

The Trials of a Long Life

Mary Ann Blyth 1783-1873

George Vining Rogers 1777-1846

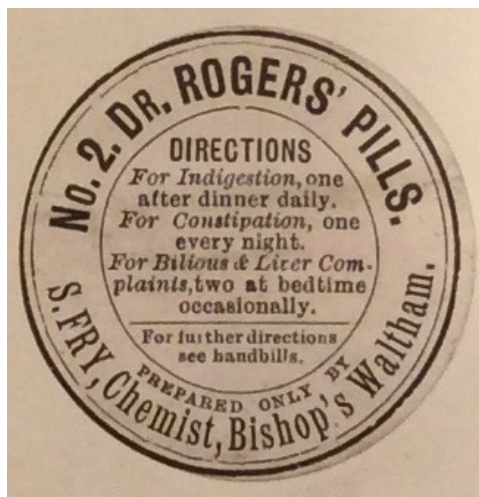
Surgeon, apothecary and man-midwife

George Vining Rogers was born at Droxford Hampshire in 1777, the fifth child of **Elizabeth Parry** and **William Rogers**. His father was a doctor and surgeon, extremely religious and a little eccentric. George was brought up in a strict household where life was regulated according to his father's religious habits – church twice a day and bible readings after lunch. One of his older sisters had been adopted out from birth, two other sisters had 'unfortunate marriages', and his youngest sister died at 16 years of age.

His eldest brother William became a surgeon like their father and George followed in this profession also. It is not known where George received his education, but it probably was at nearby Bishop's Waltham where several of his sons went to school. His professional educational details are not known, except that he had a qualification from Apothecaries' Hall, London and attended the lectures of the renowned 19th century surgeon Sir Astley Cooper as was attested to on a certificate dated January 20th 1801. He was also a 'man-midwife'. But medicine was a crude science and cruel practice in those days. The techniques and implements of surgery and medicine were primitive: no anaesthetics, stethoscopes nor speculums, few scientifically prepared drugs, no clinical records and the use of the lancet was common. After surgery many patients died from septicaemia due to the unhygienic conditions and methods of the time.



George Vining Rogers 1777-1846. Source: *The Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers*



Dr Rogers' Pills were still being sold in 1903 at Bishop's Waltham. Source: *The Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers*

BISHOP'S WALTHAM, 1802.

G. V. ROGERS,
Surgeon, Apothecary, & Man-Midwife,

RETURNS Thanks to the Inhabitants of the above Town and Neighbourhood, for the many Favours he has already experienced from them, during the few Months he has been settled in it, and hopes, by an unre-mitted Attention, to be called on in future as often as necessary to render them Medical Assistance, which he shall always be happy to do, in the most expeditious Manner, and on the most reasonable Terms.

From the extensive Share of Practice he has had in His Majesty's Service for near 7 Years, both in Naval and Military Hospitals, and also in a Regiment of Militia to which he belonged 2 Years, besides attending the largest Hospitals and most eminent Professors of Surgery and Midwifery in London, as appears by his Certificates, he is emboldened to esteem himself qualified to undertake any Case or Accident that might be submitted to his Care and Attention.

He gives Attendance on the following easy Terms:—

Inoculation for the Small Pox, (ready Money)	s. d.
Midwifery to the Poor, and within a reasonable Distance, (ready Money)	10 6 each
Ditto to others proportionable to Circumstances, Distance, &c. from	10 6 each
Attendance to visit Patients, not exceeding 4 Miles, in the Day Time, - - - - -	15 0 to 1 1 0 each
	2 6 each

N. B. Mr. R. for the better and easier Accommodation of Patients, will attend at the House of on Mondays and Thursdays, and at the House of on Tuesdays and Saturdays, between the Hours of 12 and 4, when no Attendance will be charged to Patients in the Place at those Times, the Poor will have Advice given them at all Times gratis.

☞ A Supply of Medicines kept at each House.

Messrs. Harding, Printers, Gosport.

Left: Advertisement for George Vining Rogers' practice at Bishop's Waltham 1802. Source: *The Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers*



Apothecaries' Hall, London. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014



Mary Ann's family

Mary Ann Blyth was the daughter of **John Blyth**, a petty officer in the navy, from Corstorphine near Edinburgh, Scotland. His grandson, **John Blyth Rogers**, described him as 'a man of strong character with the peculiarities, not always pleasing, of a British Jack Tar.'¹ He died on March 29th 1818 and is buried in the Gillingham parish churchyard, Kent. Mary Ann's mother was **Mary Fletcher** from Battle in Sussex. When widowed she lived at Bishop's Waltham with relatives. She was known to have 'a violent temper and strong prejudices'². Late in life she suffered dementia and died at 74 years of age and was buried on March 28th 1829 at Battersea.

