

The Curlings of Kingsdown



Curling family crest

The history of the building of Kingsdown House, the village school & St John the Evangelist Church

A story of Victorian philanthropy

8th Edition February 2023

by Jenny Wall

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The Curling's of Kingsdown

A history of the building of Kingsdown House, the village school (village hall), and St John the Evangelist Church

1. Introduction

The story of the development of modern day Kingsdown from a small fishing, agricultural and seafaring hamlet by the end of the 17th century, to a modern village complete with a country house, church¹ and first village school, rests in no small way with the story of a Mr William Curling and his wife Elizabeth. The couple came to Kingsdown in the early 1820's, bought extensive land and proceeded to live in the area for some 35 years.

It should be noted as part of the introduction of this booklet that Kingsdown has a rich history prior to the 1800's; indeed, it is well documented that the area had been of significance prior to the arrival of William Curling e.g. Bagshaw's Directory of the County (1847) states Kingsdown "*appears to be have been a place of some consequence*, The Post Office Directory (1867) "*In the valley there is the vestiges of an ancient camp, reportedly a Roman Formation*"² There has been reports of a coast guard station since the 14th century. A communication and warning beacon was on the cliffs (near the church) from as early as Saxon times, later this feature is illustrated on a map dated 1570³. It is beyond the scope of this booklet to explore the ancient history of Kingsdown beyond flagging up its importance.

Mr William Curling who was baptised on 5th August 1773 (*to distinguish him from the many other William Curlings*) owned extensive land including, by the early 1820's some 85 acres in and around Kingsdown village⁴. The first known record of him in the area is dated 1816 when he rented 14 Dolphin Street Deal on a 21-year lease⁵.

After building Kingsdown house William Curling went on to commission the building of the schoolhouse and then later the church, all built over a period of some 30 years.

He married Elisabeth Green⁶ in 1827 and one is left to speculate that together they designed Kingsdown House which they owned until after William died in 1853⁷.

¹ 19th century 1841 tithe map of Kingsdown shows a small chapel. Recorded in East Kent Parishes 2nd Edition by David Wright (2002) as a Methodist chapel dated 1813. The building lies in the back garden of Wayside Cottage on Upper Street. It seems half the building and one chimney remains in what is now a private property

² The Dover Express and East Kent News Friday June 6th, 1902.

³ <https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/Research/Pub/ArchCant/Vol.046%20-%201934/046-08.pdf> page 86

⁴ Pigot's Directory 1826 Deal, Dover & Ramsgate: Shipping Agents for Lloyds of London.

⁵ Kent History and Library Centre Ref: EK/U2938/Z4 Notebook not indexed

⁶ Marriage Saint James, Westminster, London, England. 27th April 1827 www.Ancestry.co.uk. England select marriages 1583- 1973. Exhaustive searches have failed to find a birth or any other information about Elisabeth Green. Comparison of William's signature was made in confirming their marriage.

⁷ The memorial in the church states his year of death as 1853

Figure 1 - Portrait of Mr and Mrs William Curling in Kingsdown House 1851



The portraits were painted by G A Storey RA and restored by him in 1904. The other portraits on the wall in the picture are Spencer family members. The painting was left to Joyce R Stobo (a descendent of William Curling's sister) by Spencer D Secretan who died in 1965. The portrait travelled to Darwin, NT, Australia and was damaged by Cyclone Tracey on Christmas day 1974. It was subsequently brought back to England in 1975 and was restored by Rachel D Houghton in 1977. The picture is reproduced with the kind permission of Joyce's Stobo's niece.

After William's death the house was sold to a Mr T S Clarke J. P. Deputy Lieutenant of Surrey. Two of this gentleman's daughters are remembered, as are members of the Curling family, on stained glass windows in St John's Church.



Figure 2 - Kingsdown House 1934

Kingsdown house, as photographed above in 1934. The house remains a handsome building overlooking the sea in Kingsdown.

Since 1934 Kingsdown house has been a holiday camp, a WW2 training camp, a Union club, a restaurant, and a night club, before being divided and sold as four separate residences.

In Evelyn Waugh's book '*Men at Arms*' the first part of his 'Sword of Honour' trilogy, he uses Kingsdown House (where he was based for a few weeks in 1940 while training with the Royal Marines) as the fictitious Kut-al-Imara House⁸.

In 1940 Waugh described Kingsdown House as follows:

"Kingsdown is lousy. It is a hideous, derelict Victorian villa without carpets, curtains, or furniture, one bath, one WC without a seat and another without a plug. Surrounding is a collection of huts built of one thickness of asbestos for use in the summer as a holiday camp. The cold is intense".

⁸ <http://www.evelynwaugh.org.uk/styled-101/index.html> by Duncan McLaren and with his kind permission.



Figure 3 - Chalets and Recreational Room Kingsdown Holiday Camp

A further local association with Evelyn Waugh is to be found at Walmer Castle. From 1913 – 1934 Lord Beauchamp was Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. It is widely believed that Evelyn Waugh's Flyte family of *Brideshead Revisited* fame, were inspired by the Beauchamp family during their eventful years residing at Walmer Castle⁹

It is probable that Kingsdown House as built by William and Elizabeth Curling as their country retreat (on the first floor there was a trunk room); their primary residences continued to be in Church Row Limehouse¹⁰ and Hamilton House¹¹ West Grove, Royal Greenwich London.

A year after William died, Elizabeth accompanied by her servants left Kingsdown and spent the rest of her life in Eastbourne¹².

The aim of this booklet is to tell the story of just one man, a Mr William Curling, the man who had Kingsdown House built and his other close family members, who shared the house with him. A total of seven of his family are either buried or remembered on memorials and stained-glass windows in the church. Their story, a period of some 35 years in Kingsdown, their families' story, their reasons for coming to Kingsdown, their achievements, and their legacy to the people of Kingsdown is what in summary the eight edition of this booklet continues to explore and record as new information emerges.

⁹ Walmer Castle and gardens by Jonathan Coad and Rowena Willard Wright. An English Heritage publication: Pages 32 & 46. Available at Walmer Castle

¹⁰ Kent History and Library Centre Ref: EK/U2938/Z4 Notebook not indexed

¹¹ Hamilton House by Unique Chislehurst Office 7a High Street Chislehurst BR75AB

¹² In 1861 Elizabeth with her servants are recorded living at 23 Victoria Place Eastbourne, a town where she then lived until her death in 1873.

2. Who were the Curling family of Kent?

The Curlings are an ancient family, arriving from the continent, sometime during to the 15th century when some of the family settled in the St. Lawrence area of Ramsgate, the Isle of Thanet^{13,14,15}. A Richard Curling of St Lawrence Thanet had his will proved on July 26th 1463¹⁶. Currently he is the oldest reference to the family name to be found in the Thanet area.



Figure 4 - St Laurence Church in Ramsgate Thanet ¹⁷

In 1895 Charles Cotton, author and poet published a book entitled: The history and antiquities of the church and parish of St. Laurence, Thanet¹⁸. In this book he provides rich detail about the early Curlings of the parish and includes a family tree composed from “the deductions of William Curling JP.CC. of Ramsgate” which is reproduced overleaf. This family tree has subsequently been found to have several inaccuracies.

