers had a chemist and druggist business in Alton from about 1825, and it was here in June 1837 that the sisters advertised that they were taking over a school for young ladies. Having their brother William already established in Alton would have been a great advantage for making contacts and advertising.

The Misses Rogers

INFORM their Friends and the Public, they purpose succeeding the MISSES REAVES in their Establishment for the Board and Education of YOUNG LADIES, at ALTON, and beg to add that every religious, moral and domestic attention shall be paid to the pupils entrusted to their care.

The Misses Rogers are negotiating for a French Lady to superintend that department of education.

School Business on July 24th.

N.B.—Situation remarkably Healthy.

For card of terms apply to the Misses Rogers, Alton, Hants, or Mr. Rogers, Sen., Surgeon, Westmeon, Hants.

Hampshire Advertiser June 24th 1837

In the next month:

Alton Seminary.

THE MISSES ROGERS' again direct the attention of their Friends and the Public to their Establishment for the education of YOUNG LADIES, as they have succeeded in securing to themselves a Lady who is enabled to teach French, with the true Parisian accent.

Private Drawing Lessons given.—Harp and Singing on the usual terms.

Excellent accommodation for Parlour Boarders.

Hampshire Advertiser July 15th 1837

This was a boarding school as well as a day school, previously run by the Misses Reeves and before that, Mary Ward. It was at 18 High Street situated on Crown Hill, demolished in 1971 to create the 'Crown Hill Gap', now built upon.

The next January, an advertisement for the reopening of *The Alton School at Normandy House* appeared in the *Hampshire Chronicle*:

NORMANDY HOUSE.

THE ALTON SCHOOL, conducted by the Misses ROGERS, will RE-OPEN on Tuesday the 23^d of January, 1838.

For cards of terms apply to Mr. Rogers, Surgeon, Westmeon, Hants, or to the Misses Rogers. (7511)

Crown Hill where 18 High Street was situated, was also known as Normandy Hill, therefore inspiring the name *Normandy House* (not to be confused with another *Normandy House* on Normandy Street).

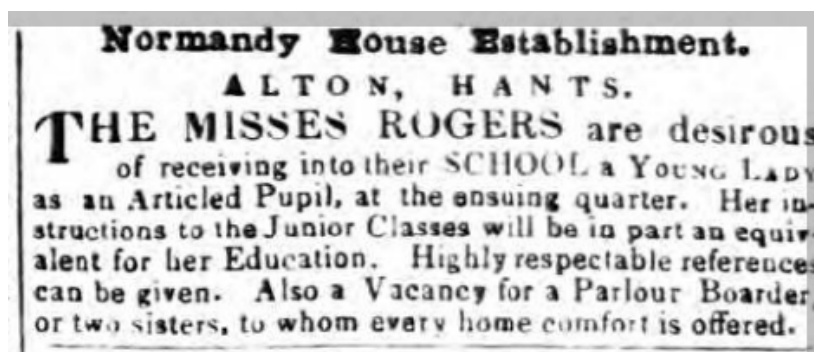


Postcard of Crown Hill, Alton early 1900s - buildings in the centre show approximate location of *Normandy House*, demolished in 1971. Source: Jane Hurst, Curtis Museum, Alton

Seven years later when the building was being auctioned by Messrs. Thomas Baker and Sons, it was described in the *Hampshire Chronicle* of July 12th 1845 as being in a 'capital situation' and having:

'.... an entrance passage, two sitting rooms, large kitchen... scullery, pantry, excellent underground cellar, seven bedrooms, and dressing room, second stairs, and other convenient offices, garden &c.'

By 1840 the school must have been doing well as Louisa advertised for a Pupil Teacher/Governess who would be able to use her work with the junior classes to add to her educational qualifications (to compensate for low wages?):



Hampshire Advertiser September 5th 1840

On the night of the 1841 census (Sunday June 6th), Louisa age 30 (she was 36⁴) and Elizabeth age 25 (she was 28) were at their school in Alton with seven pupils, presumably the boarders:

Sophia Purchase 15, Ann Andrews 15, Eliza Keen 14, Priscilla Newland 14, Eliza Turner 11, Martha Spencer 9, and Emma Rogers 7 (daughter of their brother **John Blyth Rogers** and **Emma Millicent Cobden**).

