

A Family Reunites

The children of Emma Millicent Cobden and John Blyth Rogers

Frederick William b1829
Willoughby John b1830
George Vining 1832 - 1910
Emma Melicent 1833 - 1920
Richard Charles b & d 1835

Motherless children

It was at Droxford, Hampshire, in May 1836, that **Emma Millicent Rogers** (nee Cobden) died of consumption (tuberculosis) at the age of only 36. She left four young children: Frederick William aged 7, Willoughby John aged 6, **George Vining** aged 4, and Emma Melicent aged 2. Their father, **John Blyth Rogers**, the local Droxford medical practitioner, already having difficulty with huge debts and alcohol addiction, could not cope after his wife's death and it was left up to the children's grandparents and other relatives to step in to educate and care for them.

With Emma's parents both dead, and her brothers and sisters either unmarried, living elsewhere in the country or traveling, the remaining grandparents, **George Vining Rogers**, a medical practitioner, and his wife **Mary Ann Rogers**, took charge of John and Emma's four children. George and Mary Ann lived at *The Cedars* in nearby West Meon and children were no novelty at their house. They had raised 16 children of their own and in 1836 their youngest, Edmund Lyne was only 9 years old. Presumably all four of Emma and John's children went to live with them at *The Cedars*, and Emma's Cobden relatives gave some financial support. George and Mary Ann would have also felt some sense of responsibility as it was their son who had been such a disastrous parent.



The Cedars, West Meon c1860 showing Rogers' family members: Francis S. Rogers (the children's uncle) and his wife Emily on far side of carriage, also probably a cousin, Laetitia Rogers at tailboard, and a groomsman. This was the home of Emma and John's children with their grandparents in the 1830s and '40s. Source: The Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers

John Eggar's Grammar School

In 1841 the census shows Frederick and Willoughby at *John Eggar's Grammar School* in the town of Alton about 19 kilometres (12 miles) from West Meon. As the census recorded the names of who was staying overnight on Sunday June 6th, we can assume the boys were fee paying boarders along with five other boys staying there.

The school was established in 1642 and administered by a group of trustees. According to the original schedule, school days were long, usually starting at 6am in summer and 7am in winter, then a 15-minute breakfast before resuming class until 11am when a two-hour midday break commenced. Work would continue until 5pm. The year was divided into two semesters - summer and winter and school holidays were at Christmas, Lent, Easter and Whitsun.



Eggar's Grammar School
c.1900, the school attended
by Frederick and Willoughby
Rogers in 1841. Source:
<http://www.eggars.net/schoolhistory>

When Frederick and Willoughby attended, the schoolmaster was George Saulez (master from 1828 to 1843) and being of Huguenot lineage, promoted the inclusion of French in his 'wide and liberal' curriculum which being a typical grammar school also included classical (Latin and Greek) and religious studies. Mr Saulez would have taken the older and more capable students for their classical education and assisting him with the younger or less capable students for more rote learning tasks was the usher, a junior teacher. Students were examined twice a year and high achievers were awarded prizes. We can imagine what the disciplinary code was like - sometimes masters were dismissed for issuing harsh treatment of scholars.

Normandy House Establishment

The 1841 census also shows that Emma aged 7 years, like her brothers was also in Alton. She attended a school belonging to her aunts Louisa and Elizabeth Rogers, called *Normandy House Establishment*. On census night Emma was with seven other pupils, a governess, two servants, an 'independent' lady, and a Cobden aunt,



The children's aunts Louisa (left) and Elizabeth (right). Source: The Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers

25-year-old Mary Cobden. Emma was the youngest of all the pupils. Like many schools of that era catering for the middle-classes, the *Normandy House* curriculum probably comprised of reading, writing and arithmetical skills, as well as other 'suitable accomplishments' for young women to prepare them for life as a wife, mother and cultured member of middle-class society. These included needlework, drawing, music and dance and foreign languages such as French, German and Italian. The syllabus probably also included some general knowledge concerning history and geography as well as some religious education.

Around this time, Emma was also sent to live in Manchester for about a year with her uncle Richard Cobden and his family in their large home on Quay Street, and also with other relatives in Manchester.

