

WILLIAM HENRY HUNT, ALRESFORD,

1834-1914

By

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It is not known if there exists today a portrait or photograph of William Henry Hunt but one could imagine a 'typical' Victorian professional gentleman - with a long flowing beard - perfectly attired with his top hat and cane, a well- respected leading member of an active and vigorous community and complete with his horses and carriages for travelling. King William IV was on the throne when he was born into one of the leading families of Alresford and he saw many changes in the Town before his death, soon after the outbreak of the First World War, in September 1914 - a life span of 80 years.

William Henry Hunt was born at No.33, West Street, Alresford and baptised in St. John's Parish Church on the 23rd of November 1834. He was the tenth child of a family of eleven children born to Edward Hunt who was also the tenth child of a family of eleven children born to his father, John Hunt of Alresford, being successive generations in the family business of Hunt & Co. Brewers, who brewed beer and ale and supplied Alresford for well over 120 years.

John Hunt, the grandfather of William Henry, came from the Basingstoke district and established the Brewing, Maltster and Cooperage business, in partnership with John Anderson of 33 West Street. However John Anderson died soon after and the whole of the business including the Inns and Alehouses passed to John Hunt. He married Hannah Cooper of Bramdean in 1771 and of their eleven children, John the eldest son and Edward the youngest, eventually inherited their father's business. In addition to brewing, John was a farmer, churchwarden, Burgess of the Town of Alresford for some twenty years, serving four terms as Bailiff. He was also a land surveyor and was appointed, with William Harris, as Surveyor to administer the findings of the Land Enclosure Act of 1807.

Edward Hunt, the father of William Henry, inherited the Brewing business in partnership with his elder brother John in 1818; he married Elizabeth Jones of Lymington in 1820 and on his father's death in 1826 took over the family home of 33 West Street. Their first four children died young, but Richard, Charles Edward and William Henry eventually inherited and successfully continued the family business. Edward, like his father John Hunt, was also a farmer, an active member of the church, and in his business as architect and surveyor, constructed the new weighbridge house in 1825, erected the Alresford Union Workhouse on the Tichborne boundary, and also the South Gallery in the old Parish Church, i.e. before the Blomfield reconstruction in 1897. He was also in partnership with William Keene as 'Building Surveyors, General Agents, Auctioneers and Appraisers'. Edward served the Town of Alresford as Burgess for some forty three years including six terms in the office of Bailiff. On the death of his partner and brother, John in 1861, the family business of brewers and maltsters passed complete to Edward.

In 1866 Edward, then 76 years of age, passed the business over to his three sons, Richard, Charles Edward and William Henry. Richard did not take an active part in running the business becoming a chemist and druggist, first in partnership with George Gunner, husband of his cousin Elizabeth Hunt (daughter of John) in Winchester and then establishing the chemist shop at 45 High Street known as Hunt & Co. which today dispenses medicines and all pharmaceutical wares at their new shop in Silver Hill, Winchester. But Charles Edward became the directing force behind the family firm in Alresford and successfully controlled this old established business until his retirement in 1902, when it was sold complete to Crowleys of Alton.

William Henry, like Richard, confined his brewery activities to the family Board Room and concentrated on his chosen career as Architect and Surveyor. He was a pupil at Perins School in West Street, on the corner with the Dean and in the 1851 census, at the age of 16 years, he is described as an Articled Surveyor and living at 33 West Street.

William Henry commenced his practice as architect and surveyor from 33 West Street and one of his first commissions was to carry out renovations and improvements to the interior of the

Parish Church In October 1857 the Church was reopened for divine worship when the Bishop of the Diocese preached and liberal collections were made in aid of the Improvement Fund. In these improvements the old seats were replaced with substantial pews, free sittings apportioned to the poor, a new pulpit, reading desk, clerks lectern all carved in oak, a 'Utrecht velvet' covered and carved altar table, fald stools and new tessellated paving in the Sanctuary were designed by William Henry and all the work carried out by local craftsmen. It is not known if any of these works survived the Bloomfield reconstruction in 1897. William Henry continued to serve the Churchwardens of the Parish Church throughout his working life and carried out surveys and repairs and restorations to the fabric and surrounding structures as required and instructed.

William Henry's wife Carolina Louise May was born in Bavaria in Germany and her earliest associations with Alresford were connected with the family of the Rector, the Rev. William Brodie. A keen churchwoman throughout her life she took a foremost position in the social and religious life of the Town. She was a founder member of the Mothers Union and mainstay of the Alresford Branch and undoubtedly a close friend of George and Mary Sumner. The 'Married' column in the Hampshire Chronicle dated 29th August 1863 records that "On Thursday, at St. Peters, Notting Hill by the Rev. F.J. Rawlins, William Henry, youngest son of Mr. Hunt, of New Alresford, Hants., to Carolina Louise, eldest daughter of Herr F. May of Wettelsheim, Bavaria."

