

'The Father and Mother of Cobden'¹

Millicent Amber 1775-1825

William Cobden 1775-1833



William Cobden and Millicent Amber c1798 miniatures by R. Dudman.
Source: Manchester City Council

Cobdens and Ambers in West Sussex

Our Cobdens have been in Sussex in the Chichester region, particularly the West Dean area, since at least the fifteenth century. They are recorded as having occupations such as yeoman farmers and maltsters, mostly from West Dean but also in Sidlesham. The family names of some of their wives include: Lane, Penicod and Huffman all from the local villages. Our Amber ancestors are mainly from the local market town of Midhurst in the same area, and some are from Cocking and Boxgrove. A common occupation of Ambers was oil leather dressers and maybe one was a glove seller. Wives' family names include Gale and Pullen, also families from West Sussex.



Above and left: St. Andrew's parish church West Dean, West Sussex, where many Cobdens were baptised, married and buried. Photos: Euan McGillivray 2016



Amber family graves at Midhurst church graveyard. Stone on left reads: IN MEMORY OF ANN WIFE OF THOMAS AMBER who died Febr. 25th 1764 Aged 42 years; the other reads: In memory of THOMAS AMBER who died Jun 4th 1781 Aged 64 years SARAH DYER Born Janry. 24th 1756 to RICHARD AMBER Died Janry. 6th 1823. These are ancestors of Millicent Cobden (nee Amber). Photo: Euan McGillivray 2016. The headstones were restored by their descendant Jane Cobden-Unwin in 1902.

William and Millicent marry

William Cobden was born at Heyshott near Midhurst, West Sussex in the old farmhouse *Dunford* and baptised at Midhurst on October 13th 1775. His father **Richard Cobden** (1737-1809) was a yeoman farmer and maltster (aka 'Maltster Cobden') who also owned Bex Mill in Heyshott and held the position of bailiff and chief magistrate at Midhurst. William's mother was **Sarah Lane** (b.1740 Pullborough, Sussex, and predeceased her husband). William was the sixth of seven children, having five sisters, and one brother.



Bex Mill, Heyshott, owned by farmer and maltster Richard Cobden (1737-1809), now a private residence. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014

On July 24th 1798 William married **Millicent Amber** at St. Thomas' Church Portsmouth. Millicent was the third of twelve children of **John Amber** (b.1752), a leather dresser from Midhurst, and **Mary Pullen** (b.c1747). Interestingly, Millicent was baptised on the same day at the same place as William.

Below left: Midhurst parish church where William and Millicent were baptised in 1775. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2016

Below right: St. Thomas' Portsmouth (now Portsmouth Cathedral) where William and Millicent married in 1798. Source: Early 1900s postcard



Why they married at Portsmouth I do not know, but it would have been a more prestigious church than the local one in Midhurst.

Sale of *Dunford Farm*

The Cobdens lived at the old farmhouse *Dunford* until his father's death in 1809. Here they produced the first six of their children: Frederick (1799); **Emma** (1800); Millicent (1802); Richard² (1804); Jane (1806) and Charles (1808). His father's will left William and his four remaining sisters equal shares in the inheritance. So *Dunford* was sold and the Cobdens moved to a smaller farm at nearby Gilder's Oak (also called Guillard's Oak). Here Millicent gave birth to their next three children: Priscilla (1809); Miles (1812); and Henry Andrews (1813).



The old *Dunford Farm*, engraving 1840s. William Cobden was born here in 1775. Source: National Library of Australia

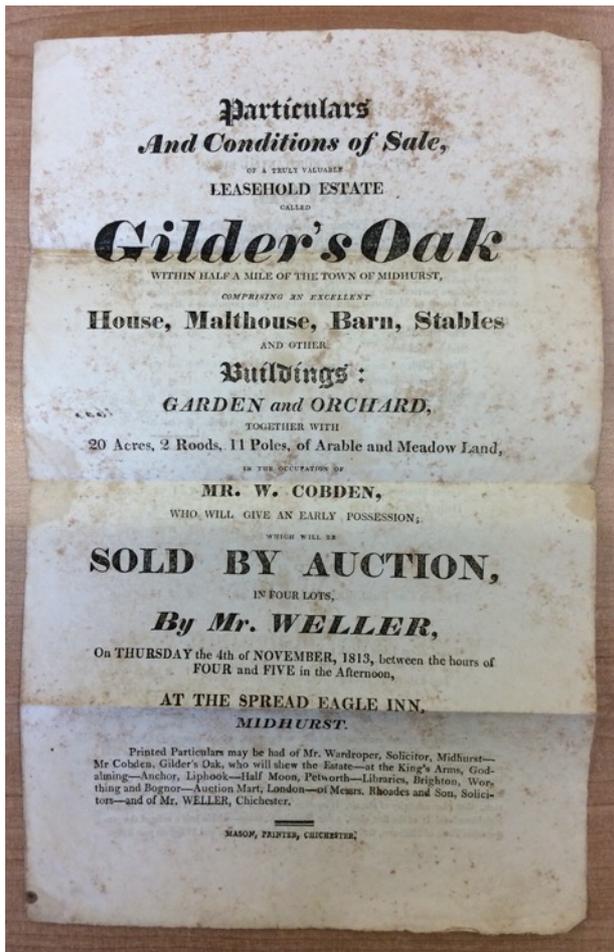
The sale of *Dunford* in 1809 (called *Dunford* and *Walker's farms*) included 11 arable fields, 'a good farmhouse', garden, two barns, cart house, stables, granary, orchard, woodland plantations and an enclosed common. It was auctioned at the *Spread Eagle Inn*, Midhurst on June 29th that year, and sold for £2,970³ plus the timber valued at £1,354. William would have inherited a fifth of this (about £865).