Mary Ann Rogers, nee Blyth. Portrait taken at T & G Shrimpton, Broad Street Oxford 1860s. Source: *The Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers*

Mary Ann had a brother John who died when only 14 years old. He was a midshipman on *The Africa* and died in 1796 at sea, near Cuba, from yellow fever. Mary Ann's grandmother's family name was Pym and that family came from Pevensey.

Young lovers

When Mary Ann was 15 her family lived in the Parish of Alverstoke, in Hampshire. She was sent to a school run by Miss Mainwaring at Basingstoke, however Mary Ann did not complete her education. According to Mary Ann herself, while still at school she had a lover named Hoskins, who was soon displaced by the 'good-looking young Army surgeon'⁸ George Vining Rogers.

When not much more than 20 years of age, George became an army surgeon attached to Portchester Castle which at that time was full of French prisoners of war. An outing for the day was to come to the castle to purchase handicrafts from the prisoners. Perhaps this is how George and Mary Ann met.



Portchester Castle prisoners selling their handicrafts. Painted in 1813 by Captain Durrant. Source: Hampshire County Council. Provided by Hampshire Cultural Trust.



Portchester Castle today. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2018

Teenage bride

On February 5th 1799 Mary Ann married George at Kingston Church near Portchester Castle. George was 22 years old and Mary Ann was only 15. The marriage was probably without the parents' consent and she could not have known George for more than a few months. The young couple moved to Shanklin on the Isle of Wight and on February 4th 1800 Mary Ann gave birth to the first of 16 children, George Vining.



portsmouth.co.uk

The next year they had twin boys John Blyth and Charles Fletcher who were inconveniently born half an hour apart at Gad's Hill in Gillingham, Kent. There are two explanations of how Mary Ann came to be at Gad's Hill, over 200 kms (about 130 miles) by road today from Shanklin. The first is that she was on her way to visit her father John Blyth where he worked at nearby Chatham

Dockyard. The other is that she was on her way to visit her uncle Samuel, a chief constructor at the Sheerness dockyard, past Gillingham on the Thames estuary.

West Meon

By 1802 George had begun a private practice and settled at Bishop's Waltham and here in 1804 their next child William Augustus was born. After only about 12 to 18 months their first daughter Louisa was born at West Meon in 1805, to where they probably moved after Charles Heron's death (Charles, a great-uncle of his mother, left a medical practice there that George's father took over for a while.) The first house they occupied there was 'adjoining the present schools'⁴. Here it was probably where their next child Frederick Heather was born in 1808. In c1809 when Mary Ann Heron was born they moved to a house 'now the Post Office near the Cross'⁵. By 1811 when Francis Slaughter was born they had moved to *The Cedars* in Doctor's Lane. The house is described by their grandson Julian Rogers in 1902:

'The house which was then little better than a two storeyed cottage comprised four small rooms on each floor. It was built about 1770 (and) was purchased by our grandfather for the modest sum of £400, including the meadow. To the right and left of the front door were two sitting rooms. The back portion of the present drawing room was the kitchen, and what subsequently became the surgery, a store room. The present central hall was added as a kitchen by my grandfather, the old kitchen being converted into a dining room to meet the needs of his growing family. Its former use is clearly indicated by square marks in the floor and ceiling of the bedroom storey representing the opening necessary for drawing up the machinery of the pump into the roof above when repairs were needed. The present kitchen was added as a scullery at a still later date, as well as the present staircase annexe which served as the means of access to the servant's bedroom. There is nothing to show when the storeroom was converted into a surgery, but the substructure of the hearth shows that the room in its original state had no fireplace and was not designed as a living room.'⁶



The Cedars, West Meon, home of George and Mary Ann Rogers and family from c1808



Above left: c1860s Emily Curtis Rogers (1st wife of Francis S Rogers) on far side of carriage, probably Laetitia Rogers at tailboard. Source: *The Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers*. Above right: c1901 with Julian Rogers, relatives and staff. Source: *The History of our Family- the Rogers of West Meon* by Julian Rogers 1902. Right: 2018 Photo: Euan McGillivray