Richard Cobden's house in Quay Street Manchester where Emma stayed for about a year in c1840. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014



Young George at West Meon

The only one of the four siblings not at a boarding school was 8 year-old George who, according to the 1841 census, was in West Meon with his grandparents who were then aged 64 and 58, as well as two of his uncles, Frank a surgeon and Joseph a medical student, both men in their 20s, and a servant. His youngest uncle, Edmund aged 13 years, was at the *Brook Street Boarding School* in Bishop's Waltham. George may have attended a day school. A letter written in 1933 by his granddaughter Eugenie McDonald in Australia to her English cousin said:

'Grandpa never tired to telling us of his schooldays and the pranks he played. On one arm he had the name George Vining tattooed in Indian Ink, for which he was punished.'¹

George emigrated to South Australia in 1854 and in 1867 in a letter to his grandmother in England, reminisced about his happy times at West Meon and the little pats of butter and little loaves she used to make for him.

Willoughby disappears

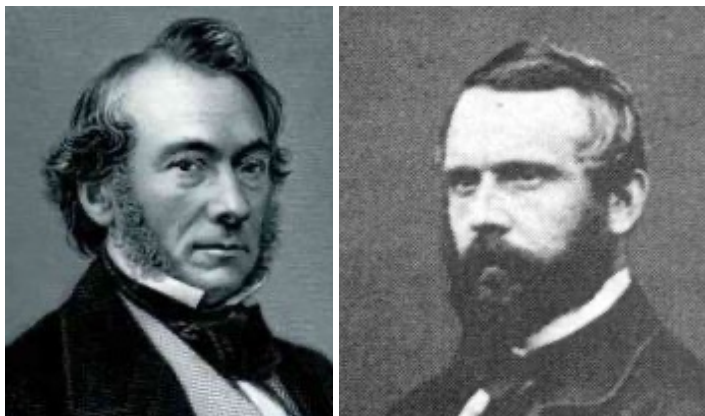
On Monday January 15th 1849, the following article appeared in the *London Morning Post* (as well as in the *Elgin Courant and Morayshire Advertiser*, Jan. 26th 1849; and the *Glasgow Herald* Jan. 19th; and *Leicestershire Mercury* Jan. 20th):

'MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.- Mr. Rogers, surgeon of No. 53 Wardour-street, made the following application to Mr. Hardwick:- He had a nephew, named Willoughby Rogers who had been in the service of Messrs. Ellis and Co., St. Paul's Churchyard, for four years, during which period his nephew retained the confidence of his employers. on Sunday night, about 10 o'clock, his nephew, who had been spending the evening with him, left to return to his place of business. Since that time not the least intelligence had been heard of the young man. Mr. Cobden, M.P., who was also uncle of the missing youth, had accompanied him to the Police Commissioners, and, on stating the nature of their application, had been promised every assistance which the police could give in tracing out the cause of the young gentleman's mysterious absence. Applicant said there was no reason which he was aware of to induce his nephew to abscond of his own accord. His nephew was very steady in his conduct and had sufficient pecuniary means at command.

Mr. Hardwick said the only way he could assist the applicant was by the publicity which such an application would undoubtedly receive from the press.

The applicant stated his nephew was about 17 years of age, 5ft. 7in. high (170cms), pale complexion, and dressed in a black frock coat and green mixture trousers.'

Willoughby had been working for the textile warehouse company Ellis and Everington in St Paul's Churchyard, London. The Mr Rogers mentioned is Dr Joseph Rogers (the Joseph listed at West Meon in the 1841 census with George) a younger brother of John Blyth, who dedicated his life to improving workhouse infirmary conditions in London. Mr Cobden MP is Richard Cobden, the celebrated Corn Law reformer, who would have helped contribute to educating his nephews and niece, and through his commercial contacts, probably assisted Willoughby to secure this job. What John Blyth knew of his son's disappearance is unknown and it is still not known if Willoughby was ever found.



Left: Richard Cobden
Right: Joseph Rogers
Willoughby's uncles who reported him missing to the police in 1849. Sources: Letters of Richard Cobden Volume III; workhouses.org.uk

After leaving school, it is not entirely clear what Frederick and George did for a living, but a letter written by their grandmother in September 1851 mentions that George was working for his uncle Charles Fiers (husband of his aunt Sarah Cobden) in the flax manufacturing trade in Ireland (I have subsequently discovered Charles Fiers was living in Adelaide Street, Belfast), that Frederick had gone to Australia, and sadly that Willoughby was still missing after two years.