Leaving Sussex

Up until 1815 when the Napoleonic wars ended, most yeoman farmers were doing a good trade mainly due to population growth and inflated domestic prices. However, unlike his father, William was not an astute businessman. Although he has been described as 'kind, affectionate, honest and a good man, he was also described as being 'weak, gullible incompetent' and 'allowed himself to be repeatedly cheated'⁴. So, after only a few years at *Gilder's Oak*, the Cobdens had to sell the property and move, finally, settling at West Meon in Hampshire. They may have stayed for a short time at Hinton Ampner in Hampshire, as this is where their tenth child Mary was born and baptised in 1815.



Gilder's Oak farm house today. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014



Pamphlet describing the property for sale at *Gilder's Oak (Guillard's Oak)* near Midhurst. Source: West Sussex Record Office

Extended family support

At West Meon the Cobdens became tenants of **Mary Ann** and **George Vining Rogers** apparently leasing from them premises to run a shop. Here their eleventh and last child Sarah was born and baptised in 1817. The eldest child Frederick was living in London working as a clerk for his uncle, Millicent's brother-in-law, Robert Hogard⁵ (of *Hogard and Felton*, furriers and lacemen St Paul's Church Yard London). As money was tight, Richard was sent to a grim boarding school in Yorkshire, *Bowes' Hall*, which was paid for by another uncle Richard Ware Cole (a calico printer at Old Change, London). Younger brother Charles was also at *Bowes Hall* for a couple of years before going to *Christ's Hospital* school in London in 1817. All the other children would have been at West Meon with Emma at age 15, employed in the shop - a drapery and millinery business. All the older daughters would have learned sewing and/or millinery to contribute to the small business, and Millicent's connections through her relatives in the textile and related trades in London would have been useful.



A milliner in her shop published in 1804 by R. Philips 71 St Paul's Churchyard London. Source: New York Public Library Digital Collection

A famous son

Richard, the Cobdens' third child was to eventually have an illustrious career as a leader of the Anti-Corn Law League and an MP. His biographer, John Morley, in 1881 described Richard's father, William as:

'a man of soft and affectionate disposition, but without the energy of affairs. He was the gentlest and kindest of men. He was cheated without suspecting it, and he had not the force of character enough to redeem a fortune which gradually slipped away from him.'⁶

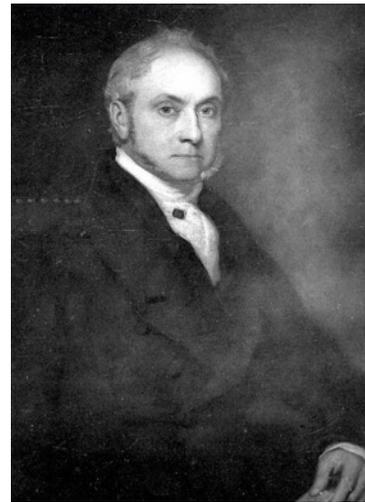
In contrast, Morley describes Millicent Cobden as 'endowed with native sense, shrewdness and force of mind.' As she predeceased William by eight years, he sorely missed her support in his later years. Fortunately, for all the family, Richard with his strong sense of family responsibility, and prudence with money, was able to step in to help whenever necessary.

Richard's later business success was in Manchester and it is in that city's library where we can find two miniature portraits, one of William and the other of Millicent, painted c1798 by R. Dudman. There is another portrait of an older William (artist unknown) painted three years before his death. The sad expression is such a contrast to the confident and boyish image of the earlier miniature.