Sixteen children



A page from a booklet belonging to Mary Ann where she lists all her 16 children's birthdays. Source: *The Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers*

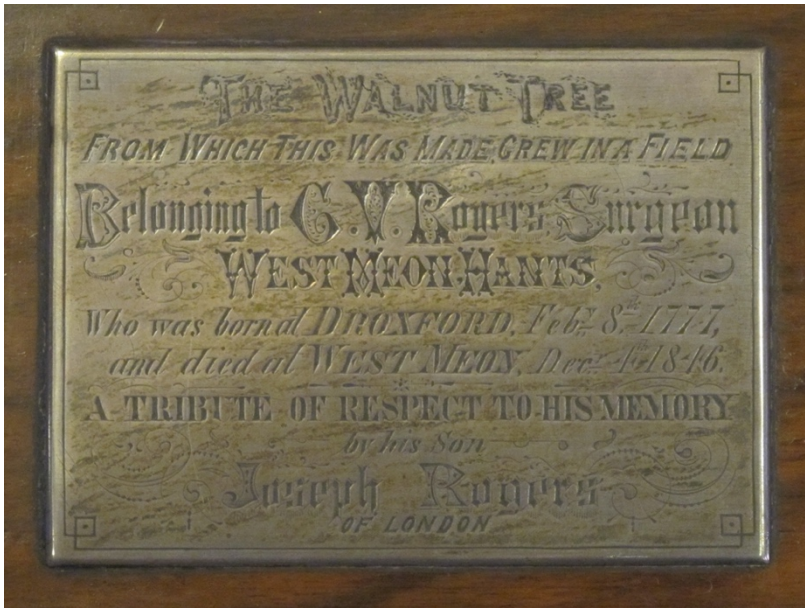
Almost every year until 1827, whilst living at *The Cedars*, George and Mary Ann added a new baby to their family: Their ninth child was Henry born in 1812, then followed Elizabeth (1813), Alexander (1816), Alfred (1818), Joseph (1820), James Edwin Thorald (1825), Richard Norris (c1826) and Edmund Lyne (1827). Their finances must have been stretched bringing up 16 children on the income from a country medical practice in a time when the cost of living was particularly high. Yet seven boys were educated in medicine: George, John, Frederick, Alexander, Joseph and Edmund; three in commerce: Charles, William and Henry; two in the church: James and Richard; and one, Alfred, in the navy. James Edwin Thorold was a clergyman and later a renowned economist and historian of agriculture. He was also a professor of Political Economy at Oxford University, as well as being a Member of Parliament. Joseph Rogers became an eminent doctor and Poor Law Reformer helping greatly improve conditions in workhouse infirmaries. Her daughters Louisa and Elizabeth conducted a school at nearby Alton.

Cobden connection

Some extra income could be made through leasing some property, and in 1814 the Cobden family from Heyshott in Sussex were tenants of the Rogers, leasing a shop from them. Their daughter **Emma Cobden** later married the Rogers' son John, and Emma's famous brother Richard became a close friend and associate of James who was to give the sermon at Richard Cobden's funeral in 1865. According to Anthony Howe in his introduction to *The Letters of Richard Cobden*: James 'introduced Cobden to collegiate and university life' and was 'much influenced by Cobden's ideas.'⁷

Death of George

The working life of George Vining Rogers was a very busy one as his practice extended over a large area of countryside. During one week, when in his 60s, George had travelled over 300 miles on the rough roads probably on horseback as was his usual mode of transport. This resulted in a paralytic seizure that caused his death on December 5th 1846. He had also suffered paralysis some years earlier. His son Francis was at his deathbed. He was dearly loved and respected by his family. After his death his son Dr. Joseph Rogers dedicated a lectern to his father in the King's College Chapel, London:



The lectern plaque at King's College Chapel, London. It reads: 'The walnut tree from which this was made grew in a field belonging to G.V. Rogers Surgeon, West Meon Hants., who was born at Droxford Febr. 8th 1777 and died at West Meon Dec. 4th 1846. A tribute of respect to his memory by his son Joseph Rogers of London'. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014

Right: The lectern dedicated to George Vining Rogers at King's College Chapel, London. Source: kingscollectionns.org



Far right: George Vining Rogers watercolour date and artist unknown. Source: *The Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers*



A description of George from his grandson Julian Rogers:

'He had a vein of sternness in him but was kind and affectionate. He was indefatigable in his work, inflexible in duty, and imbued with a deep religious sentiment which permeated all he said and did.... Those who knew him describe him as distinguished by an old-fashioned courtesy and gravity of manner which inspired general respect'⁸.