Social Life in Alton

There is one record of Frederick in 1849 when he was 19 years old. William Terrell Gunner of Will Hall Farm in Alton, a young farmer not much older than Frederick, kept a diary in which he records:

'1849 20 Dec. A lovely day, walked with Frederic Rogers in the morning shooting - he is a nephew of Cobden, the great reformer of the day - the Corn Law champion spent the evening with him at the Misses Rogers, his Aunts, my sisters also there - passed a few hours very pleasantly in agreeable Conversation'

The Misses Rogers were of course Frederick's aunts Louisa and Elizabeth who ran the school in Alton that their sister Emma attended.

In Gunner's diary a couple of years later, Emma is mentioned:

'1851 9 Jan. Emma & Lucy Curtis, Emma Rogers, the Doctor & Henry Curtis spent the evening with us - had a good deal of music.'

'1851 6 Feb. Met a party at Mrs. Snelling's in the evening the Curtis's at the Cottage, Sarah Ellen, & her brother William, Caroline Hooper, Emma & Letitia Rogers (*Emma's cousin, daughter of William Augustus Rogers*) & Mrs. Cave of Hartley Row, & my 2 sisters - we had a pleasant evening - music, bagatelle &c. but somehow or other there is always something unsatisfactory in this kind of evening, it seems like a waste of time to me - & really time is very precious, we do not think enough of it; not but that I think visiting one another is very proper & exceedingly agreeable, but in one way or other I like the mind to be a gainer by every visit.'¹²

Clearly not intellectually stimulating enough for W T Gunner - but I hope not too boring for Emma. In the census of 1851 Emma is 17 and employed as a governess at her aunt Elizabeth's school in Alton called *Wey House*. They have 14 pupils there and also three servants, as well as her 12-year-old cousin Charles Rogers (son of her father's brother George Vining Rogers).



38 High Street Alton, where the Misses Rogers' Wey House school was run. Emma was a governess there in 1851. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014

A West Meon wedding

On April 14th 1853 at the new West Meon church (St John the Evangelist, built 1846), at the age of 19, Emma married William Henry Cooper, son of a government contractor William Cooper and his wife Sarah. At the time of marriage William Henry was living at Bilston, Chester and gave his occupation as 'gentleman'. He is described on the 1861 census as a brewer (probably a brewer's clerk) and from 1871 on, as a commercial clerk. It is interesting that Emma's cousin, Bertram Rogers wrote that 'I am under the impression that the wedding was not approved of by her family as Cooper was in trade as a photographer.' I have found no evidence that William was a photographer. Witnesses to the marriage were Emma's cousin Caroline Letitia Rogers, William's sister Anna Maria Cooper, and Emma's uncle Francis Slaughter Rogers.



St John the Evangelist, West Meon c1901, where Emma married William H Cooper in 1853. Photo: Emily & Ethel Pickering, Petersfield. Source: The Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers

It is telling that in a marriage notice in the *Western Times* of April 23rd, Emma is referred to as the granddaughter of George Vining Rogers, and the niece of Richard Cobden, but not the daughter of John Rogers even though he was still living and listed as a doctor in the local area. Also, as Emma was under 21, she needed parental permission to marry. This was given by her uncle William Augustus Rogers and not her father which would be the normal practice. It looks as if Emma had lost touch with her father, however when John died in 1860, Emma was the only legatee in his will and in it he refers to her as his 'dearly beloved daughter'. He made his will one month before he died.

The Cooper children

Emma and William had five children. The first two, Agnes (1855-1944) and Emma (b1856) were baptised at Birkenhead Holy Trinity. Within a few years the family moved to Bexley in Kent where their third child Melicent (also called Millicent) was born and baptised in 1858. By 1862 they had moved again, this time to Brixton in Surrey where Ethel was born and baptised at St John's, as was their youngest child

Alfred William in 1868. Their address in Brixton was given as Berkeley Villas. Some time in the 1870s the Cooper family moved to 10 Dingwall Road, Croydon, Surrey. This was to be their residence for the rest of Emma's and William's lives. Dingwall Road now with its stretches of gleaming steel and glass office buildings would be unrecognisable to the Cooper family if they could see it today.