Cobden letters⁷

It is due to the achievements of their son Richard that we know anything about William and Millicent Cobden. Richard wrote many letters to his family that have been preserved at the West Sussex Record Office. Some are from when Richard was at school and many from his early travels around the country.

William's insecurity and anxiety became evident when Richard wrote to him in 1822 seeking his blessing regarding leaving the employ of his uncle Cole in London and going to Ghent in Belgium where he had the offer of work for another textile company. Richard was very unhappy working for his uncle and let his father know of the unjust treatment he had received from him. But perhaps as this was his parents' brother-in-law who had paid for Richard's education, the Cobdens felt unable to concede to Richard leaving. So, the dutiful son, now 18 years old, did not go. Equally perhaps, their dependence on Richard's income and business connections was also too great.



William Cobden in 1830, unknown artist. Source: Manchester City Council



Richard Cobden c1830
Artist unknown. Source: Manchester Central Library

Father surrogate

All through the 1820s Richard really took over the father role in the family. He was doing well in his job and able to give some financial support to the family when necessary. He writes in February 1823 to William regarding his brother Charles finishing school and needing a suit:

'I shall be able to procure Charles the remainder of his wearing apparel I am glad it is in my power to take upon myself to do supply him with every requisite until the time that he is able to do for himself he is very anxious to come out of the school well clothed for the credit of himself as a monitor amongst his boys & it is a laudable pride which ought to be indulged he will also have to appear before a Committee of the Governors the day after he leaves to be examined in his Studies & to receive a Bible & Prayer book & probably a medal - I shall buy as much blue cloth as will make him a good new suit which I will get Davies to make so that he can appear on those occasions in a respectable manner & he will not be hereafter shy of appearing among his old Schoolfellows - I have a good Sunday suit which I have completely outgrown & which will make him a capital everyday suit of clothes...'

Richard's letters to William show he took responsibility for much of his brothers' education, advising on affordable schools (Richard and other relatives assisting with fees) and appropriate subjects for study. When it came to finding employment for his sons, William left that to Richard too. Richard used his mother's relations in Chichester and his commercial networks in London to find employment for his younger brothers as each left school.

Long journey on foot



Rain Above Dorking 1823
by George Scharf sr.
illustrates travelling on foot
in the 1820s Source: British
Library Prints and
Drawings

On June 12th 1825 William, now aged 50, wrote to his eldest son Frederick⁸, after meeting him at Egham, a town about 40 miles (64 kms) from West Meon:

'My dear Frederick

I must give you a little account of my journey home to Westmeon. I left Egham the next morning after I parted with you & Richard about 8 o'clock I walked on to Bagshot, where intended taking a ride by Coach, first came the Southampton quite full next the Alton came up the road not to return till the next day - then the Gosport Coach quite full I then

walked on to chance it - for Chaise or something else I rode about 2 miles by cart or I walked every step of the way to Westmeon where I arrived about 11 o'clock safe and tired enough I thought if I had Poor Dick with me what would he have done, my feet were very sore indeed I suppose Charles would have walked it like a Man,....'

It should be remembered that in the early 19th century, it was common for most people to travel on foot between towns and villages, not everyone could afford a horse or coach fare. But this journey seems to be excessive. Was this the actions of a man trying to save money on coach fares, or was he just not making sensible decisions? He may have done this more than once, for two years later after he moved to Farnham in 1827, Richard writes to him trying to arrange a family meeting in London:

'.....How far it may be convenient for you to leave Farnham at so short a notice - we know not but if you can contrive it pray do..... - if the weather should be favourable for a walk and you could get as far as Bagshot on foot (*Farnham to Bagshot is about 12 miles*) you would meet many Coaches upon that road and might I dare say get a seat to Town at a cheap rate - you need not be in fear of getting a place after you are as far as Bagshot But we particularly wish you not to walk too far - your effort in that way after meeting us at Egham was very imprudent and we would prefer paying twice the fare rather than you attempting so much again.....'



One of the ten milestones along the London road between Farnham and Bagshot. Photo: Lynda Robinson. Source: Farnham Trust



West Country Mail Coach Leaving Piccadilly, by George Scharf 1829. Illustrates the crowded condition of many coaches not designed to take many passengers. Source: *Jane Austen's World* website

Millicent - 'highly respected'

As is most often in the case for women, we know little of Millicent Cobden other than the description given by Morley. The West Meon shop was run by her, and her elder daughters Emma, Millicent, Jane and Priscilla employed there as they became old enough. But in the mid 1820s, West Meon was suffering from a typhoid epidemic. Many Cobden family letters mention neighbours very ill or dying. Millicent helped her neighbours by nursing a child who had typhoid. But Millicent caught the disease herself.