Please see the latest research on the Curling family tree researched and presented by LucyAnn Curling, Clive Boyce on their website entitled: <https://curlingofthanet.wordpress.com>

The Curling family-owned land and built a succession of farms and houses at Chilton (Chylton) near Pegwell bay; here they were in continuous occupation between the 1460's and 1874. The current property Chilton Farmhouse is a Grade II listed building which is apparently built on 16th century foundations¹⁹. Nearby there is a new development called Curlinge Court.

¹³ The pedigree of the family of Curlinge, Curlying or Curling, of Chilton in the parish of St Laurence, in the county of Kent (1895) by Charles Cotton.

¹⁴ <http://thanetonline.blogspot.co.uk/2009/07/pedigree-of-family-of-curlinge-curlying.html>

¹⁵ <https://curlingofthanet.wordpress.com/>

¹⁶ <http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/18/03/27.htm>

¹⁷ The church was founded around 1062, making it the oldest building in Thanet apart from the Abbey

¹⁸ The history and antiquities of the church and parish of St. Laurence, Thanet by Charles Cotton first published in 1895. reprints (2008,12) ISBN 10: 190736918X ISBN 13: 9781907369186

¹⁹ Entry Name: Chilton Farmhouse Grade: II Source: Historic England Source IID 1085400 ID: 171723

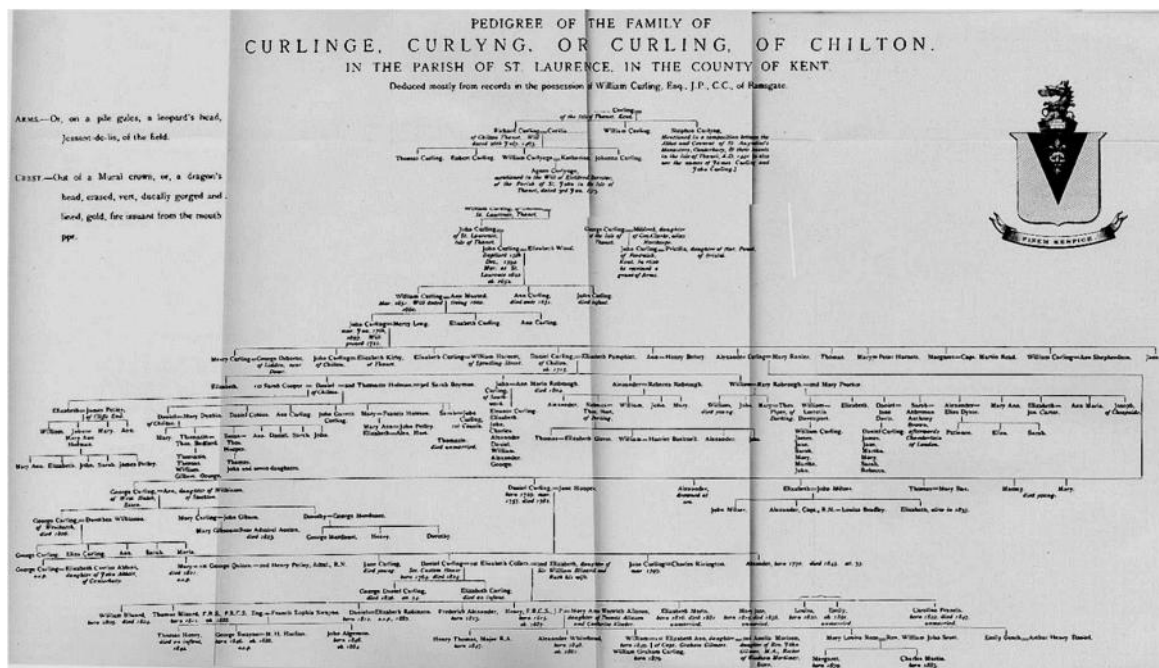


Figure 5 - An Early Curling family tree reproduced by C. Cotton 1895

The Curling family were and remain a large family with many descendants still living locally. Much has been researched, written, and published about the family; recently and perhaps most poignantly a set of letters discovered in the 1990s written by a Henry Curling from Ramsgate about his survival of the battle of Isandlwana during the Zulu Wars of the 1870s²⁰. This author is aware of further research both by family descendants here in Kent and others continues.



Figure 6 - Photograph of Curling graves at St Laurence 2018 (JW)

²⁰ <http://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Curling-Letters-Zulu-War/dp/0850528496>

By way of completeness the earliest reference to the name of Curling in the parish of Ringwould (which includes Kingsdown) is currently believed by this author to be a different William Curling who was born about 1805²¹. This William married a Sarah Taylor, and they lived in Ringwould. On the 1871 population census²² descendants of William and Sarah are shown living in Ivy Cottage as the “retired coachman cottage”. Indeed, a John Curling born circa 1805 who married a Mary White is recorded as the coachman to the Ringwould Church Rectory and the Monin’s family over a period of some 30 years. In more recent times a Henry Thomas Curling, born in Ramsgate in 1850 married a lady from a local family by the name of Julia Ruth Bingham in 1876. They lived at Sunnycote Upper Street Kingsdown from before the First World War. Henry and Julia were married in St Johns church and are indeed both buried in the church yard in 1924 and 1931 respectively. Following extensive research this author has been unable to connect each of these Curling families to each other or indeed to the William Curling of Kingsdown House. Into the 20th century several other Curlings were married in St John’s Kingsdown.

The William Curling of Kingsdown House and indeed all the Curlings are almost certainly descended from the first known Richard Curling of Thanet who had his will proved in 1463.

3. Why did William & Elizabeth Curling come to Kingsdown?

To tell the story of William Curling and his other family members it has proved vital to explore the wider historical and social factors which may have influenced his decision to buy land and live here. Local, regional, and indeed national events of the era will have influenced William’s decisions and the choices he made.

What brought the Curlings to Kingsdown during the early 1800s remains speculative. By the 1840s he was the Squire of the hamlet of Kingsdown, it is reported that he said “*the beer house should not be the only open door in Kingsdown*”²³. Certainly, it’s possible to state that visiting the seaside had been made fashionable by King George IV and during the regency period in general. The Duke of Wellington, following his illustrious military and political career became Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports in 1829, residing for part of each year at his official residence at Walmer Castle. It is recorded that William Curling was for many years on “visiting terms”²⁴ with his neighbour the Duke of Wellington. Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, and some of the royal children had holidayed at Walmer Castle during the autumn of 1842²⁵ and William Curling appears on a guest list during their stay²⁶. It was during this time that it was reported in the Dover Express and East Kent News that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert had sheltered from the rain in a fishermen’s hut on the beach at Kingsdown

²¹ Births, marriages and deaths by parish www.ancestry.co.uk

²² <http://www.ukcensusonline.com/search/index>. or www.ancestry.com

²³ The Dover Express and East Kent News Friday June 6th, 1902.

²⁴ Memorial Records of the Curlings of the Isle of Thanet by Robert Curling Esq. (son of John, William’s bother) of Gosmore Herts. 1886 Printed for private circulation by Unwin Brothers 71a Ludgate Hill London. In private ownership.

²⁵ Wellington at Walmer Chapter 4 from page 63 by Gregory Holyoake (1996) ISBN 0-7212-0970-X

²⁶ The Standard (London, England), Saturday, November 26, 1842; pg. [1]; Issue 5736. 19th Century British Library Newspapers: Part II.

that belonged to Thomas Erridge. Later the article recalls the fisherman received a lifelong pension for his kindness²⁷.