There was also a governess, Mary Ralf⁵ age 20 (who may have responded to the advertisement of the previous September for an 'articled pupil'); two women described as 'independents': Catherine Richman age 35 and Mary Cobden age 25 (their brother John's sister-in-law); and two servants: Ann Adams age 20, and Charlotte Spiers age 15. Also, in nearby *John Eggar's Grammar School* in Alton were Emma Rogers' brothers Frederick and Willoughby, pupils aged 11 and 10 respectively.

Normandy House Curriculum

Like many schools of that era that catered for the middle-classes, Louisa's curriculum probably comprised of reading, writing and arithmetical skills, as well as other 'accomplishments' suitable for young women to prepare them for life as a wife, mother and member of middle-class society. These included needlework, foreign languages such as French, German and Italian, drawing, music and dance. We can see from Louisa's advertisements that a Parisian accent was regarded as important when speaking French, and that her girls could also learn to play the harp. The syllabus probably would have also included some general knowledge concerning history and geography as well as some religious education. An advertisement in the *Hampshire Advertiser* in March 1845, boasted that:

'.....they have engaged Masters of eminence to assist in teaching the Piano, French, Singing, German, Italian, and the Guitar: also, a highly approved Master for Dancing. Drawing taught in all its various branches.'

Train robbery

In 1843, Louisa and Elizabeth were missing a parcel including books, India rubber, lead pencils and five packets of writing paper, ordered from Messrs. *Relfe and Fletcher*, booksellers of Cornhill, London. It was reported in the *Police Gazette* that the goods, with other packages and tea chests, had been placed on a luggage cart on the train at Nine Elms, Vauxhall and were still secure when reaching Woking. It seemed that soon after leaving Woking, thieves had hidden themselves on the train and disconnected the luggage cart 'at the great hazard of their lives'⁶. A 27-year-old man, Charles Wells, was seen the next day with the Misses Rogers' package and some *Relfe and Fletcher* pencils in his coat pocket. He was reported and apprehended. The court found him guilty and sentenced him to 6 months hard labour. Louisa and Elizabeth eventually received their books and stationery supplies.

Wey House Ladies' Establishment

In 1845, Louisa had considered moving her school to London. An advertisement appeared in the *Hampshire Chronicle* on July 12th that a 'Freehold Dwelling House, in the centre of the town of Alton, late in the occupation of Miss Rogers' was to be auctioned. It is unknown why Louisa considered moving. However, she soon changed her mind, which is revealed in another advertisement of the same date appearing in the *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*:

'Miss Rogers considers it expedient to inform the Public, that, in consequence of an alteration in her plans, and the earnest solicitation of Friends in the neighbourhood, she has abandoned the idea of removing her Establishment to Town...'

Instead, Louisa moved her residence and school further down the road to *Wey House* at 38 High Street, owned by solicitor Thomas Knight. She was keen to emphasise that at

her new establishment, the rooms 'are large and airy' and back onto the River Wey enabling varied 'amusements during the hours of relaxation from study'. She also outlines her curriculum: 'English, French, Botany, Use of the Globes, Elocution, Composition, History, Geography, Mental Arithmetic, with every description of Ornamental Needlework', and the school fees: ' 35 Guineas per Annum, Washing included'. The advertisement also notes that Elizabeth will be instructing the junior pupils.



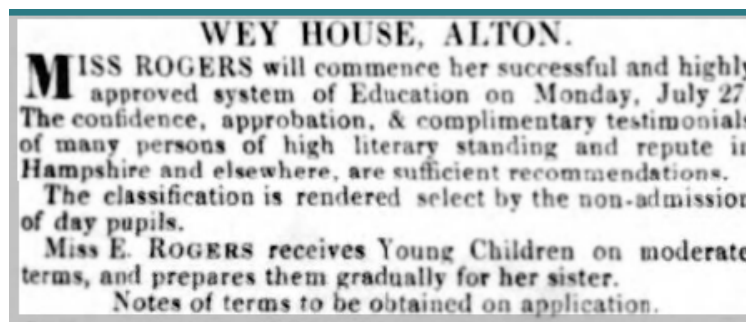
38 High Street Alton, once *Wey House Ladies' Establishment*, run by the Misses Rogers from 1845 to 1854. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014

Building a reputation

Louisa's advertisement also draws on her social connections to attract enrolments by listing her respectable contacts elsewhere in the country:

'Parties are referred, in the West of England , to the Rev. J. Thorold, Rector of Kencot, Oxfordshire (an uncle); in the Metropolis, to Randal J. Waters, D.D. Emmanuel College (Doctor of Divinity, son-in-law of Rev. Thorold); in the North, to Richard Cobden Esq. M.P. (Member of Parliament, her sister-in-law's brother who was enjoying great fame in the fight to repeal the Corn Laws); and the resident Clergy.'