She had appeared to be recovering, but then had a relapse and died on July 19th 1825.⁹ *The Hampshire Chronicle* of July 25th reported:

On Tuesday died, at Westmeon, Mrs Cobden, wife of Mr William Cobden, of that place. Mrs Cobden had superintended a respectable drapery and millinery business for many years past, and was highly respected by all who knew her. Her remains were interred yesterday evening, attended by a numerous offspring of eleven children, who had been brought up almost entirely by her meritorious and anxious perseverance.
Died this morning at an advanced age Mr

Thankfully this death notice describes her character and occupation rather than just a place and date of death. Interestingly William is only mentioned in relation to her, and it implies his ineffectuality as a father.



West Meon, High Street looking towards the Cross c1901. Source: The Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers

When Millicent was dying, in fear and desperation William wrote to his children, who were either working or at school in London, on June 28th 1825:

'My dear Boys & Girl

I am truly very sorry to inform you your poor dear Mother is very ill and this is her particular wish as well as mine for as many of you to come to Westmeon as can leave London and as soon as possible. I have asked Mr Rogers to tell me his real opinion of your poor dear Mother he has just told me she is great danger I have just wrote(sic) to Emma Jane & Mr Rhoades¹⁰ I expect them here tomorrow we are in very great trouble my dear Children as you may suppose please to tell your Uncles & Aunts know the danger your Mother is in with love to all believe me

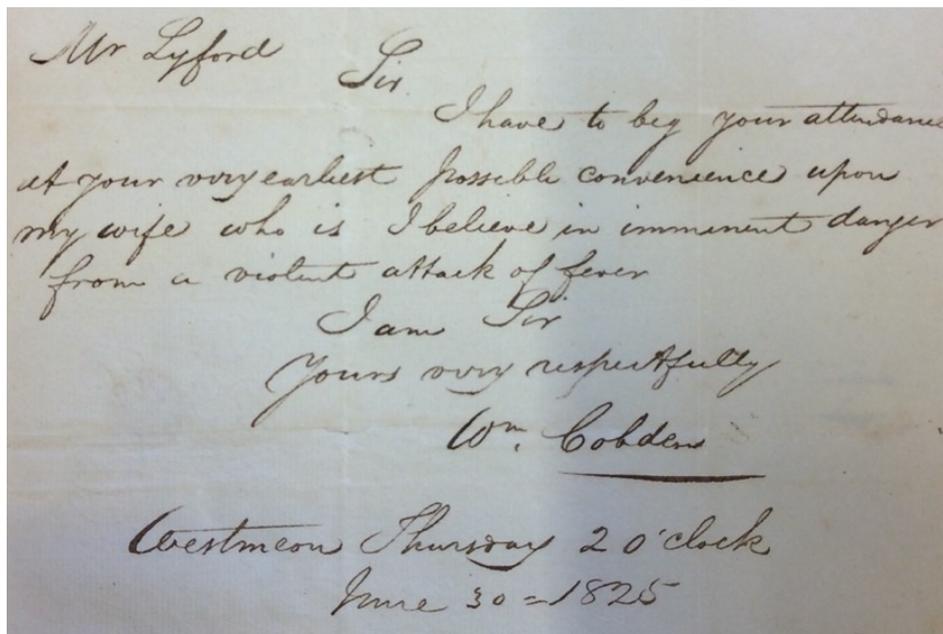
My dear Children ever to
remain your affectionate
Father William Cobden

come as many as you can and as soon as possible

If Emma is at Chichester and Jane at Amberley please to forward Emma immediately with love to Mrs Rhoades & Family
in Haste

Mr Rogers¹¹ has just told me my dear Wife is in great Danger'

Two days later, William urgently writes to Mr Lyford, a surgeon of Winchester:



Mr Lyford Sir. I have to beg your attendance at your very earliest possible convenience upon my wife who is I believe in imminent danger from a violent attack of fever. I am Sir Yours very respectfully Wm. Cobden Westmeon Thursday 20'clock June 30 - 1825

After Millicent's death, William grieving, writes to his brother-in-law Thomas Rhoades in Chichester:

'My dear Sir

I know your generous heart too well to think for one moment you will not sympathise with me in the loss I have sustained by the death of one of the best of wives - poor Mrs Cobden expired on Tuesday evening last after a most painful trial of a months illness which she sustained with astonishing fortitude & it is some consolation to reflect that she died in perfect resignation to the will of her Maker. My children eleven in number were all here & last Friday we performed the last sad office of following their poor Mother to the grave - you will readily imagine the great distress into which this affliction has thrown us I hereby think I could have possibly sustained myself under so severe a trial were it not for the consideration of my family which has now so great a claim upon me the youngest of whom is but seven years old - for their sakes I hope to be able to bear up against this calamity with becoming resignation - my Children are as well as I could reasonably expect with the exception of poor Jane who is again in a very ill state of health - Emma joins me & the rest of my children in best regards to yourself Mrs Rhoades & family & I remain