William Pitt (the younger) the famous prime minister and Lord Warden of the industrial period, we remember today for defeating Napoleon during the French wars. William Pitt regarded Robert Curling²⁸ (William's father) as "*one of the ablest men he had ever conferred with*". Indeed, it is possible to suggest that William was already well acquainted with this stretch of coastline and some of its residents, including his eminent neighbour. Kingsdown village became both a suitable and desirable place to build a house. In addition, the forthcoming railroad to Dover, which arrived during the 1840s was to make traveling between here and London quicker, easier, and safer.

To wealthy Victorians, as were William and Elizabeth philanthropy was expected and Kingsdown in the early 1800s would have fitted the bill in being a community in need of good deeds for the benefit of local people. It was a time of rapid change²⁹, the midst of the industrial revolution, a time when such things as social justice, the spirit of reform, improving people's lives, particularly that of children, came to the forefront of modern thinking. If you look in the church at the east window you will find a man and woman carved in stone, William, and Elizabeth perhaps?³⁰

William and Elizabeth also had family members in the vicinity³¹, Edward Spencer, William's brother, resided and ran businesses at Deal and over three hundred Curlings are to be found in the church yard of St Lawrence Parish Thanet³². Family members also resided in Ramsgate, Broadstairs and Margate spreading out from the middle of the 19th century beyond Kent and indeed across the world.

4. Who was William Curling?

William Curling was born in July 1773 and was baptised on August 5th, the 6th of 10 children born to Robert Curling and Ann nee Spencer between the years 1769 and 1791. Their "twig" of the Curling family tree has been traced back to the early Curlings of Thanet by Lucy Ann Curling and Clive Boyce and other colleagues³³. A family tree for William of Kingsdown, his father and grandparents is presented in figure 6 overleaf.

William and all his siblings were baptised at the Anglican chapel of St George in the East Cannon Street in the Wapping / Limehouse area of London where William's father Robert served as a church warden in the 1790s. William's parents lived in Torrington Street, Wapping, later moving to Camberwell Grove the home retained by the Curling family by several later generations.

²⁷ Dover and East Kent News dated 8th June 1902

²⁸ Memorial Records of the Curlings of the Isle of Thanet by Robert Curling Esq. of Gosmore Herts. 1886 Printed for private circulation by Unwin Brothers 71a Ludgate Hill London. In private ownership.

²⁹ A new view of society by Robert Owen (1813) <http://historyguide.org/intellect/newview.html>

³⁰ These carvings are more likely to be Queen Victoria and Archbishop Sumner. Dover Express June 8th, 1902.

³¹ <http://www.kentfallen.com/PDF%20reports/DEAL%20ST%20LEONARDS.pdf>

³² With my thanks to LucyAnn Curling & the work of Margaret Bolton Demographic Historian for supplying this information.

³³ http://cliveboyce.com/George_Curling_WebPages_5/HTMLFiles/HTMLFiles_03/P534.html

Robert Curling, William's father, was a ship owner active in the Jamaica trade, who originally purchased dockside properties and traded in a range of commodities as well as playing an active part in the 'marine politics' of the day (the late 18th and early 19th centuries). Robert (of whom a known portrait of is in private ownership) with other members of the Curling family in the Wapping, Stepney and Limehouse areas of London are variously listed as ship and shipyard owners, sea captains, ship insurers, consuls, traders of goods such as sugar and whalebone, and family members are also recorded as slave owners in Jamaica.

William's father Robert owned ships as a partner in the company Cox, Curling and Company, shipbuilders in Limehouse; this included part ownership of a ship called the Elligood registered in London in 1795. By 1800 Batson's Yard Limehouse was registered to the company, which was previously based at Duke Shore, Limehouse across the river. Robert captained a ship called the Salamander on whaling trips and as far afield as Australia. He also insured a ship called the Loyalist.

After their father's death in 1809, William, Jesse, another brother, and William Young (William's brother-in-law) took on the family businesses, as Curling, Young and Company, the building of large timber ships for the East and West Indies. Their businesses extended to rope making, trade in whale fins and other "commodities" such as sugar and transportation of slaves.

Gradually as the trade in timber ship building was replaced by steam and iron their timber ship building business declined.