In the days before any standardised curriculum for girls' education, when attracting pupils, it would be advantageous to give an impression of a high-quality education and also promote your social respectability as this advertisement indicates:



Hampshire Chronicle July 18th 1846

Were 'day pupils' regarded as poorer quality students, or was Louisa making a business decision to focus on families that could afford to pay for boarding? She certainly was

trying to create an exclusive reputation. Having the approval of the clergy seemed valuable for promoting your Establishment:

EDUCATIONAL CELEBRATION.—The young ladies of the Misses Rogers' Establishment, Wey House, Alton, held their annual *converzazione* on the 14th instant, in presence of the resident clergy and their respective friends. After a most satisfactory examination in their various branches of study, the musical portion of the celebration ensued, and the music selected for the occasion and the manner in which it was executed, gained high encomiums from the audience.

Hampshire Advertiser June 24th1848

In Louisa's advertisements of December, 1845 she describes her 'System of Education' including attention to physical health as well as academic instruction and a more relaxed daily schedule:

Wey House Establishment for Young Ladies, Alton, Hants.
MISS ROGERS, in announcing to her Friends
and the Public that her
SCHOOL WILL RE-OPEN
on the 26th of January, 1846, begs to call their attention to her System of Education, which includes every solid acquisition, as well as accomplishment, in which she is assisted by first-rate Masters. Desirous of securing the health, as well as the improvement, of her Pupils, she blends exercise with instruction, and has abandoned in her system the formal and fatiguing routine of fixed scholastic hours, thus smoothing the path to learning.
The highest and most satisfactory references will be found on the prospectuses, which can be obtained from the establishment on application, by post, to Miss R.
Terms, including board, with German, French, Drawing, &c. &c. 40 guineas the year.

Hampshire Advertiser December 27th1845

Family tragedies

Over the 1840s and '50s, life presented many challenges for Louisa, Elizabeth and all of the Rogers family. In 1844 their brother Alexander, died at age 28, their father died in 1846, their youngest brother Edmund died of 'brain fever' age 22 in 1849 and in the same year their nephew Willoughby Rogers was reported missing in London. In 1850 elder brother Charles died suddenly, age 49, in Plymouth.

The 1851 census of Sunday March 30th shows Louisa age 46 in West Meon with her mother, Mary Ann age 68 and their maid Sarah Ann Gregory age 20. Elizabeth age 34 is at their school in Alton with two servants: Elizabeth Mills age 18 and Elizabeth Findon age 19; two instructresses: Jane Pamplin age 20, Emily Ogelvey age 24 and their niece Emma Rogers age 17, who was once their pupil, now employed as their governess. There are also 14 female pupils and, their nephew Charles Rogers (son of eldest brother George), a scholar age 12.

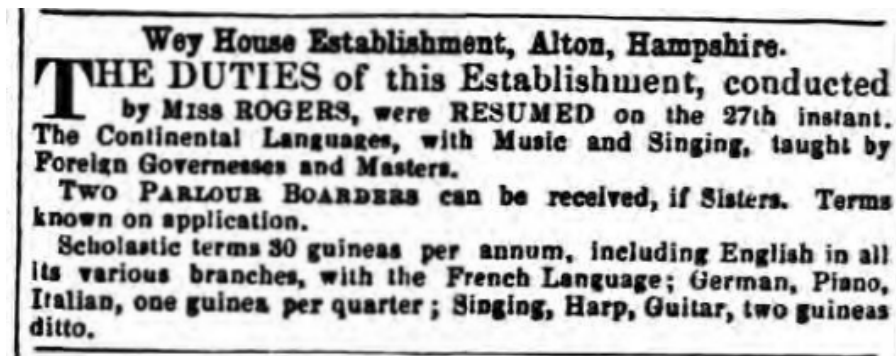
Later that year their brother Alfred, a ship's captain, was murdered at sea in the Straits of Malacca, and his wife Mary Ann (nee Relf) drowned during the siege. Also at that time, the wife of their brother George, was temporarily committed to a lunatic asylum and George who had financial problems as well, was struggling with alcoholism. It was also a period when another elder brother, John, now a widower, was also suffering from alcoholism.