In preparing for his marriage William Henry purchased 38 West Street, the adjacent house on the west side, No.40, being owned and occupied by John Hunt, his uncle In 1864 their first child, Louisa Elizabeth, was born, being baptised in the Parish Church on the 1st September 1844 at a joint service with her cousin Ann Charlton, a daughter of William Henry's sister Harriet then living in Haberton Ford, Devonshire. Their eldest son, Walter Edward Henry was born two years later but unhappily died soon after his third birthday.

In the meantime William Henry had purchased the house on the east side next door, No.36, and proceeded to pull it down in order to erect a fine new dwelling to his own design and requirements. This new house was completed in 1868 and the move was made; it is interesting to note however that he retained the large front room in No.38 as a billiard room with access only from the new house No.36. This arrangement existed until 1926 when No.38 was bought by Mr. Peploe from his daughter Louisa Hunt. Mr. Peploe paid an additional £30 for the room, and the communication doorway between the houses was bricked up.

In designing his home, on this typical burgage plot, William Henry created an L shaped plan using on the short leg part of the rear wall of the previous building and lined the existing cellar in splendid red brickwork to form a useful wine and beer cellar. The red brick circular bays to the street frontage reflect the style and character of Perins School House lower down West Street and the slated roof above has been carefully formed to mould the curved lines of the eaves with the straight line of the ridge above. The entrance door surround contains '1868' and 'WHH' in roundels adjacent to the semicircular fanlight over the door and there are two doorbells marked 'Visitors' and 'Servants'. The entrance door from the street opens on to a small lobby leading to the main circulation on the right, a servants' room in front, and the billiard room in No.38 on the left. There is an elegant staircase and lobby behind the main front lounge having a well-designed roof light featuring a deep oval shaped apron lining, and this hallway leads to the long rear wing at ground and first floor levels. The original rear rooms of the house at both levels which contained the kitchens, servants' quarters and Office are now in separate ownership and most of the original garden has also been sold. The main rooms in this house, including the three main bedrooms, have good proportions, fine shuttered Georgian type sash windows, excellent plaster cornices and handsome panelled doors and moulded frames which again illustrate that fine sense of good design and strict attention to correct detail so characteristic in all William Henry's work.

In their new and attractive house, named Westholme, five more children were born to William Henry and Caroline. On the 14th February 1867 Charles William was baptised followed by Ernest on the 25th April 1868. Both sons went abroad, possibly to Germany. Charles William

subsequently attended the funerals of his father and mother, was a beneficiary in his father's will and two of his children were beneficiaries in the later will of his sister Louisa Elizabeth in 1946.

Ernest attended the funeral of his mother, but not that of his father, but a sum was invested in his father's will to provide an income for life and he was also a beneficiary in Louisa Elizabeth's will of 1946. On 20th April 1869 William Henry's second daughter Ethel Mary was baptised in the Parish Church, she was living in her parents' home in 1881 and again in 1897 but like her brothers eventually left Alresford. A beneficiary in her father's will of 1914 Ethel was then married to a Mr. Beer and living in China, she was also a beneficiary in her sister Louisa's will of 1946 and still living in China but then remarried to a Mr. Midford.

During these years Alresford was preparing itself for the coming of the railway and this brought further commissions to William Henry. The route chosen for the railway line was through the middle of the sheep Fairfield on the eastern side of Sun Lane and in 1864 instructions to design and build the new Hurdle House in the College owned field on the north side of the Bishops Sutton Road were given by the Bailiff and Burgesses. This pleasant building clearly illustrates William Henry's love of good red brickwork together with the grey faced flintwork carefully moulded with great attention to proportion and detail in the structure. This useful building was in use for over one hundred years and is now sadly awaiting repair and reconstruction after the fire damage in July of last year.

The Town now realising the need to provide a suitable new centre to conduct trade and business, called a meeting of the Townsfolk, commenced a subscription list and in May 1865 at a further meeting adopted the report of the Committee i.e. a Company to be constituted to proceed with the construction of the Alresford Market House, on the site of the old Rose and Crown public house, and the plans produced by the architect, Mr. William Henry Hunt, were approved and adopted. The building was completed in March 1866 and opened at a Public Dinner, on Thursday the 22nd of March, by the High Sherriff of Hampshire, the Hon. J.T. Dutton. Incidentally the wine and meal was supplied by Mr. Ridgway of the Hunt owned Bell Inn. This multi-purpose building was planned for markets, public meetings and other general requirements such as dispensation of justice and has served Alresford in many capacities over the years, indeed the Hampshire Chronicle records in June 1897 that "whilst the reconstruction work was being carried out to the Parish Church all services will be held in the Town Hall at the usual times." At the time of construction the Market House was considered to be a conspicuous and elegant addition to West Street and the vista from Broad Street, with much credit due to the architect. Certainly the scale and proportions of the street frontage with fine circular headed window openings under the classical pediment form a splendid and imposing addition to the market square, but the original red brickwork and knapped flit elevations are now obscured with colour wash. Within a very short space of time the building became known as the Town Hall.

