

ZINZANS in England

contributed by family researcher Valerie Sherwood, valesherwood@xtra.co.nz

This is the story of **Robert Comport Zinzan** (FRCS, MRCS: surgeon and apothecary), his wife **Ann Elizabeth Edwards**, and their four children: **Lavinia Caroline** b. 7 Aug 1838; **Robert Vaux** b. 6 Nov 1839; **Ann Elizabeth** b. 13 July 1843, and **Susannah** b.1845. The family lived in Edmonton, North London, while Robert Comport engaged in the practice of surgery at St-Martins-in-the-Fields.

Tragically, Robert Comport's wife **Ann Elizabeth**, aged 29, died 19 May 1848, of catarrh, with superadded bronchial and cardiac disease. One year later, Robert set up practice in Hindon, Wiltshire.

Following the death of their mother, the four Zinzan children were separated, with **Ann** and **Lavinia** living with their Zinzan grandparents, and **Robert Vaux** and **Susannah** living with their Edwards grandparents. Both the Zinzan and Edwards grandfathers were medical practitioners.

Six years on, in 1855, **Robert Comport** (aged 41) married **Mary Ann Green** (aged 18), the elder daughter of the innkeeper of *'The Lamb Inn'* at Hindon. That marriage was childless.

Robert Comport died seven years later, in 1862 at age 49, leaving a young widow. The cause of death given on the records was 'exhaustion,' a term used implying 'giving up after a long struggle,' and suggesting that Robert Comport had experienced a long period of ill health.

In 1851, the young **Robert Vaux Zinzan**, described in the Census of that year as a 'scholar', lived with his sister **Susannah** in the home of their maternal grandparents, the **Edwards**. Ten years later, in 1861, he was a medical student, residing with Doctor Robert Webb and studying at *The London Hospital*. He did part of his apprenticeship under his uncle (Edwards) in the West Indies. By 1863 the young man, having completed his studies gaining the surgical qualification, MRCS.

Drama unfolded in 1864 when **Mary Ann**, his step-mother, became pregnant, apparently as the result of an illicit relationship between the young doctor and herself. The *Anglican Book of Common Prayer* declared that a marriage between a man and his stepmother could not take place. The situation was calamitous. What could be done?

The facts had to remain secret, but the expected child would need to be legitimised. It so happened that in Edmonton, where the family had previously lived, Robert had a friend and neighbour who had, in adulthood, trained for the priesthood. This young man, **Joseph Maychurch Vaughan**, was now a curate at the church of St-George-in-the-East, in Cannon Street Road, London, and he was prevailed upon to conduct a marriage service for the young couple, which he did on 28 September 1864. **Robert Vaux** was aged 25, and his bride **Mary Ann** was two years older. There were several falsifications or omissions on the marriage certificate. Church records stated their given address as 107 Lawson Street Road, London, though it was later shown that neither of them lived at that address, nor were they known there. On the marriage record the bride was declared to be a spinster. The name of the groom's father was given, but no mention of his demise was made. Mary Ann's father is named as William Zinzan, farmer, when he was in fact, William Green, innkeeper.

The validity of this marriage, between a man and his father's widow was challenged by John Beckett, the parish clerk officiating at the Hindon church, who had knowledge of the family. The challenge was based on the *Anglican Prayer Book's 'Table of Kindred and Affinity.'* Despite the fact that there was no blood link

between the couple, such a marriage was not legal. Subsequently, the Alderman's Court at the London Guildhall caused a warrant to be served for Robert Vaux's apprehension. Robert Vaux's younger sister **Ann**, now Mrs Griffiths, and her friends who sympathised with the couple, employed the services of counsel, though the accused Robert Vaux avoided both attending at the court in person and instructing counsel. A hearing at Guildhall was reported in *The Times* on 21 December 1884. Following discussion between counsel before Alderman Waterlow, it was decided that the case was to be treated as a misdemeanour rather than a felony. Two months later, a daughter, **Louisa Fanny Zinzan** is shown to have been born to Robert Vaux and Mary Ann just two months following the illicit marriage. Louisa was raised by her mother who later married a widower with a family. As an adult **Louisa Fanny** became a governess, later joining the Sisters of Mercy, an Anglican Order, at Saint Denys Warminster. She died in 1929.

It seems that the 'marriage' was quietly annulled, for two years following the unfortunate proceedings, on 6 December 1866, **Robert Vaux** married **Isabella Margaret Hay Griffith**, daughter of the late **John Gwyn Griffith**, Rector of Llansannor, Glamorganshire, at the East Knoyle parish church in Wiltshire. Interestingly, three years earlier, Robert Vaux's 20 year old sister **Ann** had married **Francis Gwyn Griffith**, brother of Isabella, his legal wife.

Lavinia, Robert and Ann Zinzan were all eventually to emigrate to New Zealand.

(see the biographies of **Lavinia Zinzan (Harris)**, **Robert Vaux Zinzan**, and **Ann Zinzan (Griffiths)** on this website).

Susannah Zinzan died September 1866, of heart disease at East Knoyle, near Hindon; she was aged 21.

The unusual surname, **Zinzan**, apparently originated in Modena, Italy. The earliest recorded mention of the name in Britain was in the 16th Century. Some members used the name **Zinzano**. The first Robert Zinzan to be traced in public records was prominent as an equerry to Queen Elizabeth 1; a gifted horseman, on one of his missions for the Queen, he travelled to Scotland to present a gift of horses to James VI of Scotland who, as James 1 of England, knighted the equerry at Whitehall in 1663 as 'Robert Alexander.' This latter surname was used by some descendants, while others preferred to retain Zinzan as their family name. Sir Sigismund Zinzan, son of the first Robert, was also an equerry, holding an appointment as Master of Royal Sports, with emphasis on jousting and tilting, though he and his brother Henry also organised Masques and Revels. A family industry grew from the equine sports in the form of the manufacture of 'brigandery' (leather body armour), which later expanded into harness-making. The body armour was a protection against injury in the vigorous sports in which members of the royal family and aristocracy engaged. In 1662 Sir Sigismund Zinzan was noted as being the owner of the land on which the Globe Theatre stood, and at a later date, of the theatre itself, through his second wife. Over the succeeding generations several notable and/or wealthy descendants prospered. A descendant of Sigismund's line, Charles Zinzan, was appointed to the position of Governor of Bombay in 1884. Each subsequent generation produced prominent individuals.