He was a religious man, with an interest in the preaching of John Wesley. Apparently, he even invited Dissenters home to tea which Mary Ann disapproved of.

Death in the Victorian Family

Mary Ann was the major support for her family. In July 1828 she went to London to nurse her dying son Frederick at the home of Mr. Love, surgeon at 10 Gilbert St.

Grosvenor Square. Frederick had been studying medicine there. He died on August 2nd. Pat Jalland's book *Death in the Victorian Family* (1996) contains many references to Mary Ann Rogers' role in nursing many of her adult children:

'At the age of 74 in 1856-7 Mary Ann Rogers and her daughter Louisa nursed her eldest son George Vining Rogers, an alcoholic apothecary, for nine months. "George's long illness has almost worn me and Louisa out, indeed I sometimes think it will be too much for her...[George was] obliged to be fed like a child and watched day and night, you cannot conceive the trouble and heavy expense he is to me." Mary Ann concluded that at her advanced age "it is a sore grievous trial".⁹

Nearly a decade later, at the age of 82 in 1865, she nursed her daughter Elizabeth, a school teacher, who was gravely ill with jaundice, but known to be demanding and selfish. Two months before her death, Elizabeth paid tribute to her mother's nursing skills: '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.'¹⁰



Mary Ann Rogers 1860s Source: *The Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers*

An ageing Mary Ann felt the strain and loneliness of having lost so many of her children. She expressed this in letters to her son James Edwin Thorald Rogers:

'there is no youth in the family now.....I find it very dull at times I am getting quite an old woman and cannot get out in the cold weather but I should not complain I can read and work which many cant at my age I wish you had a good living near me then I could see the dear children often I often think of the little dears.'¹¹

Mary Ann Rogers is described by her grandson Julian Rogers as 'a tall and stately woman with an air of command'¹², who never let her maids forget she was in charge. Julian also wrote 'her mental endowments were probably greatly superior to her husband's, and it was undoubtedly from her that her children derived their intellectual powers, which, taking them as a family, were far above the average, though one or two fell short of the general standard'¹³. In her religious views she was 'on the side of authority, of conformity to settled principles, and, not less from honest conviction than from a certain social aloofness, she regarded all amateur shepherding (ie. non-conformists and dissenters) with absolute abhorrence.'¹⁴



*Fir Tree Cottage, West Meon, home of Mary Ann Rogers. Far left: 2014 Photo: Euan McGillivray. Right: c1901 Source: *The Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers**

Mary Ann's will

Mary Ann spent her last years in *Fir Tree Cottage* in West Meon. By the time of her death Mary Ann had only a small amount of money to leave her children. However she had listed all her possessions that were to be left to various family members: a barometer, a looking glass, a brooch containing hair of one of her dead children, an easy-chair, a rosewood tea-caddy, linen sheets, shifts, night gowns, under petticoats, a Chinese work-box, a fender and hearth brush, a little tea cup, a wash stand and foot-bath, as well as other china, furniture, clothes and kitchen utensils.

Mary Ann outlived her husband by 27 years and was survived by only five of her sixteen children. She was suffering from diarrhoea for four days before her death on January 3rd 1873 at West Meon. She was 90 years old and is buried in the West Meon churchyard of St John the Evangelist.

The West Meon Cross

In September 1901, the last surviving of their 16 children, Reverend Richard Norris Gandy¹⁵ erected a Memorial Cross at West Meon dedicated to his parents. A report in the *Hampshire Chronicle* of September 7th described the event:

'A very interesting event took place in the parish on Wednesday afternoon. In the centre of the village is a triangular piece of ground known from time immemorial as "The Cross," and in bye-gone days a wooden cross used to stand there..... A very handsome stone cross has now been erected by the Rev. R. N. Gandy..... in memory of the late Dr. and Mrs. Rogers..... Dr. Rogers practised in the village for more than forty years, and was much loved and respected by the inhabitants. The structure was designed by Mr. C. Harrison Townsend of Great George Street Westminster, and the work was executed by Messrs. Farmer and Brindley, of Westminster Bridge-road.....



The West Meon Cross 2014. Photo: Euan McGillivray

Large numbers of people gathered to witness the event. Many members of the Rogers family were present.....'