In the meantime the railway work was completed and opened to the public in October 1865. Many townsfolk however considered that the footpath approach through the churchyard and the long way down West Street, along Jacklyns Lane and up to the station approach yard to the new station were not satisfactory, so in 1866 the requisite property in West Street was acquired adjacent to the Swan Hotel, and demolished and in due course Station Road was planned and constructed.

William Henry's civic life was also proceeding apace. He was elected a Burgess in 1865, served with his father Edward and then brother Charles Edward many years until the change in Local Government in 1890, and filling the high office of Bailiff on three occasions. He became a member of the Alresford School Board, the Alresford Education Committee and then Governor of Perins Grammar School; also Chairman of the Alresford Gas Company, Secretary to the Alresford Market House Company, member of the Flower Show Committee and Alresford and District Cottage Gardeners Society and serving his church continuously as a prominent churchman being a Churchwarden for many years, also Clerk to the Vestry and later Auditor of the Parish Church accounts from 1892-1913. He served on the new Parish Council as Vice-Chairman for several

years and was a Co-optative member and Treasurer of the New Alresford Town Trustees from its inception. With his brother Charles Edward, William Henry joined the Volunteer Force at its inception being 8th and 11th respectively on the roll.

William Henry's mother, Elizabeth, had died in October 1861, before his marriage, and his father, Edward, followed in August 1873; brother Richard had moved to Winchester, brother Charles Edward was successfully running the family business now described as "Brewers, Maltsters, Coopers and Wine Merchants", sister Marianne had taken up residence in East Street and sister Sarah Seymour had returned from London with her five children on the early death of her husband Edward Alfred Chaston in 1871 and was living in the Old Post House in Broad Street.

The next commission to be found in the records and dated 18th April 1874 was the design and construction of a new school at Itchen Abbas and work commenced on site in the summer. The building we see today, near the railway viaduct, has been adapted and extended over the years but one can however recognise the red brickwork and grey knapped flintwork of William Henry's original structure. Later we find the building of the New Fire Engine House in the Broad Street of Alresford. The Bailiff and Burgesses Minute for 21st September 1881 states that Mrs. Covey's present to the Corporation of the site of the Cottages recently pulled down at the north east corner of Broad Street be accepted and Mr. Hunt be requested to prepare a Specification and estimate for a building to be erected thereon for the reception of the Fire Engine'. It was a great day for Alresford when the new Engine House, designed by William Henry and costing £120 was completed and handed over to the Fire Brigade in April of the following year. The members mustered in full strength at their old quarters at the Bell, proudly moved the engine into its new premises and then proceeded to entertain the Townsfolk with an hours display of their efficiency and fire drill. This was followed with a substantial celebration supper back at the Bell.

In 1888 instructions were received from the Alresford School Board to enlarge and refurbish the existing school building in The Dean. Many Alresford residents today will remember this school which was demolished some five years ago and several in fact commenced their school life in this building. William Henry considerably enlarged the building with the addition of four classrooms, provided protective porches to the entrances, new cloakrooms and new and more modern toilet accommodation bringing the premises right up to date. This building continued to serve the young children of Alresford and district for some eighty years until the new Sun Hill School was opened in the 1970s.

Meanwhile over the years as the original purpose of the Broad Street Market Square continued to decline, the penning of sheep having been discontinued in 1834, the Bailiff and Burgesses now resolved to beautify the prospect with the planting of trees in the sidings. In October 1877 under William Henry's guidance an estimate was obtained from Edwin Hillier of Jewry Street, Winchester to plant twenty eight standard limes and Norway maples in equal quantities on each side at a cost of £39.10s.0d. This sum however did not include the cost of digging the required holes for the planting or the supply of tree guards for protection, which were provided direct by the Bailiff and Burgesses.

Now under the Municipal Corporations Act of 1883 the Town Corporation of the Bailiff and Burgesses of New Alresford was dissolved in June 1890 and all the assets were transferred to the New Alresford Town Trust which would operate under the office of the Charity Commissioners. William Henry was a nominee in the change-over and appointed as one of the first Co-optative Trustees, a position which he held in his service to Alresford for the remainder of his life.