A mother at 41

Over the next few years *Wey House Ladies' Establishment* continued to operate but maybe with some personnel changes. In April 1853 at West Meon, niece Emma married William Henry Cooper, a brewer from Greenwich, and therefore would not have continued her work as a governess at *Wey House*. More significantly in January that year, Elizabeth at the age of 40, married Robert Parker, a local farmer from Wishanger near Headley. The wedding was held in St Anne's Soho, London, where her brother Dr. Joseph Rogers was living. We can assume Elizabeth discontinued teaching, at least for a while as may be seen subsequently, and that Louisa's school kept operating with new staff.

Earlier, in 1847 Louisa and Elizabeth each inherited £200 from their late father's estate and jointly the house and land at West Meon. However, the terms of a codicil to their father's Will, stated that if either sister married or died the other sister would have sole ownership of the West Meon property. So, when Elizabeth married, Louisa became the single owner of her late father's house and land, presumably *The Cedars* at West Meon. By this time her mother had moved to a much smaller, and more manageable residence, *Fir Tree Cottage* in the village.

When Elizabeth at the age of 41, gave birth to her first child, Alice Mary Parker in the summer of 1854, Louisa was still advertising her school:



Hampshire Advertiser July 29th1854

Louisa sells

However, by the end of that year, Louisa, now aged 49, was unwell and decided to give up her school at *Wey House* and auction its contents, her own possessions. An advertisement of December 16th described some of the items:

**WEY HOUSE,
HIGH STREET, ALTON, HANTS.**

*Household Furniture, Piano Fortes, Harp, Organ,
School Requisites, Brewing Utensils, Appendages to
Domestic Offices, Garden Rollers, Tools, and Miscel-
laneous Effects.*

MR. FREDERICK EGGAR is favoured with in-
structions to **SELL** by **AUCTION**, on Wednesday
next, the 20th day of December, 1854, on the premises, at
twelve precisely, without reserve,—The **HOUSEHOLD
FURNITURE**, Musical Instruments, School Desks, and
other Effects, the genuine property of Miss Rogers, who, in
consequence of ill health, is relinquishing the school which
has been conducted by her at the above residence for the
last 17 years; comprising, a set of mahogany dining tables,
with shifting leaves, loo tables, sofa, chairs, lunch tray and
stand, carpets and rugs, window curtains, four-post, tent,
French, and other bedsteads and furniture, beds, mattresses,
paillasses, toilet tables and glasses, chests of drawers, wash-
stands and ware, lamps, school desks and stools, fine toned
pianofortes by *Broadwood* and *Peachy*, harp, four-barrelled
organ, a few articles of china and glass, kitchen and culi-
nary articles, brewing utensils, garden rollers, tools, and
other effects.

The whole to be described in catalogues, to be had one
day previous to the sale (when the property may be viewed)
at the Swan Inn, Alton, and of the auctioneer, **Market-
place, Alton**, who, in consequence of the shortness of the
days, respectfully requests punctual attendance.

Hampshire Chronicle December 16th1854

Rogers & Parker?

An interesting fact is that the *Kelly's Post Office Directory* of 1855 lists in Alton, '*Rogers & Parker, ladies' school, High Street.*' But that year, Elizabeth's second child Robert George Vining Parker was born. Did Louisa and Elizabeth reopen another school after closing *Wey House*? Who does '*Rogers & Parker*' refer to in this directory? Did Elizabeth briefly return to teaching between having her two children, (which would have been difficult seeing as they were born close together) or was there another Rogers and Parker? Of course, the directory may not have been updated from the previous year, but the fact that the name Parker is there suggests Elizabeth or maybe her husband had something to do with the school.