My dear Sir

yours most sincerely

WC'

William of course suffered deeply from losing Millicent, as did the whole family. The elder daughters Emma and Millicent were his chief support and carers at this time. Emma took over the running of the shop and Millicent took leave from her job as a milliner in London (at her aunt and uncle Hogard's firm) to look after William. Millicent wrote to her aunt Hogard:

'.....My poor Father endeavours to bear his bereavement with becoming fortitude - but notwithstanding his attempt to appear resigned and even cheerful before us - I assure

you it is most distressing to see the inroads that grief has already made in his countenance and every day makes us all more and more alarmed on his account He has for the last four days suffered very much from a violent pain in his chest and we have been apprehensive that he might have another attack of his old complaint he has taken medicines and port wine constantly....'

But with the support of village friends, William seemed to be lifting in spirits. In August Emma writes to Frederick telling him their father is much better and has been kept busy helping friends at a local farm. Millicent returned to London for a short time and Emma was left in charge of the shop and her younger siblings at West Meon.

Delayed tombstone

At the time of Millicent's death, a headstone for her grave was not affordable. But close to the first anniversary of her death, son Frederick must have pressed his father for a headstone at last. William responds to Frederick on July 17th 1826:

'My Dear Fred,
your letter of the 9th I received and am sorry to say on a subject I scarcely know how to answer, but I must say Fred it has scarcely ever been out of my mind, it is that which for months past I have wished to mention to you in London I did not know how to set about it I assure you Fred when I have thought of writing on the subject it was to [sic] much for me to get through a letter God knows Fred poor soul she needs no monuments with us I hope & trust that is truly in our hearts and ever will remain there but I sincerely think it is what we ought to have done it is a respect due I have seen Mr Dyer respecting it but I would wish to see you or Richard before the inscription is wrote it is my wish and your sisters that you will write it in Town as you can all be together and consult on the subject write it and let me have it as Mr Dyer is not a very good speller or grammarian but I hope we shall see you & Richard or one of you soon..... I am sorry we have not been able to send you some money - I hope it will soon get better.....'

Millicent's tombstone reads:

Sacred
to the memory of
Millicent the Wife of
William Cobden
who was born at Midhurst
Sussex the 3rd of September
1775
and died the 19th of July 1825.
Deeply deplored by her
Husband
and a numerous Family
As, in Adam all die, even so in
Christ shall all be made alive.





West Meon Church 1841, watercolour by RHC Ubsdell. The building that existed when Millicent, and later William were buried. The current St John the Evangelist was built in 1843. Source: Hampshire: Discovering the World of Portsmouth Artist RHC Ubsdell Vol 1, Chris Brindle

Hares and apples for Christmas

William expressed great disappointment when at the first Christmas after Millicent's death several of his eleven children were not able to join him on Christmas day. Although he had Emma, Mill, Sarah, Priscilla and Miles at home for the Christmas dinner, Jane, Frederick, Charles and Henry (pupil at Christ's Hospital school) were in London and Mary was visiting relatives at Chichester. William was really missing the company of Richard (who was having to travel for business), as well as the opportunity to discuss family matters such as what to do for Miles' job prospects 'and other matters'. Nevertheless, gifts for their Christmas table were on their way to London, as mentioned in William's letter to Fred, Richard and Charles on December 23rd 1825:

'I have sent a Hare for little Henry a Cake a few Apples Mrs Padwick sends him I will thank you to let him have it as soon as you can Mr Gage gave me the Hare..... We shall put poor Henry in a little Cash, little Sarah & I shall she had four shillings sent her from Chichester she said she should send one to Henry and shall send him one I think her a good Girl to think of her Brother



Presenting the Plum Pudding early 19th century print Source: Jane Austen's World website

The following Christmas of 1826 was also at a difficult time as this was when William and his daughters were in the middle of moving to Farnham and were having trouble selling

the stock from their shop (despite reducing their prices). He wrote to Miles (who now had a job in London) on December 22nd:

'.....I hope you will be moved from you blocking [?] situation soon and get on like a Man like your Brother Charles we have you some apples nuts etc and something for Henry please to let him have what is for him soon - I suppose Miles we must give up all thoughts of seeing any of you Boys this Christmas but I hope Miles I shall see you all this summer at some way or other we must not mind disappointments - the Hare is for Henry please to send Henry the Letter and the other things to him I will send Fred & Richard some Game if I can get any, if I can go into Sussex I should be sure to get some, I have not had much sport this season, I have been with Mr Hicks a few times Corseing [sic] and he has given me three Hares he gave me this one for Henry...'