Emma and William Cooper with three of their children c1890s: at back, Melicent (Millie) and Alfred William (Willie); in front Ethel. Source: The Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers

Discovery at Oxford

In 2018 I was able to access the *Family Papers of James Edwin Thorold Rogers* at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Here I discovered a treasure trove of documents, photos and letters pertaining to various ancestors and descendants of the Rogers family preserved by the sons of John's brother, Professor James Edwin Thorold Rogers (known as Thorold), of Oxford University. Two most significant discoveries for me were firstly that Emma Cooper and her children had become reunited with her cousins, the children of Thorold Rogers. A letter written in 1890 by Emma Cooper's daughter Agnes, to Bertram Rogers (a son of Thorold), establishes that Emma's children barely knew their Oxford cousins, but now had made contact because Agnes's husband, Francis Murray Rogers (who also was her mother's cousin), was an executor for the will of their uncle, Dr. Joseph Rogers who died the previous year. Having no children of his own, several items of Joseph's had been bequeathed to Bertram, and therefore there was a need to make contact and establish their relationships. This relationship continued for the rest of their lives.

Amongst the Family Papers is a photograph showing a gathering of the cousins that took place in 1901 at the old Hampshire family home *The Cedars* at West Meon, on the occasion of the dedication of the village cross. The cross was organised by Richard Norris Gandy, another brother of John Blyth Rogers and the cross is dedicated to their parents, George and Mary Ann Rogers. In the photo of this large

gathering, Emma is central. Unlike her brothers who, if still alive, were all elsewhere, she seems to have become part of the Rogers' fold. She is remembered in her grandmother's will written in 1865 and also in her uncle Francis Rogers' will of 1883.



Rogers family gathering for the dedication of the West Meon cross 1901. This photograph taken in the garden of *The Cedars*. Emma is the lady seated in the centre, Bertram is the balding man seated at front centre. Photo: Emily & Ethel Pickering, Petersfield. Source: The Family Papers of J.E.T. Rogers

As it happened, the 1901 reunion proved to be very important for Emma. A letter written to Bertram in the 1930s from her daughter Agnes revealed this:

'Dear Bertram

It has been in my mind to write you on the matter of Leonard's generous loan to my mother - you & your Brothers have shown the same spirit towards my sister for which on my part I thank you all - we are all very hazy about the transaction Ethel can find no written account of it - but this I know that after my father's death in 1908 their Landlord decided to sell the house No 10 Dingwall Road & an effort was made (to save my mother being turned out) to purchase it we don't know who approached Leonard in the matter. I think very likely it was Julian. Ethel still owns the house which considerably helps her very limited income.....'³

Leonard is Bertram's brother (died in 1933) and Julian is another cousin (died in 1917, the author of the Rogers' family history book), the other brothers are Arthur and Clement.

Links between England and Australia

Secondly, and most importantly for me, other letters amongst the Bodleian papers proved that after arriving in Australia, Frederick and George had been in contact with their English relatives from the 1850s until at least the 1870s, including their grandmother Mary Ann Rogers and their uncle Frederick Cobden. Letters also

revealed that in the 1930s, the children and grandchildren of George, had also discovered their English cousins.

Frederick's life - diggings and disillusionment

Frederick maintained a connection to his mother's eldest brother Frederick Cobden whom he may have worked for in Manchester before coming to Australia. There are two letters written in 1854 to his uncle Frederick, who was now at the Cobden family home Dunford, near Midhurst in Sussex. The letters reveal Frederick had come to South Australia with a plan to probably go to the Victorian goldfields at first and then if successful, buy land to farm. His letters indicate he had been over to the diggings in Victoria more than once, and to Melbourne, but due to his 'hardships and misfortunes' had become quite disillusioned. The slowness of mail across the world must have also been frustrating but he had learned of his sister marrying in April 1853. He writes from Langhorne's Creek, South Australia on April 1st 1854:

