

# ROBERT VAUX ZINZAN

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*1864 Hindon surgeon*

*and latter day Oedipus*

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Researching the backgrounds of former Hindon doctors I came across the extraordinary antics of Robert Vaux Zinzan (Robert Vaux Zinzan). Inevitably this must have been the source of much scurrilous conjecture and gossip for Hindonians.

Robert Vaux Zinzan was born in Edmonton in 1839 and was the son of Robert Comport Zinzan (Robert Comport Zinzan). They were both surgeons and apothecaries. Robert Comport Zinzan married Ann Elizabeth Edwards in Kingsbridge, Devon on 17 August 1837. Soon after the marriage they moved to Edmonton where their four children were born, Robert Vaux Zinzan being the second child. Ann Elizabeth died in Edmonton in 1848 aged 35. Robert Comport Zinzan went into practice in Hindon c1849. In 1855 he married Mary Ann Green elder daughter of the innkeepers of The Lamb Inn at Hindon but the marriage was childless. He was 41 at the time of this marriage and Mary only 18. Unwittingly this set the scene for Robert Vaux Zinzan later scandalous behaviour. Robert Comport Zinzan died in Hindon aged 49 in 1862. The cause of death was given as exhaustion. This is not a diagnosis but a lay descriptive term and implies giving up after a long struggle. The requirement for a death certificate by a registered doctor only became necessary in 1874. Exhaustion suggests that Robert Comport Zinzan may have had a long period of ill health before his death and could explain why there had been no children. In 1864 Mary became pregnant by Robert Vaux Zinzan.

Presumably in an attempt to legitimise the birth and unable to resolve the problem in Hindon, Robert Vaux Zinzan returned to his medical student haunts in Tower Hamlets, Poplar. There he persuaded the unsuspecting curate of St George in the East parish church, the Rev. J M Vaughan, a former neighbour of his when a student, to marry him to Mary Ann by licence on 28 September 1864. To do so he made the false declarations that she was a spinster and her father William Zinzan a farmer. Though he must have known that in law he was barred from marrying his step-mother he also swore on oath that he knew of no impediment to the marriage. Someone, probably the vicar of Hindon, lost no time in challenging the validity of the marriage which set in train a thorough investigation of the circumstances. This resulted in a court case against Robert Vaux Zinzan in the Alderman's Court at The Guildhall, London which was held in December 1864.

The most telling evidence against him was a short and succinct written submission by the Hindon parish clerk pointing out the kinship of Robert Vaux Zinzan with Mary Ann. Other evidence indicated that Robert Vaux Zinzan was unknown at the address he gave to qualify for residency in the parish and had probably never been there at all. He did not appear in person at his trial nor did he instruct counsel who was employed by his younger sister and her friends. The outcome of the trial was a warrant for his apprehension. His counsel argued that this was unlikely to be successful as Robert Vaux Zinzan had left home and his whereabouts was unknown and that he was possibly abroad. The case was widely publicised in the press but no record of later events has been found. Mary gave birth to Louisa Fanny Zinzan in the December quarter 1864. In due course Robert Vaux Zinzan returned to the Hindon area and lost no time in trying out

pastures new as on 6 December 1866 he married Isabella Margaret Hay Griffith at East Knoyle parish church. That he was free to marry in church indicates that his marriage to Mary Ann must have been annulled.

Seemingly to put his past indiscretions behind him and start a new life where he was unknown Robert Vaux Zinzan and Isabella moved to New Zealand in 1869 and settled in Onehunga a suburb of Auckland. His elder sister Lavinia Caroline and her husband George Brown Harris also settled in Onehunga. Robert Vaux Zinzan would not have known that his past had preceded him to Auckland. A local newspaper, the Pehi Evening Post, had picked up and reported in detail in their 18 March 1865 edition the circumstances of his 1864 trial. Robert Vaux Zinzan practised as a surgeon and apothecary in New Zealand until his premature death from cirrhosis of the liver in 1879 aged only 40.

Louisa Fanny Zinzan was brought up by her mother. After a period as a governess she became a Sister of Mercy at St. Denys, Warminster where she died on Christmas Eve 1920. St Denys has since closed. The Sisters of Mercy are an Anglican order of nuns dedicated to the welfare of children. The St Denys buildings are now part of Warminster School.

To every cloud there is a silver lining and Zinzan descendants have produced some outstanding international Kiwi sportsmen. Zinzan Brooke and his brother Robin played rugby for the All Blacks. Zinzan Brooke is considered by many to be among the greatest No 8 forwards of all time. The Harris brothers Chris and Ben played cricket for New Zealand. Chris became something of a folk hero in the 1990s for his left hand batting and right arm bowling successes in One Day Internationals.

Of all the other former Hindon doctors none has a story to match that of Robert Vaux Zinzan.

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