A Farnham wedding



*St Andrew's Church Farnham from a lithograph published by Messrs Nichols c1852 (tower extended in 1865) Source: *The Story of St. Andrew's Parish Church At Farnham In Surrey* (2006)*

After Millicent's death, his daughter Millicent left her job in London and worked for a short time at nearby Bishop's Waltham. Towards the end of 1826 with the West Meon shop struggling, it was decided they would open a shop in Farnham about 20 miles north-east from West Meon. So, the family reluctantly left the little village to try to improve their economic situation in this busy market town. A happy event, it was hoped, was the wedding of his eldest daughter Emma at Farnham on October 16th 1827. It was here at St Andrew's Church, that Emma, after swearing never to, married **John Blyth Rogers**, a son of their old landlords and friends, the Rogers of West Meon.

Even in this more prosperous town, the Cobdens were still struggling to make a decent living. In preparation for what was the first family wedding, William wanted to make a true celebration but was unable to supply even the basics. He wrote to Frederick a week before the big day:

'what think you Fred of Richard asking Mr Cole for a bottle or two of wine or spirits as we have not a half a bottle of spirits in the House at this time - and I have no doubt myself that he would send some on this Occasion...'

Emma also had to skimp on her wedding outfit, which was supplied in the form of gifts from uncles in the textile trade. As it turned out, the marriage was a disaster, due to John's profligate habits, and I wonder if Emma had felt obliged to marry when she did, so as not to be a burden on her father. Emma and John settled at Droxford, very near West Meon.

No success in Farnham



Castle Street Farnham
c1903 (Valentines
series postcards) With
many medieval and
Georgian buildings, little
would have changed
since the Cobdens were
there in 1827-9
Source: Wikimedia
Commons

The busier more prosperous town of Farnham did not have any positive impact on their millinery and drapery shop as they hoped, and Millicent was very concerned about meeting payments, and worried about how they would get through the coming winter of 1827/28. Even moving to a better residence in Castle Street by the end of the year did not change anything. In 1828 Richard had tried, through family connections, to find William employment as a Coal Meter¹². As this seems to have largely depended on William making some subtle and diplomatic enquiries himself, nothing came of it. Another year on, nothing had changed at Farnham, so in 1829 William and his daughters had to sell up and move again.



'Wretched' Barnet

Frederick was now working as a timber merchant in Barnet (then part of Hertfordshire) and so Richard decided it would be best for William to live with him there, whilst the unmarried daughters moved in with their brothers in London. Sarah, the youngest, was sent to live with Emma at Droxford where she could receive a cheaper education.

Barnet Herts, John Hassell, Picturesque Rides and Walks, 1816-1818 Source: Wikimedia Commons

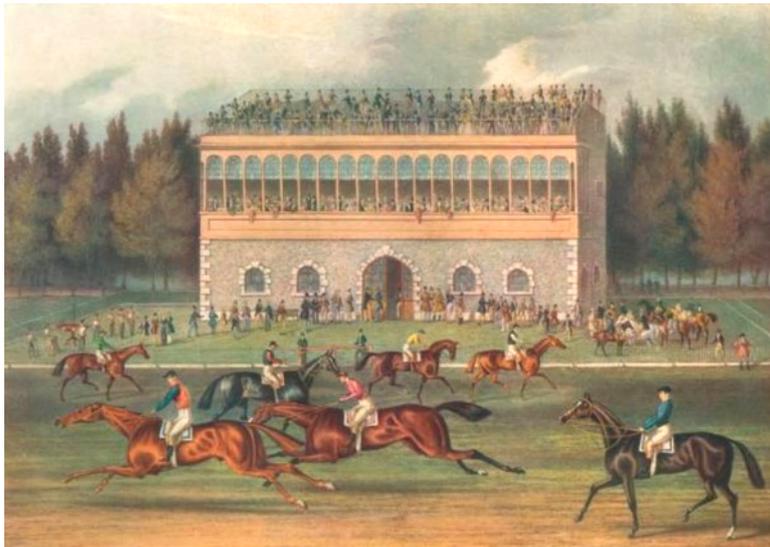
Most tragically, it was during this period that William was to suffer the loss of two of his children. In January 1830 Miles, only 19 years old, died from tuberculosis whilst living in London. Then four months later, Jane aged 25 years, died of the same disease whilst staying with her father and brother at Barnet.