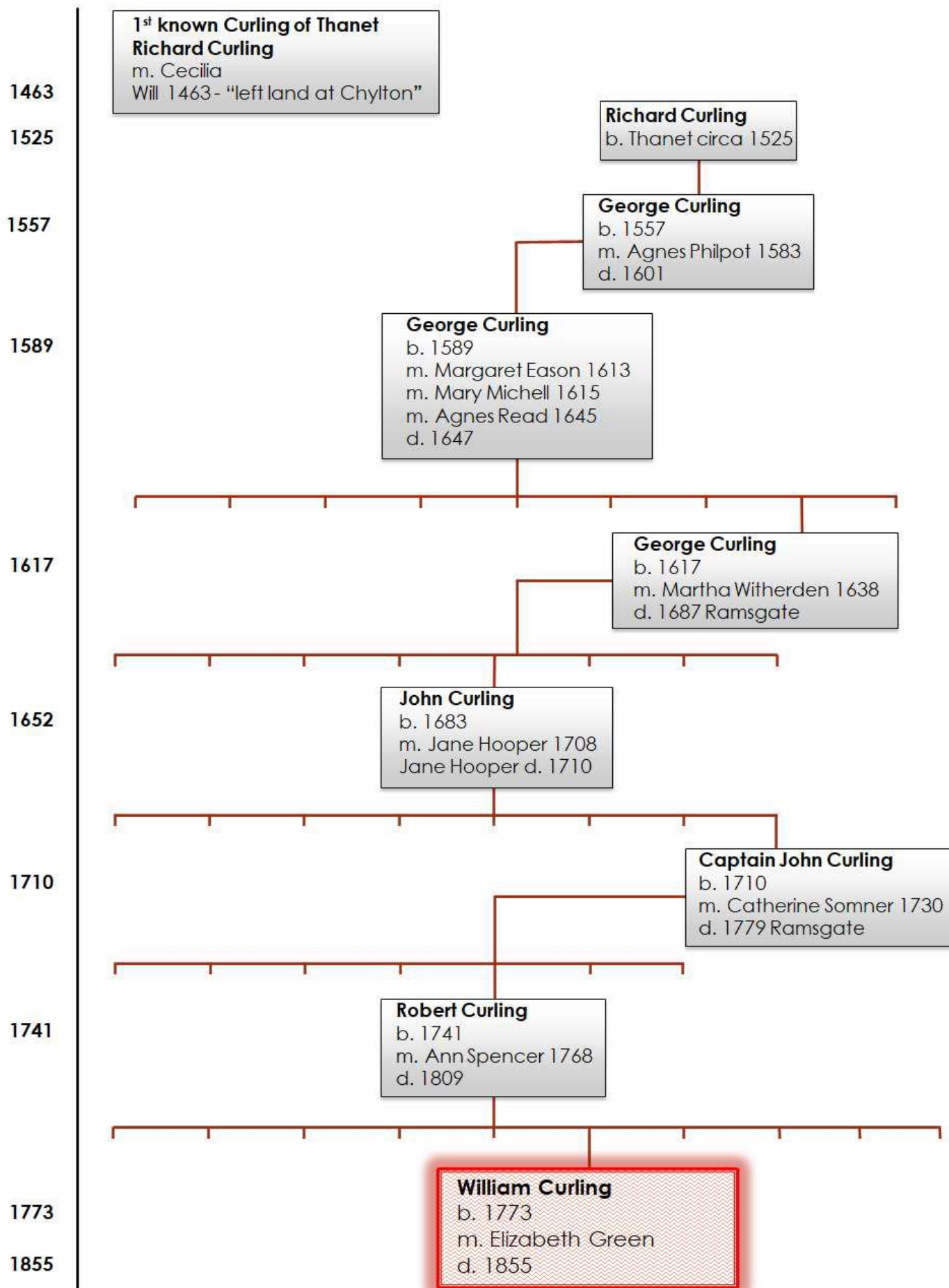


Figure 7 - William Curling of Kingsdown Family Lineage



Figure 8 - Map showing the location of Curling, Young & Company in London

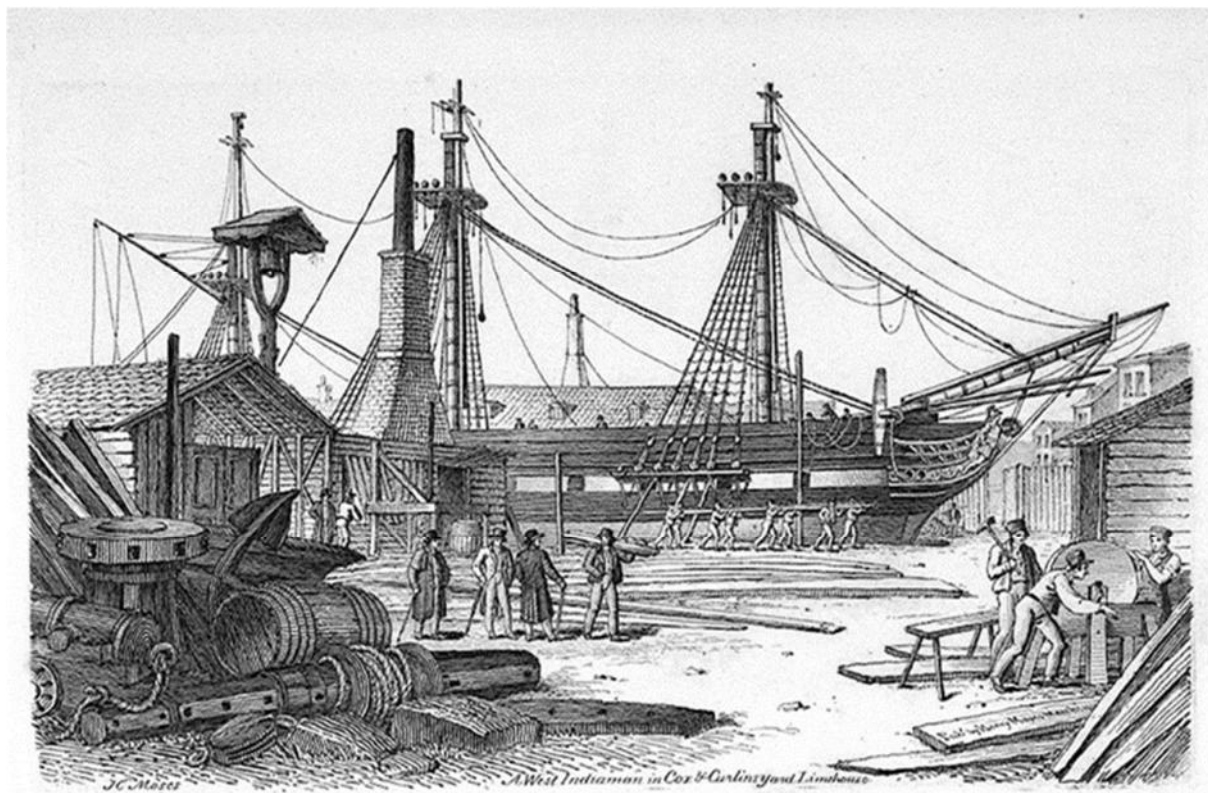


Figure 9 - A West Indiaman in Cox & Curling's Yard Limehouse³⁴

³⁴ Green Blackwall Collection reproduction ID: PU7906 by Chatfield and Coleman

William's father was the founder of the Society of Ship Owners of Great Britain formed in 1802 to promote and protect the shipping interests across the country³⁵. The family were also involved with the welfare of seamen supporting emergent organisations for the sick and disabled.

The William Curling of Kingsdown inherited the family businesses and became a prominent and wealthy merchant and ship owner, by the early 1800s trading from 26 Princes Street Rotherhithe, London³⁶. In 1802 he is recorded as insuring a brig called Perseverance commanded by Walter Sky, a ship called the Enterprise, mastered by James Ferguson and a ship called Resolution (mastered by Nathaniel Domett, another of his brothers in law) as Cox, Curling & Co³⁷. William was also reported in his nephew Robert's (son of John) memorial records of the Curlings written in 1886³⁸ to be a Trustee in the year 1820 for the affairs of his Royal Highness the Duke of Kent, Queen Victoria's father³⁹.

William owned Hamilton House, West Grove Royal Greenwich during the years 1829 – 1844. This beautiful grade 2 listed building stands a short walk from the river at Greenwich (a world heritage site) and overlooks Blackheath. The building is now a hotel and was originally built in the 1730s by wealthy ship builder Peter Bronsdon from Deptford.

³⁵ <http://www.stgite.org.uk/media/curling.html>

³⁶ <http://www.stgite.org.uk/media/curling.html>

³⁷ <http://www.stgite.org.uk/media/curling.html>

³⁸ The Curlings of Thanet Collected by Robert Curling Esq. of Gosmore Herts. Printed for private circulation by Unwin Brothers 71a Ludgate Hill London. In private ownership.

³⁹ The Curlings of Thanet Collected by Robert Curling Esq. of Gosmore Herts. Printed for private circulation by Unwin Brothers 71a Ludgate Hill London. In private ownership.

5. William and Elizabeth's time in Kingsdown (35 years)

William Curling purchased extensive land here in Kingsdown from the early 1800's onwards. Kingsdown House was built during the 1820's, probably as a seaside retreat, perhaps his retirement home; and the schoolhouse and church followed⁴⁰.