'I have not as yet received a letter from Emma but I am anxiously expecting one. It seems such a short time since I left England that I shall hardly believe she is married till I hear it from herself. I will write to George in a short time all the information I can relative to the Colony, though I should fancy he was much better fitted to push his way at home. If you have a few old papers to spare I shall be much obliged by your sending me a few.'⁴

So where was Frederick living? The address he writes from, Langhorne's Creek, part of an area stolen from the Ngarrindjeri people and occupied by Europeans in the early 1850s on the banks of the Bremer River south east of Adelaide. Today it is known as the wine making area called Langhorne Creek. Frederick writes in 1854:

'The party you address my letters to is a good specimen of what a Bush Farmer should be, he was lucky enough to buy land at a time when things were very different and although he expended the whole of his capital in the purchase, and came out the pioneer of the plough in the immediate neighbourhood, he is now in very comfortable circumstances, though from the time he first settled here till the diggings opened and Adelaide produce rose to its present remunerative prices, he had, through being short of money, a hard fight for it.'⁵

The 'bush farmer' Frederick mentions could be Frank Potts one of the first and most successful farmers to purchase land in the area, 'the pioneer of the plough in this immediate neighbourhood'. There is another interesting fact that links Frank Potts and the Rogers, but more of that later.

Gold mining woes

Frederick's letters also reveal that he had some debilitating experiences, chief among which was the loss of his gold escort receipts. The colonial governments ran gold escort services from the diggings so miners could send their gold directly to the capital cities where a better price could be had than on the goldfields. The miner was given a receipt for his gold deposit which had to be presented, along with proof of identity when reclaiming their gold. If the miner lost his receipt the following rule applied:

6. If receipts are lost, parties claiming delivery of gold can only obtain it by entering into a bond jointly with two respectable persons—being owners of real property, in the Colony, to an adequate amount—to the extent of the value of the gold, to secure the Government against any other claimant.

(South Australian Government Gazette Dec 29th 1853)

Frederick's letters reveal he had lost his gold receipts and by the time he had proved he was the rightful owner of his gold....

'I was obliged to find the securities to the full amount and although from papers I had with me, there could be scarcely a shadow of doubt as to my being the party who lost the receipts still there was the risk of someone presenting them. I was compelled at last (after trying every means to get it out,) as an inducement to offer the Gold at a loss to myself, to my securities. This has been the worst misfortune that has happened to me since my arrival in the Colony, and has quite put a stop to land buying for the present.'⁶



Mt Alexander Gold Diggings 1853 watercolour by William Bentley giving a sanitised impression of a busy Victorian goldfield. Source: National Library of Australia

Frederick's other misfortune was having an injured foot. He wrote:

'I have been under the Doctor's hands now for a long time with a bad foot and I am afraid it will be some time before I can walk about as well as formerly. It is cut through into the joint and I believe in all cases when oil(?) escapes the wound is much longer in healing. I am uncertain what I shall do now.'⁷

He also mentions he has rheumatism, a very common problem for miners living in damp tent conditions. But despite his ailments, he writes that he may go back to the diggings.

This is the last I have discovered about Frederick. Did he go back to the goldfields? As yet I can find no conclusive records for him anywhere, nor anything of his death. Notes from the Family Papers of Thorold Rogers say he died in Australia.

A warning for George

In one of the letters to his uncle, Frederick asked him to advise his brother George to not venture out to Australia, as the advertising promoting the colonies was very misleading. He reported that conditions were hard for farming and gold mining was difficult and fraught with challenges as he himself had found out. He also expressed a very low opinion of the gold miners:

'every man seems in a hurry here, they have no time for anything but business. Bullocks are worked here till they drop, it is a common thing to put the saddle on a horse's back and ride from 60 to a hundred miles in the day. Altogether it is a strange country, the people are strange, quite go ahead as the Americans and if anything more covetous and grasping. It is laughable to see some of the settlers who have done well since the digging, with more money than they ever had before, their first attempt is to "play the swell", as they term it.'⁸



However, Frederick's letter did not arrive in Midhurst until July 22nd and whether or not George received this information, he was determined to sail for Australia and so left from London on November 17th 1854 aboard the *Flora Kerr*.