The article then described the details of the religious service held at the unveiling, including bible readings, hymns sung by the church choir, and speeches. It then continued:

'The clergy, choir and the relatives (about thirty in number) then proceeded to the churchyard, where the graves of the family were visited. The memorial stones were beautifully decorated with flowers.....'

More hymns, blessings and prayers were performed before they all proceeded to the church. Then, 'Every old person over 60 years of age was presented with a half-crown in commemoration of the event. The Rogers family has been medically connected with Westmeon for 130 years, four generations having successfully practised medicine in that place.'

Quite an event! The photographers Emily and Ethel Pickering of Petersfield were employed to record the family gathering:



The Rogers family gathering for the dedication of the West Meon Cross in 1901. Rev. Richard Norris Gandy is the large white bearded man seated to the right of centre, the last of George and Mary Ann's children. Others include grandchildren, great grandchildren and in-laws. Photo: Emily and Ethel Pickering of Petersfield. Source: *The Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers*



Memorial cross at West Meon erected by Richard Norris Gandy to honour his parents. It reads: 'George Vining Rogers 1777-1846 More than 40 years a medical practitioner in West Meon, Mary Anne Rogers his wife 1783-1873'. Designed by C. Harrison Townsend, Great George Street, Westminster. Photos: Euan McGillivray 2014



Left: Graves of George Vining and Mary Ann Rogers and family members, St John the Evangelist Churchyard West Meon. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2018. Below: the same graves in 1901 adorned with flowers. Photo: E and E Pickering. Source: *The Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers*





The beautiful St. John the Evangelist churchyard at West Meon. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014



St John the Evangelist church West Meon in c1901. Photo: E & E Pickering, Petersfield. Source: *The Family Papers of J.E. T. Rogers*

Ann Hurley

2020

See my story **A Family Disintegrates** for more about their son John Blyth Rogers.

hurleyskidmorehistory.com.au

Notes:

¹ Rogers, Julian - *History of Our Family (Rogers of West Meon) 1451-1902* (1902) p55

² Rogers, Julian - *History of Our Family (Rogers of West Meon) 1451-1902* (1902) p55

³ Rogers, Julian - *History of Our Family (Rogers of West Meon) 1451-1902* (1902) p56

⁴ Rogers, Julian - *History of Our Family (Rogers of West Meon) 1451-1902* (1902) p52

⁵ Rogers, Julian - *History of Our Family (Rogers of West Meon) 1451-1902* (1902) p52

⁶ Rogers, Julian - *History of Our Family (Rogers of West Meon) 1451-1902* (1902) p52

⁷ Howe, Anthony - *The Letters of Richard Cobden Vol. 1* (2007) pxxii

⁸ Rogers, Julian - *History of Our Family (Rogers of West Meon) 1451-1902* (1902) p58

⁹ Jalland, Pat *Death in the Victorian Family* (1996) p99

¹⁰ Jalland, Pat *Death in the Victorian Family* (1996) p99

¹¹ Jalland, Pat *Death in the Victorian Family* (1996) p147

¹² Rogers, Julian - *History of Our Family (Rogers of West Meon) 1451-1902* (1902) p59

¹³ Rogers, Julian - *History of Our Family (Rogers of West Meon) 1451-1902* (1902) p59

¹⁴ Rogers, Julian - *History of Our Family (Rogers of West Meon) 1451-1902* (1902) p60

¹⁵ In 1858 Richard married Barbara Gandy in Kendal, Cumbria. Her father James Gandy is listed in The Peerage as a Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant of Westmorland. In accordance with James's wishes, stated in his will of 1857, due to having no male heirs, Richard was required to change his surname to Gandy. To do this, application had to be made to the Queen for permission, which was granted. (ref: *The London Gazette* 28th January 1859)

Other resources:

19th century medical profession <https://janeaustensworld.wordpress.com/2008/05/17/the-physician-in-the-19th-century/>

A History of the County of Hampshire: Volume 3 Parishes: West Meon, William Page ed. (1908)

Apothecaries <https://www.apothecaries.org/family-history/>

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

England & Wales, National Probate Calendar - Index of Wills and Administrations (Ancestry.com)

England and Wales census records (Ancestry.com)

Birth Death and Marriage certificates - General Register Office England

Hill, Matthew - Droxford UK, local historian

Jacobs, Robyn and Andrew - West Meon residents

Mee, Arthur *Hampshire with the Isle of Wight* The King's England series (1939)

Parish records - Hampshire (Ancestry.com)