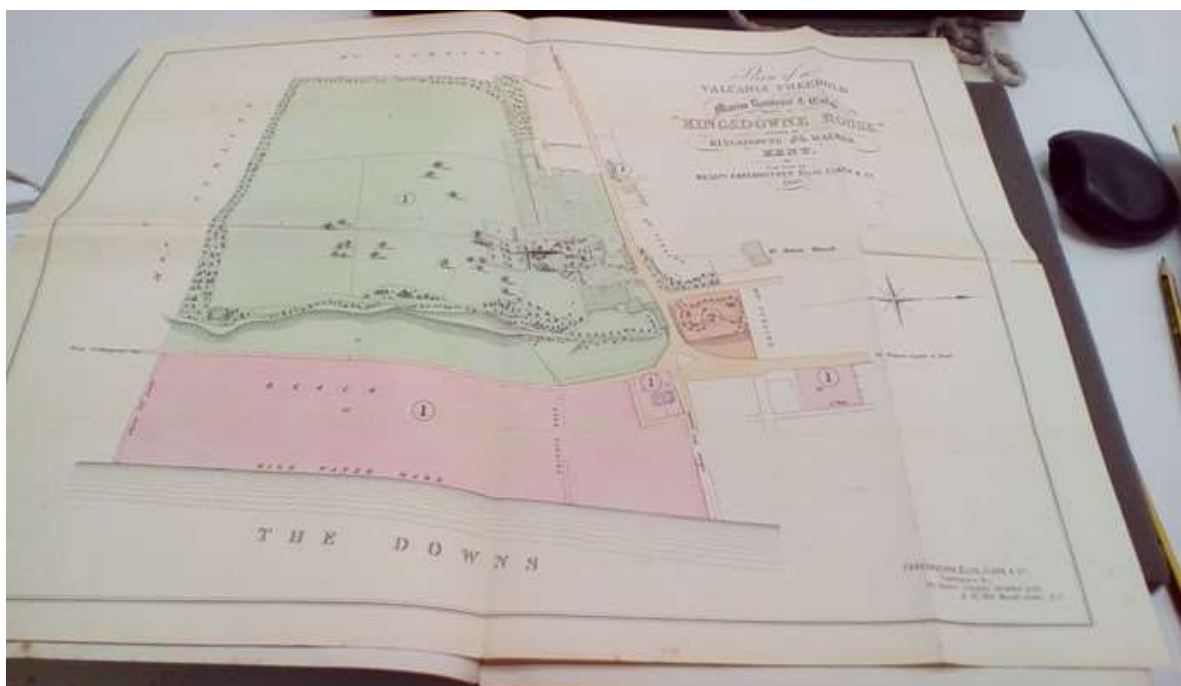


Figure 10 - Diagram of Kingsdown house and grounds dated 1875⁴¹

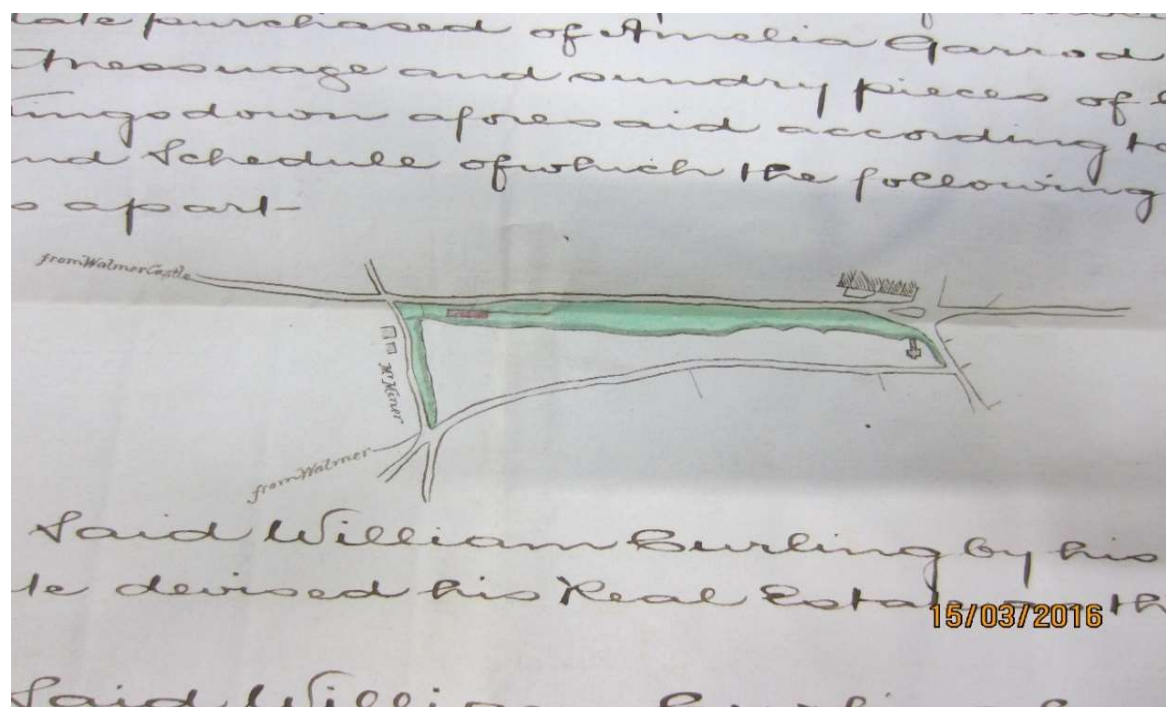


Figure 11 - Diagram of land along Kingsdown Road owned by William Curling⁴²

⁴⁰ Memorial Records of the Curlings of the Isle of Thanet by Robert Curling Esq. of Gosmore Herts. 1886 Printed for private circulation by Unwin Brothers 71a Ludgate Hill London. In private ownership.

⁴¹ Kent History and Library centre EK/U2938/Z4 not indexed

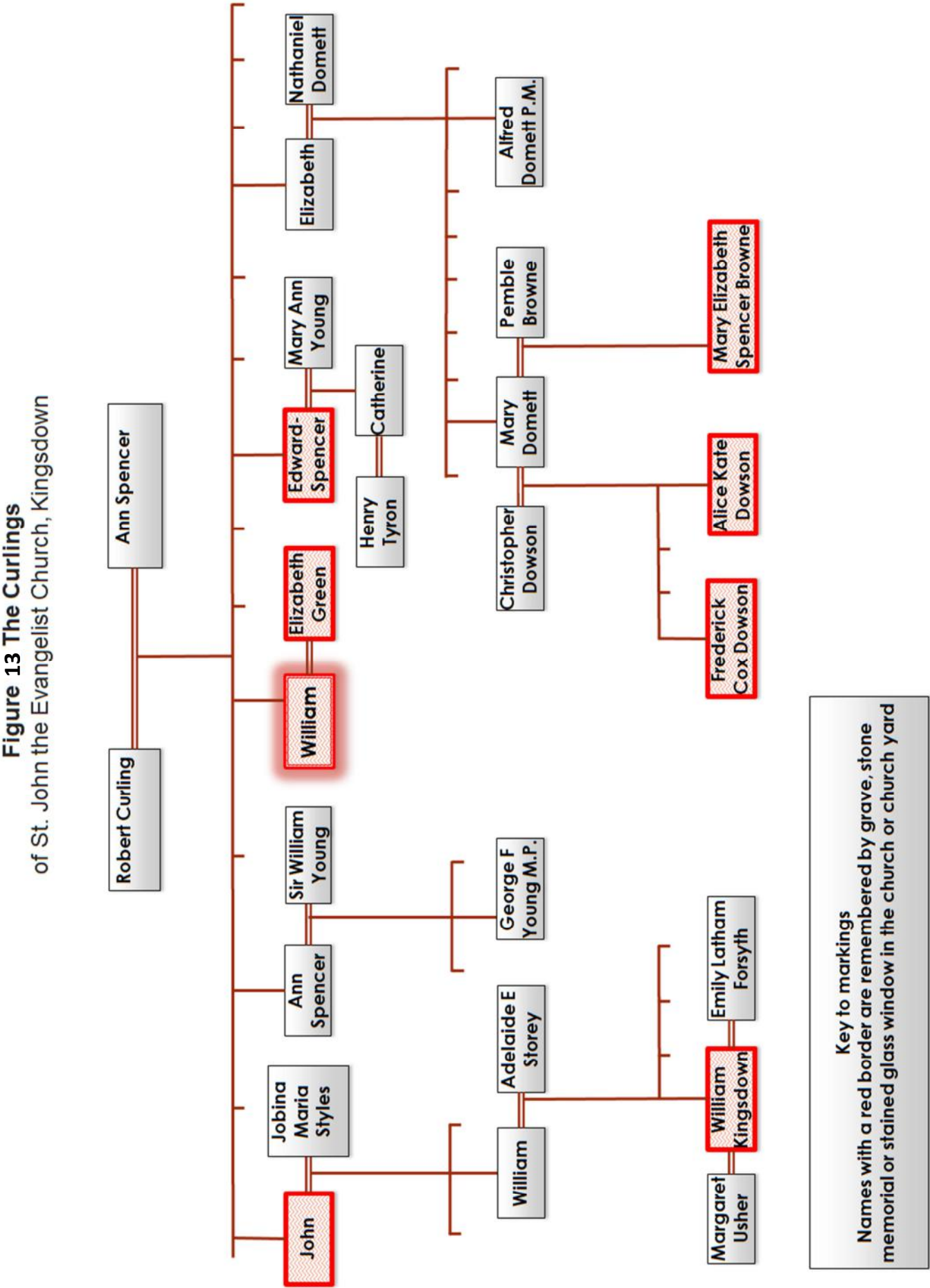
⁴² Kent History and Library centre EK/U2938/Z4 not indexed