Whilst at Barnet, life was taking its toll on William. After all his worries, and loss of his dependable wife and two adult children, he may have retreated into himself and possibly was showing early signs of dementia. Richard's biographer Morley writes that whilst staying at Barnet, William....

'..... amused a favourite passion by watching the hundred and twenty coaches which each day whirled up and down the great north road.'¹³

Clearly William was not happy at Barnet, referring to it as a 'wretched place'. Richard described the place as 'that abomination of bricks and mortar - that nuisance to a civilised Country named a Town!'¹⁴. But some relief came when William was able to escape for a week or so with Richard (no doubt paid for by Richard) to see old friends in Sussex and Hampshire. In April 1831 they stayed with relatives in Chichester, probably his sister's family, the Rhoades, and he and Richard also had a day or two at the races:

'.... there was a very very large party at the races though the King was not there The racing was very good and Chichester was very full & very gay indeed....' (William to Frederick 22nd August 1831)



Goodwood Grand Stand, Preparing to Start 1836 by RG Reeve, the race course near Chichester William and Richard would have attended. Source: The Print Collector/Getty Images

After Chichester, William travelled to Brighton, Petersfield, West Meon and then Droxford where he was to meet up with Richard again and return to London.

In the care of his daughters

Frederick, was very like his father in personality and unfortunately also in his lack of business ability, and during this time at Barnet he was also unwell. It wasn't before too long that his timber business was failing and Richard was encouraging Frederick to sell up and leave Barnet to join him in Manchester (where unlike the rest of the family, he was enjoying commercial success) and to bring William with him. However, for whatever reason, when Frederick went to Manchester in December 1832, William instead moved in with Millicent and Priscilla in London. Perhaps Frederick could see what Richard, in his enthusiasm for Manchester, could not, that William was becoming ill and increasingly frail.

Millicent and Priscilla consulted doctors who recommended William needed fresh air and quiet. The only place to go was back to Hampshire to convalesce in the countryside and with old friends nearby. On Wednesday May 15th William went on his last journey, to stay with his daughter Emma at Droxford. Millicent writes from London on the following Saturday to Frederick in Manchester:

'My dear Fred,

I am happy to tell you that our dear father left Town on Wednesday I most sincerely hope that the country will restore him. It is I think the only chance medicine appears to be of little service to him as we could see him grow weaker & thinner every day, a few days before he left town he could not even shave himself so you may imagine how very much he is reduced unfortunately our poor Fathers spirits are very much depressed which is very much against his recovery, but my dear Fred we must trust in Him who alone can restore him again to us & I trust that our united prayers will be heard.....'

After William arrived at Emma's in Droxford, Millicent continues:

'.....we heard from Emma yesterday she says my Father was very much fatigued from his journey but that he was rather recovered from the effects on Thursday when she wrote that he appears to enjoy the Country very much & is much pleased with his rooms, she says John can scarcely give his opinion yet but he does not think his lungs affected, but considers him seriously ill, and that he will require as much care and attention as an infant, but at present he thinks he will recover with very great care I fear poor Emma in her state (*she was pregnant*) will not be capable of giving him that attention which he requires indeed I think she ought not to be with an invalid very much, but I am anxiously looking forward to Richards visit as he will then visit Droxford and see what is requisite to be done, and if necessary will I am sure arrange for one of us to be with him, all the Medical Men that have seen him say that he should have country air quiet & very great attention & this is also my serious opinion....'

It was Millicent who went down to Droxford to assist her sister. But William deteriorated further. Richard reports back to Frederick on June 3rd:

'.....Our poor dear excellent father is just in the same state as he has been for the last few days but rather weaker - His decline has been so sudden that it appears almost as if his whole frame has collapsed is quite a skeleton Yet thank God most fervently that the poor soul has not from the first suffered the slightest pain or uneasiness - I am at a loss to account for the change his lungs appear good - his cough is strong & he can yet draw as long a breath as ever - he is lethargic to a greater degree than you would suppose possible - he is just conscious of my presence & can comprehend perhaps one short question & then he is as unconscious as a child of all you say to him & still he is awake

Mill is at Droxford - be assured the poor dear soul will be well attended to - Do not hope - I fear he cannot live two days.....'