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|--|
| Robinson George, cooper, market place Rogers & Parker, ladies' school, High street Rogers William Augustus, chemist & druggist, & wine & spirit merchant, High street |
|--|

from *Kelly's Post Office Directory* 1855 Louisa and Elizabeth's brother William Augustus is also listed.

Return to West Meon

I have found no evidence that Louisa Rogers continued any school after 1855. A major role for women in the 19th century family was to provide home nursing to the sick and elderly. For Louisa, after teaching, running her own school and living independently for so many years, it would have been a challenge to take on this traditional domestic role. Her world would have narrowed somewhat and become quite monotonous even though she may have not resented it and probably needed a quieter life due to ill health. Through 1856 and 1857, however well or unwell, Louisa still had to assist her elderly

mother Mary Ann when her brother George needed nursing. Mary Ann wrote in her diary:

'George's long illness has almost worn me and Louisa out, indeed I sometimes think it will be too much for her.' George, in his late 50s had to be 'fed like a child and watched day and night'⁷.

Louisa remained at West Meon with her mother for the rest of her life. She died on February 9th 1864 at 58 years of age and was buried in the churchyard at West Meon. Family financial issues delayed the installation of Louisa's tombstone, which troubled her mother, and took many years to be finally completed, and then with an incorrect date engraved on the stone.

Elizabeth's death

The year following Louisa's death Mary Ann and her maid Sarah Ann Gregory, nursed Elizabeth when she was dying from jaundice. Elizabeth has been described as 'demanding and selfish' and tending to her needs would have been very taxing for 82-year-old Mary Ann. However, Elizabeth was not unappreciative as she wrote, two months before her death:

'My dear Mother is a splendid nurse. I only wish you could see how she plans and arranges for an invalid, old as she is she has lost none of the vigour of her mind, dear soul.'⁸

Elizabeth's husband Robert Parker also recognised Sarah's contribution. He gave to her:

'...a pound and a suit of mourning, she deserved it, she did all in her power for poor dear Titty (Elizabeth).'⁹

Elizabeth died at West Meon on November 3rd 1865 and is buried in the West Meon churchyard.

Louisa and Elizabeth were survived by their mother who died 8 years later, and their brothers: William Augustus Rogers, who died in 1866; Frances Slaughter Rogers (d. 1886); James Edwin Thorold Rogers (d.1890); and Richard Norris Gandy (d.1910), and Elizabeth's children Robert and Alice.

The Parkers

Elizabeth's husband Robert Parker died in 1901 at the age of 92. Her daughter Alice did not marry but stayed with her father whilst on the farm and later when he retired to Portsmouth. She died there in 1942. Elizabeth's son, Robert George Vining Parker, married in 1876 Susannah Mary Dare from London. They emigrated to the U.S.A. then settled in New Zealand. Robert had a military career and died in his retirement in 1941. They had 12 children, their eldest, Robert Vining Parker, a draughtsman died on the battlefield in France in 1916. Six others survived the parents, one of whom, Frank Parker, connected with Rogers' descendants in Australia (see my story 'A Family Reunites') and this began a link back to cousins in England.

Ann Hurley

2020

hurleyskidmorehistory.com.au

Notes:

¹ Rogers, Julian C. *The Story of Our Family - The Rogers of Westmeon* 1902

² Rogers, Julian C. *The Story of Our Family - The Rogers of Westmeon* 1902

³ *The Family Papers of J. E. T. Rogers* - The Bodleian Library, Oxford

⁴ Adult age in the 1841 census was usually rounded off to the nearest 5 years. Louisa and Elizabeth seem to have rounded theirs down rather than up.

⁵ She may have been their future sister-in-law Mary Ann Relf who met a tragic death in a mutiny at sea.

⁶ Also reported in the *Railway Times* March 23rd 1843

⁷ Jalland, Patricia - *Death in the Victorian Family* (1996) p99

⁸ Jalland, Patricia - *Death in the Victorian Family* (1996) p99

⁹ Jalland, Patricia - *Death in the Victorian Family* (1996) p100

Other resources:

British Newspaper Archive (British Library)

Dowdall, Daisy - *Educating for Femininity? Reform of Working and Middle Class Girls' Education in Victorian England* (2014)

England Census 1841 and 1851 (Ancestry.com)

Gorham, Deborah - *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (2012)

Hurst, Jane - local historian, Curtis Museum, Alton (notes on WeyHouse)