A further six members of the close family of William and Elizabeth Curling were either buried in the family vault or remembered on memorials and stained-glass windows in the church. The table below provides a summary about each person. Overleaf in Figure 11 the seven family members are presented on a family tree.

Figure 12 - The Curling family members buried and remembered in St John's Church

Name	Surname	Born	Died	Relationship	Description
William	Curling	1773	1853	Gentleman	Buried in the family vault, remembered on a plaque and a stained-glass window
Elizabeth	Curling <i>nee</i> Green	Circa 1790	1873	William's wife	Buried in the family vault, remembered on a plaque and a stained-glass window
Edward Spencer	Curling	1772	1850	His brother	Buried in the family vault (having been moved from Deal) remembered on a plaque and a stained-glass window
John	Curling	1784	1863	His brother	Buried in the vault, remembered on a plaque and a stained-glass window
Alice Kate	Dowson	1839	1845	Great Niece	Stained glass window in her memory
Frederick Cox	Dowson	1837	1861	Great nephew & brother of Alice	Stained glass window in her memory
Mary Elizabeth	Spencer Browne	1858	1859	Great niece and half-sister of Alice and Frederick	Stained glass window in her memory
William Kingsdown	Curling	1857	1909	Great Nephew	Grave in the church yard.

Figure 13 - The Curling's family tree of those remembered in St John's Church



When William and Elizabeth first came to the parish of Ringwould (which includes Kingsdown) the population comprised of approximately 566 persons⁴³. Most were employed in agriculture or fishing. The enumeration census of 1831 records a total of 9944 inhabited houses in Kingsdown and Ringwould.

By the night of the 1851 census the following people were residing in Kingsdown House.

Name	Age		Occupation
William Curling	77		Gentleman
Eliza Curling	57		-
Sarah Beay	48		Cook
Mary A Smith	41		Upper house maid
Elena Webb	22		House maid
George Stepney	29		Footman
Richard Bard	35		Coachman
William Rule ⁴⁵	11	Visitor	OCC
Sarah Adams ⁴⁶	24	Visitor	Governess / niece?

Figure 14 - The 1851 population Census return for Kingsdown House

William and Elizabeth Curling were often reported in the newspapers as being kind landlords. On Christmas day 1850 it is reported that the Curlings provided their tenants, the poor and the old with meat and warm clothing. On New Year's Eve of the same year some 80 – 90 children were fed on roast beef and plum pudding in the school⁴⁷. It was reported that Mrs Curling stated the purpose of the school was *“educating the children of artisans and working people”*

The residents of Kingsdown presented Mrs Curling with a plate on her birthday one year and once again it is reported that a generous meal was served in the schoolhouse for many local people.

William and Elizabeth made several financial bequests to the people of Kingsdown to be continued after their deaths. In 1966 when the Charity Commission came into being these became registered

⁴³ Enumeration Census 1831 www.histpop.org

⁴⁴ Enumeration Census 1831 www.histpop.org

⁴⁵ The author has been unable to establish any relationship between William Rule and the Curling family, his mother maiden name was Dodds.

⁴⁶ William's grandfather Robert had a sister called Mary who was married to a Richard Addams.

⁴⁷ The Whitstable Times and Herne Bay Herald Saturday December 27th, 1850

charities. In 1973 an Effie Patey administered 40d each to the poor on Christmas Eve⁴⁸. Records also exist of an annual repair fund for the church for the sum of £150. There is documentation both at Kent History and Library Centre and the National Archives which relate to educational trusts which Elizabeth continued to be involved in when she moved to Eastbourne after William died.

Four charities which administered money in Kingsdown were finally under the umbrella of the Esther Upton Charities⁴⁹ and they were all dissolved in 2002.

William's death was registered in Dover Kent, where he passed away on May 4th, 1853. The family vault lies under the church, where his body lies. A memorial plaque about **William and Elizabeth Curling** is located on the north side of the chancel, near to the east end of the church with the following wording:

"In the vault beneath the chancel are deposited in hope of a joyful resurrection the mortal remains of William Curling, ESQ. Of this parish, who died May 4th, 1853 in the 80th year of his age.



Erected and endowed at his sole expense, this church with the schoolroom, and parsonage of this village, will ever form his noblest monument, and be a testimony to future generations of his desire for the spiritual welfare of those among whom he dwelt, and to whom he ever proved a father and a friend. "Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in, in his season."

To perpetuate his memory, to point to his example, and to offer the last tribute of well merited esteem, and devoted affection this tablet is erected by his widow.

Also, Elizabeth Curling widow of the above named William Curling, ESQ. She died 22th December 1873, in the 83rd year of her age"

Figure 15 - The Curling Memorial plaque in St John's Church

⁴⁸ Reference CCA-U3-270/25/A/3 Kent Libraries (Canterbury)

⁴⁹ Charity Number 248460. Search Charity Commission website

6. St John the Evangelist Church Kingsdown

William lived to see the church finished. The tithe map of 1841 records a chapel, two tenements, a garden and chapel meadow (numbers 29 & 30) off Upper Street in Kingsdown. The building of St John's church was apparently not the first place of worship to be built in the village. The old chapel built on William's land is recorded as a Methodist chapel and dated 1813⁵⁰. What remains of the chapel, probably only about half of the original building including a chimney, can be viewed from upper street to the left of Wayside Cottage in the private garden.



Figure 16 - The 1841 Tithe map of Kingsdown

The earliest references this author has been able to establish to the building of St John the Evangelist appears in the national press announcing the laying of the foundation stone by William Curling on May 4th 1849⁵¹. A long article in the Morning Post vividly describes a procession of 1000 people and 100 invited guests passing through a triumphal arch decorated with flowers on its way from the school for the laying of the foundation stone. The Daily News (London) Friday May 11th, 1849 issue number 923 reports the new church was to be built near the old beacon on the cliff and that the building was endowed and paid for by Mr William Curling Esq at a cost of £6000.

At the service to lay the foundation stone Mr Curling was presented with an elegant silver trowel engraved with a view of the church from the southeast.