Then Emma writes on June 10th:

My dearest brothers,
although our dear father is still alive we all think it improbable he can survive another day indeed in his present state both Richard and myself most fervently pray God will be pleased to take him quickly. The abscess has broken and discharges so much that a



Miller's Cottage, Droxford. The home of William's daughter Emma where William died in 1833. Photo: Matthew Hill 2018

strong person would almost sink. John was going to write tonight but was sent for out and he desired I would not lose this post as it would be impossible to keep him more than two days and he thinks Frederic should not lose an hour in getting to London, he takes no nourishment now and his almost unconscious of every thing. We will write to you by tomorrow's post but pray my dear Frederic leave Manchester immediately
God bless you all
EMR
Monday night 1/2 past 8

William Cobden died at age 58 on June 15th 1833, at Emma's home in Droxford. His body was taken to West Meon where he was buried next to his wife Millicent.

Burials in West Meon churchyard

In Arthur Mee's *The King's England - Hampshire* (1939) he entitles his essay on West Meon: *The Father and Mother of Cobden*. In it he writes:

'...the churchyard hides in the grass three¹⁵ headstones bearing well-known names. On two of the stones, standing side by side and made beautiful with decoration, are the names of William and Millicent Cobden. These two peaceful sleepers had a son whom they christened Richard, born to them when living in Sussex in 1804 in the old home at Heyshott...'

In 2018 I decided to search for these graves, even though many of the old headstones in the churchyard of St John the Evangelist are illegible. I wandered alongside one of the churchyard walls and had nearly given up when I saw two graves side by side that had modestly decorated headstones. On close examination I could just make out William's name but not much else. My suspicions were confirmed in the next couple of days at the West Sussex Record Office in Chichester, when I discovered an old photograph of the graves and a transcription of the memorials (see Millicent's one above). William's tombstone reads:

Sacred to the Memory of
William Cobden
who was born at Midhurst
September 30th 1775 and Died
at Droxford June 15th 1833
Also to the memory of
Miles Jouning
Who died in London
January 22nd 1830 Aged 19 years
And of Jane
Who died at Barnet May 25th 1830
Aged 25 years
Son & Daughter of William &
Millicent Cobden





St John the Evangelist Churchyard at West Meon with the graves of William and Millicent Cobden in the foreground. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2018



Above: William and Millicent's graves in 1901. St John the Evangelist Churchyard at West Meon. Source: West Sussex Record Office

Left: the same graves in 2018. Photo: Euan McGillivray

See my story **The Australian Cobdens** for more about their son Henry Andrews Cobden.

hurleyskidmorehistory.com.au

Notes:

¹ Mee, Arthur - *Hampshire with the Isle of Wight - The King's England series* (1939) (In the same essay the Cobden's landlord, George Vining Rogers, is mentioned.)

² The town of Cobden in Western Victoria was named after him, and the town of Bright in Victoria after his close associate and friend John Bright.

³ for a relative value in today's money see

<https://www.measuringworth.com/> and <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result>

⁴ Hinde, Wendy - *Richard Cobden, A Victorian Outsider* (1987) p1

⁵ Robert Hogard married Millicent's sister Anne Amber

⁶ Morley, John - *The Life of Richard Cobden* (1903) p3

⁷ All the letters are quoted with their original punctuation (or lack of), capitalisation, underlining and spelling. Additional information I have included in italics in brackets. The letters are all to be seen at the West Sussex Record Office, Chichester

⁸ Frederick had recently returned from working in the USA for several years

⁹ According to *The Cobden Family 1313-1903* by Agnes Rogers (at the West Sussex Record Office), Millicent died at Fir Tree Cottage in West Meon. This house belonged to the Rogers and it was where Mary Ann Rogers died in 1873.

¹⁰ Thomas Rhoades, a solicitor and Mayor of Chichester, married William's sister Sarah Cobden

¹¹ George Vining Rogers Doctor of West Meon and their landlord

¹² Coal meter - A person who assesses the weight or volume of quantities of coal - an important position of authority at that time

¹³ Morley, John - *The Life of Richard Cobden* (1903) p21

¹⁴ A letter from Richard in Manchester to Frederick in Barnet April 12th 1832 trying to encourage Fred to relocate.

¹⁵ The other headstone referred to was that of Thomas Lord, founder of Lord's Cricket Ground

Other resources:

British Newspaper Archive (British Library)

England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538-1975 (Ancestry.com)

England, Select Marriages, 1538-1973 (Ancestry.com)

Foster, J.J. - *Chats on Old Miniatures* (1908) <http://gutenberg.polytechnic.edu.na/4/7/5/1/47512/47512-h/47512-h.htm> - Page 253

Gravel Roots <http://www.gravelroots.net/amber.html#index>

Howe, Anthony and Bannerman, Gordon - *The Letters of Richard Cobden* (2007)

Orbell, John - *Cobden in History* <http://homepages.phoncoop.coop/cobden/index.html> (2009)

Richardson, Ted - Cobden descendant and researcher

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

Trove (National Library of Australia)