In 1893, Mr. John Hall the Town miller decided to replace his existing buildings and machinery at the bottom of Mill Hill with a new roller mill plant properly housed in a modern building and accordingly instructed William Henry to proceed with the designs and estimates followed by construction. The building we see today, apart from the mansard roof, is now some ninety years old and appears to be structurally sound being a fine tribute to its design and construction in

those water laden conditions. This strong, simple and satisfactory building in its pleasant red brick facades again reflects the abilities and skill of William Henry and it will surely serve its present owners for many years to come. The mill was erected by Walter Read of West Meon and all the new machinery was supplied and installed by Robinson & Sons of Rochdale.

William Henry was by now past sixty years of age and moving towards retirement when on the 10th August 1897 his youngest daughter Margaret, known as 'Daisy' and baptised on the 29th February 1872, was married at the Old Alresford Parish Church to Henry Terrell Chalcraft, an architect, then living at Esher. Following the Royal Diamond Jubilee celebrations this appears to have been quite a notable event in Alresford. The bridegroom's family were farmers and hopgrowers at Alton and must have been business associates and friends of the Hunts for several years. The Chalcrafts moved to London and later back to Guildford where Henry Chalcraft practised until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. Over the few years after his daughter's marriage there was some co-operation between William Henry and his architect son-in-law for it is noted that on the 21st May 1908 the Town Trustees Minute Book recorded that it was resolved that Mr. Chalcraft of 48 Bishopsgate Street, London be asked to prepare plans for the alterations to the Fire Engine House and again on the 28th May when it was resolved that the plans relating to the Engine House as suggested by Mr. Chalcraft be accepted.

In 1902 the decision to sell the family business was made, brother Charles Edward retired and the Crowleys of Alton became the new owners, including all the properties with the exception of 33 West Street which Charles Edward bought back it being his home. It is interesting to note that Hunt & Co.'s long established custom of supplying the communion wine to the Church, and the Town miller Mr. Hall with his standing order of one gallon of whisky had come to an end. William Henry also retired from business but the two brothers carried on with their public duties with undiminished diligence.

William Henry's wife, Carolina, died in November 1904 followed by brother Charles Edward and his wife Ann Susan in 1906. Then in February 1908 brother Richard died and in December 1912 his sister Sarah Seymour died. Marianne had died in 1899 and so of this great family of Hunts, William Henry and his daughter, Louisa, were now the last remaining members living in Alresford and on the 23rd September 1914 William Henry, now in his 80th year, was dead. The executors and trustees in his will were his daughter Louisa Elizabeth and his friend and colleague of many years, Joseph Ridley Shield. He left his beloved Westholme to his daughter Louisa and an income for the maintenance and support of Ernest. The remainder of the estate was divided equally between his children, Charles William, Louisa Elizabeth, Ethel Mary Beer and Daisy Chalcraft. His will is remarkable for the precise instructions given for the division of his collection of silver tableware and ornamental china of which he was so very proud. Louisa Elizabeth stayed on in Westholme and some residents in Alresford today will recall the 'little old lady in black' who lived alone almost as a recluse for another thirty years when, having moved to East Street, she died on the 26th November 1945 attended only by her physician and legal advisor. Her last will is dated 22nd November 1945, four days before she died, when she was too weak to sign her full name and made only her mark which was witnessed.

Alresford does not appear to have remembered the name of William Henry Hunt, its own architect, but today some of his works can be easily seen and it is hoped accepted as well designed and pleasing structures. With regard to his life's work and efforts, his designs and drawings it is understood were all destroyed some few years ago.

William Henry Hunt is buried under the grove of yew trees near the southern end of the old churchyard. Below a granite, weathered slab he shares a family grave with

his wife Carolina Louise, his firstborn son Walter Edward, three years old and his third daughter Caroline, two years. As an epitaph it would be appropriate to quote the very last entry in the last Minute Book of the Bailiff and Burgesses of New Alresford who served the Town for some four to five hundred years. On the 30th June 1880 in handing over to the Trustees, I quote – ‘At the same meeting it was resolved that a most grateful vote of thanks be accorded to Mr. W.H,Hunt for his valuable services to the late Corporation of Alresford and it was also resolved that a memorandum of this resolution should be placed upon the Minute Book of the Corporation in order to perpetuate the sense of obligation which all members of the late Corporation feel themselves under to Mr. W.H. Hunt for the way in which he has always sacrificed his own time and interest for the benefit of the Corporation work.

(Signed) C.E. Hunt. Chas.E. Covey. J. Ridley Shield. Last Entry.

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