⁵⁰ East Kent Parishes 2nd Edition by David Wright (2002)

⁵¹ The morning post May 4th, 1849

William proceeded to place a bottle with two papers “of the county”, a copy of the Morning Post, copper and silver coins into a stone which had been carefully prepared with a cavity carved into it. At 1.30pm a signal gun was sounded, and the procession took their places. Led by Rev. T Monins and other assembled clergymen and dignitaries the service commenced. Once the contents had been placed in the cavity it was secured by a brass plate with an inscription on it which included the Curling crest⁵². The article then describes the mortar being spread and the foundation stone being laid in the ground⁵³. Mr Curling and his nephew John Young were presented with a vellum copy of the address and the guests retired for tea, wine, and cake in the school. This author has been unable to locate the position of the foundation stone despite extensive searching!

The building of the church was not without incident. The Kent Herald and Dover Telegraph both report that on the 16th October 1849 after a particularly bad storm a portion of the newly erected west side of the church collapsed half an hour before builders were due on site⁵⁴. The Dover Telegraph also reports the name of the architect, as Mr John Hay from Liverpool⁵⁵. Accounts differ as to when the church was completed, ranging from 1850 to 1853⁵⁶. Edward Spencer Curling who died on the 26th March 1850 (6 months after the west fall collapsed during construction) was originally buried in St George’s chapel graveyard in Deal. The new burial records for St Johns church Kingsdown confirms that after his burial Edwards’s remains were moved to the new family tomb at Kingsdown in the July. The church may or may not have been completed at this time.

Figure 17 – Record of the burial of Edward Spencer Curling

Name.	Abode.	When buried.	Age.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
1850 Edward Spencer Curling No. 1.	Deal	July 12 th the Remains having been removed from the Burial ground of St George's Chapel, Deal.	78 yrs	Robert Harrison Incumbent

⁵² As on the front cover of this booklet see <https://curlingofthetanet.wordpress.com/heraldry/>

⁵³ The location of the foundation stone is unknown

⁵⁴ Kent Herald reported in the Daily News (London) Friday October 19th, 1849 issue 1061

⁵⁵ The Morning Post October 16th, 1849 page 2. Issue number 23668- headline ACCIDENT.

⁵⁶ <http://www.ringwouldchurch.com/kingsdownstjohntheevangelist.htm>



Figure 18 - St John the Evangelist Kingsdown

7. The Village School (St John's Village Hall)

The building now known as Kingsdown Village Hall was opened as such in April 1952. Accounts vary but a souvenir programme of the opening of the hall states that the building was originally built in 1843 at the bequest of Elizabeth Curling and was erected for the 'purpose of educating the children of artisans and working people'⁵⁷. Other accounts attribute the building of the school more to William Curling and a later opening date of 1845. The building had two large rooms with a fireplace in each room and catered for 90 pupils by the early 1900s. The present lower hall was originally the cloakroom, with hooks for the children's clothes.



Figure 19 - Kingsdown Village School

⁵⁷ Ringwoud and Kingsdown. A history and Guide (1989) Forward by Robert Dougall 2nd Edition. Available for reference in Deal Library

After William died in 1853 the building was sold by Elizabeth Curling to the Church on the 30th July 1856. The building continued to be used as a school until the 31st December 1937. During the Second World War the building was run as a canteen for troops who were billeted in various important radar stations near Kingsdown. After WW2 the building passed from church to public and charitable ownership and has since this time been called St John's Village Hall Kingsdown.

8. The other Curlings remembered in the church

8.1 Edward Spencer Curling

Edward one of William's younger brothers, is buried and remembered in St John's church. Edward owned lands in Oxfordshire and across Kent. Being based in Beach Street Deal, he had several noteworthy occupations, including being appointed Chevalier of the Order of the Lion and as the United Kingdom's consul for Hamburg, Hanover, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Russia under King George 4th ⁵⁸.

Edward is also remembered for his dealings and trade in early stained-glass windows from across parts of Europe (see [Old Dutch and Flemish Stained Glass - Photorasa Free HD Photos](#) for further details) and his collection of bird and animal specimens. In 1827 Edward donated a large collection to what is now the Beany Institute in Canterbury⁵⁹. The museum also holds Edward Spencer's diary between the years 1827 - 1836 which remain unpublished. See [PDF Peter L Martin \(whiterose.ac.uk\)](#) for further details. Edward's memorial in the church reads:



Figure 20 - Stained glass window in the church

"In memory of Edward Spencer Curling, Knight of the Netherlands, Order of the Lion and upwards of 36 years Consul of that Kingdom for the district of Deal. He died at his residence in Deal on the 26th of March 1850 in the 79th year of his age. Greatly lamented by his family and friends in whose affectionate remembrance his name will long be cherished his remains are deposited in the family vault under this church".

⁵⁸ The Curlings of Thanet Collected by Robert Curling Esq. of Gosmore Herts. Printed for private circulation by Unwin Brothers 71a Ludgate Hill London. In private ownership.

⁵⁹ <http://www.canterbury.co.uk/Beany/collections>.

8.2 John Curling

A third brother John, who was some 14 years younger than William and Edward, is also remembered with a memorial stone noting that his remains lie with his brothers in the family tomb under St John's Church. This brother, John, owned land at Offley Holes and Gosmore in Herefordshire and was a magistrate for the county of Hertfordshire.

One of John's sons, Robert later wrote a history of the Curlings of the Isle of Thanet which was completed in 1886⁶⁰. In his book, he recounts his father John as a very young ship's apprentice serving on a ship called the Duff and being captured by pirates on the Le Grand Buonaparte during the French wars. He eventually escaped to South America and returned to England. John went on to apparently have further adventures in India during his youth, finally settling at Offley Holes and the surrounding land which remained in the ownership of the Curling family for most of the 19th century. John and his wife Jobina Maria Styles had 10 children, one of whom, another William, was the father of William Kingsdown Curling, who is buried in a separate grave in St John's Church Kingsdown. Quite why William who lived in Ramsgate is both called William Kingsdown Curling and why he is buried next to his grandfather at Kingsdown remains uncertain, beyond that fact he may have wished to be near his ancestors.

8.3 William Kingsdown Curling

William Kingsdown Curling had a prestigious naval career, serving across the world, as his father and grandfather had before him. He served as a naval officer with the 106th Regiment of Foot (Bombay Light Infantry) later becoming the Durham Light Infantry.

His private life was colourful, first marrying Emily Latham Forsyth on September 10th, 1881, the daughter of Sir Douglas Thomas Forsyth C.B., K.C.S.I a distinguished English diplomat. They had two children, a son, Robert Douglas Kingsdown was born 26th October 1886 in India. Unusually for the time William and Emily were divorced in 1893 following a lengthy court case between the years 1888 – 1893. Emily was granted a divorce on the grounds of her husband's adultery with several women including a named Frances Nellie Boston. Further the divorce was granted on the grounds of cruelty as William had knowingly passed venereal disease to Emily⁶¹.

William went on to marry Margaret Usher later in the same year as his final divorce settlement was agreed⁶². Margaret originally the daughter of a Chandler from Stockton near Middleborough, was the former nurse / servant at the Curling marital home in Elswick Yorkshire while William served with the Durham Light Infantry⁶³.

⁶⁰ Memorial records of the Curlings of the Isle of Thanet. Collected by Robert Curling Esq of Gosmore Herts. Printed for private circulation by Unwin Brothers 71a Ludgate Hill EC in 1886 (author has a photocopy)

⁶¹ UK Divorce records 1858-1914 on www.ancestry.co.uk

⁶² May 20th, 1893 in Whitby www.ancestry.com . Reported in the London Standard

⁶³ 1891 Population census www.ancestry.co.uk

By 1901 William and his second wife Margaret, were apparently separated, William living in the north and Margaret in Ramsgate. On his death in 1909 aged 51 years he left land over £5000 to Margaret his sole beneficiary.