The Improvident Digger 1852 by S. T. Gill.
Successful gold miners 'playing the swell'.
Source: State Library of Victoria

Frank Potts' vineyard

As mentioned earlier, Frederick may have known Frank Potts, one of the first white settlers at Langhorne's Creek. Potts was certainly there in 1854 when Frederick wrote to his uncle, and Frederick may have even been boarding or working for him in between his trips to the Victorian goldfields. Langhorne's Creek was situated near the goldfields route from Adelaide to the central Victorian diggings at Castlemaine and Bendigo and Potts had established a *Travellers' Rest* public house for the purpose of making money from gold miners in transit. In 1858 Potts planted his first vines and established the *Bleasdale Winery*, still operating today. In the 1860s, George had written to his grandmother describing his time in Australia and mentioned he had first worked in a vineyard which makes me think he may have joined Frederick at Langhorne's Creek and worked in Potts's vineyard there, as there were very few, if any other, vineyards at that time.



Frank Potts's *Bleasdale Winery*, Langhorne's Creek 1865. Frederick and possibly George would have known this place. Source: <https://www.langhornecreek.com/history>

Boat building at Milang

The other interesting fact about Frank Potts is that he was principally a boat builder, and from about 1857 Potts had been building boats at Milang, only about 18kms south of Langhorne Creek by road today. By 1859 George had started to make his living sailing cargo boats from Milang. Two boats he sailed most frequently were the cutter *Souter Johnny*, also used in races, and later the paddle steamer *Milang*, both of which were built by Potts. This may all be coincidental, however I can't help but see a connection between Langhorne's Creek, Frank Potts, Frederick and George.



Paddle steamer *Milang* c 1895 built by Frank Potts in 1878, Captained by George from the 1880s. Source: State Library of South Australia

Milang boatman

In 1863 George married an Irish girl from County Tyrone, **Rebecca Jane Fox**, and they eventually had 10 children. They lived at Milang in South Australia where George sailed boats delivering mail and goods up and down Lake Alexandrina and the Coorong, and later qualified as a Master Mariner and captained a paddle steamer

transporting primary produce along the Murray River. Rebecca died at age 42 and is buried in Milang Cemetery. George did not remarry, but in old age lived at Swan Hill in Victoria with one of his married daughters, dying there in 1910.

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2020

See my story **Master Mariner on the Murray** for more about George Vining Rogers.

hurleyskidmorehistory.com.au

Notes:

¹ August 2nd 1933 letter from Eugenie McDonald (*The Family Papers of Thorold Rogers*, Bodleian Library, Oxford UK)

² Diary of William Terrell Gunner of Will Hall Farm, Alton Hampshire Record Office, 284M87/2

³ Agnes Rogers to Bertram Rogers 1930s (*The Family Papers of Thorold Rogers*, Bodleian Library, Oxford UK)

⁴ April 1st 1854 Frederick Rogers to Frederick Cobden (*The Family Papers of Thorold Rogers*, Bodleian Library, Oxford UK)

⁵ April 1st 1854 Frederick Rogers to Frederick Cobden (*The Family Papers of Thorold Rogers*, Bodleian Library, Oxford UK)

⁶ July 3rd 1854 Frederick Rogers to Frederick Cobden (*The Family Papers of Thorold Rogers*, Bodleian Library, Oxford UK)

⁷ July 3rd 1854 Frederick Rogers to Frederick Cobden (*The Family Papers of Thorold Rogers*, Bodleian Library, Oxford UK)

⁸ July 3rd 1854 Frederick Rogers to Frederick Cobden (*The Family Papers of Thorold Rogers*, Bodleian Library, Oxford UK)

Other resources:

British Newspaper Archive

Diaries of William Terrell Gunner 1849 Hampshire Record Office

England Census 1841, 1851

English Parish Registers 1538-1909

General Registry Office England

<https://www.familyhistorysa.org/sahistory/gold.html>

<https://www.langhornecreek.com/history>

<https://www.southaustralianhistory.com.au/langhorne.htm>

Hurst, Jane local historian, Alton UK

Taylor, Pamela - *John Eggar's Free Grammar School, the Early Years 1642-1880* (2017)

Trove: National Library of Australia digital newspapers