8.4 Elizabeth Curling Nee Green

Along with the three brothers, William Curling's wife Elizabeth is buried in the family vault under the church. It seems Elizabeth was reunited with her husband some 20 years after he had died, as she had left Kingsdown to take up residence in Eastbourne. While there Elizabeth continued to support the community; In 1865 she commissioned the building of a water fountain in the town ^{64,65}.

A bronze plate on the fountain reads "This drinking fountain was donated in September 1865 by Mrs. Elizabeth Curling (1790 – 1873), who lived in Kent Lodge, Seaside Road (now Trinity Trees)".

Mrs Curling was also treasurer of the Eastbourne Society for promoting female industry.

A Mr John Roper poet and musician living in Eastbourne contacted the author in 2021 and shared the poem below which he composed about Mrs Curling and the fountain she had built. It is with my thanks that I now include this poem in this edition of the Curlings of Kingsdown:



The Fountain - a poem by John Roper - All Poetry ⁶⁶

Each Sunday, Mrs Curling would sit in her
paid oak pew, dressed in widow's hat and coat,
unbowed by age, the wafer melting on
her tongue, thin dry lips-stained wine red.

To mark her life, she gave the town a
drinking fountain, forged by foundry craftsmen
as a journey's break for man and horse,
a place to meet a friend or make a speech.

She believed God's word could quench a lifelong
thirst, but it was the needlework she found
for poor deserving women, that nourished
their frail bodies through the harshest winter.

Figure 21 - The Curling Fountain Eastbourne

⁶⁴ <https://memorialdrinkingfountains.wordpress.com/tag/mrs-elizabeth-curling/> . The fountain was originally located in the middle of the road in Seaside, near the junction of Leaf Hall Road. It was first moved to the corner with Langney Road, probably in the 1950's before being restored and relocated here on 21st December 2000. Two intertwined dolphins rest on the block surmounted by a gas lamp. On 30th March 1992 it was listed a Grade II Historic Building. It was restored in 2000 and relocated to Marine Parade. The base of the fountain was used as a platform for public speakers and services held by the Salvation Army.

⁶⁵ With my thanks to Ms Lucy Ann Curling for informing me about the Curling Fountain in Eastbourne.

⁶⁶ [John Roper - poet at allpoetry](#)

This author has been unable to confirm other information about Elizabeth Curling Nee Green beyond the date and place of her marriage to William Curling^{67,68}. It's probable Elizabeth was related to an eminent ship building family by the name of Green based at Blackwall London at a similar time to the Curlings.

The three Curling brothers, William, Edward, and John also have memorial plaques inside the church. John's grandson William Kingsdown Curling is buried in a separate grave to the front of the Curling vault in the church yard.

8.5 Frederick Cox Dowson, Alice Kate Dowson, and Mary Elizabeth Browne

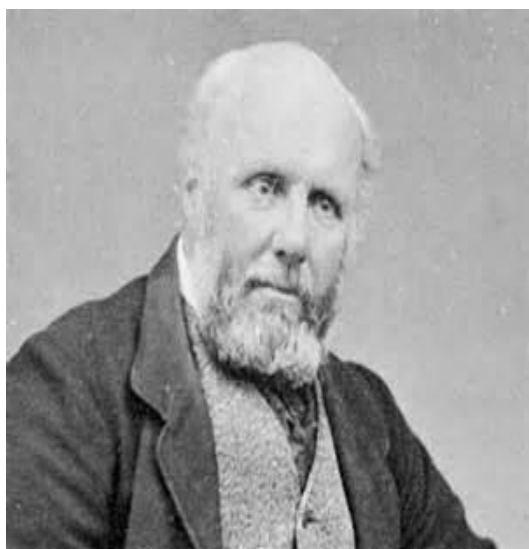
Three other young members of William's family are remembered on individual stained-glass windows. All three were grandchildren of William's sister Elizabeth, whom in 1801 married a ship's captain called Nathaniel Domett.

Her eldest grandchild **Frederick Cox Dowson** died at sea in 1861 on board a ship called the Japanese aged 24 years.

His sister **Alice Kate Dowson** died on 20th January 1845 in Limehouse London aged 5 years from scarlet fever.

Their half sister **Mary Elizabeth Browne**, (from their mother's second marriage to a Mr Pemble Browne) died at the age of 14 months in 1859 of "congestion of the brain"⁶⁹

Several other prominent local people have stained glass windows in their memory in the church. Amongst them are two sisters Mary Jane Williams nee Clarke and Julia Elizabeth Sarah Douglas nee Clarke who were later residents of Kingsdown House.



**Figure 22 - Alfred Domett PM
New Zealand**

8.6 Elizabeth Curling and Nathaniel Domett⁷⁰

Elizabeth Curling (one of William's older sisters) and Nathaniel Domett were the parents of nine children, including Alfred Domett CMG, born in 1811 who went on to be the fourth Prime Minister of New Zealand between the years 1862-1863. Alfred Domett was also an accomplished poet and was a close friend of Robert Browning. The poem 'Waring' was reputedly about Alfred.

⁶⁷ They were married 27th April 1827 Saint James Westminster London www.ancestry.com

⁶⁸ It's a strong possibility that Elizabeth was related to Henry Green shipbuilder at Blackwall. A Henry Green (junior) was a beneficiary of her will along with a Mr William Baker.

⁶⁹ As recorded on her death certificate dated 13.3.1859

⁷⁰ Slave owner <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146630697>

Alfred Domett was also the great uncle of Ernest Dowson an English poet, novelist, and short-story writer, often associated with the Decadent movement. He was born in 1867 and lived in London.

8.7 Ann Spencer Curling and Sir William Young

Another of William's sisters, the eldest, Ann Spencer Curling had a long life, bore thirteen children, marrying **Sir William Young** on the 15th September 1789. Sir William was an officer of the Royal Navy, who saw service during the American War of Independence, the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars rising to the rank of Vice-Admiral of the blue.



Figure 23 - Sir William Young⁷¹



Figure 24 - George Frederick Young MP⁷²

Their eldest child was **Mr George Frederick Young**⁷³ who had been an eminent ship builder, chairman of the General Ship Builders Society, MP for Tynemouth and Scarborough and was staying at the Curling residence in Kingsdown at Christmas 1851 when he took ill. It was reported he developed paralysis and later recovered⁷⁴

The couple mixed with royalty, enjoying the friendship of kings and dukes⁷⁵. Sir William died at Denmark Hill, Camberwell, Surrey on 11 February 1847, after spending 70 years in the navy.

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⁷¹ A First-Rate Man of War, taken from the Dockyard Plymouth, an 1809 caricature of William Young while commander at Plymouth, by Robert Dighton

⁷² George Frederick Young (1791–1870), First MP for Tynemouth unknown artist

⁷³ G F Young had a son called William Curling Young who was killed while overseas in circa 1837. A John Young was William Curlings nephew as reported on May 3rd, 1847 at the laying of the church foundation stone.

⁷⁴ Benjamin Disraeli letters for October – November 1849 & 1848 & in Derby Mercury 24th, 18 Issue: 7131

⁷⁵ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Young_\(Royal_Navy_officer,_born_1751\)#Family_and_early_life](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Young_(Royal_Navy_officer,_born_1751)#Family_and_early_life)