John Robinson (1829–1864)

By Patricia Lovell

John was born on 28 November 1829 at Peckham, Surrey, the eldest child of John James Robinson and Rebecca Morris, and was baptised on 31 January 1830 at Grove Independent Church in Camberwell. There were six children, five of whom survived infancy.

His father, John James Robinson, was a Goldsmith. The Goldsmiths' Company have given the following information about him:

> John James Robinson was apprenticed to his father, John, to be a silversmith and jeweller through the Goldsmiths' Company in 1810. He was made a freeman on 2 July 1817 and was elected to the livery in January 1822.
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> From our livery lists we have John James Robinson at 153 Leadenhall Street from 1822 until June 1842. There is a gap in the livery lists until April 1850 (the next extant list) when he was listed at East Hoathly, Hurst Green, Sussex. He was listed there until July 1855. In July 1859 he was at Box Grove, Guildford Surrey until the 1877 list."

The *elder* John Robinson mentioned as the father, above, was, according to his granddaughter Sarah in her book *A Life Record*, Goldsmith and Jeweller to the Honorable East India Company and had his shop in Leadenhall Street, near East India House and his residence at Peckham.

It is probably worth recording here, before moving on to the succeeding generation, that John James Robinson died on 31 December 1878.

The family has been found in 1841 at Prospect House, otherwise known as Heasmonds, East Hoathly, but young John is not with them. It appears from other information that it was the practice in the family to send the children away to school. There is a possibility that he was school at Church Hill School, Dyke Road, in Brighton, aged eleven. This school was run by a William Butler, Clerk and Schoolmaster.

The likelihood of John being at this school is the presence, in the 1851 census, of two of his brothers, Isaac and James, at that same school.

John himself can be found in 1851 at 8 Springfield Terrace Grove. Camberwell as nephew to Mary Hooper. He was an Architect born in Peckham, Surrey, and she was born in Lewes.

His sister Sarah wrote in her book *Yarns* that he worked under Gilbert Scott as an architect, largely abroad, then came home in 1856.

Sarah says that, in 1856, “she became acquainted” with her eldest brother, John. What with John’s Brighton schooldays, then Sarah’s own time away at school, also at Brighton, then John’s work with Gilbert Scott, she never really got to know him.

John then married. The *Morning Chronicle* of Friday, 11 July 1856, carried the following announcement:

> 8 July 1856 at St Nicholas, Brighton, John, — son of J.J. Robinson to Sarah Susanne, youngest daughter of the late Edward Gardner Esq. of Stamford Hill and Paternoster Row.

Sarah is variously given as Susanne, Susanna or Susannah in other documents, apparently not using the name Sarah.

Edward Gardner is recorded in the National Archives as being insured by the Sun Fire Office on 29 May 1822.

> Insured: The University of Oxford Clarendon Press Printing Office Oxford Samuel Collingwood Joseph Parker **Edward Gardner** 7 Paternoster Row printers booksellers”

He appears as a Member of The Booksellers’ Provident Institution at 7 Paternoster Row in 1837, and died on 30 December 1850. All that is known of his wife is that she was called Mary and that she predeceased him.

Edward left a long and very detailed Will, apportioning his fortune to his sons and daughters. By the look of it, Sarah Susanne was quite a wealthy woman in her own right.

There is every likelihood that the Robinsons and Gardners knew each other at Brighton.

The marriage record at St Nicholas gives John Robinson, Architect, of East Hoathly and Sarah Susanna Gardner of 9 Old Steine, Brighton. The witnesses are Isaac Robinson, who would have been John’s brother, and Mary Moon. The latter is of interest as *The Standard* of 24 August 1850 carries a marriage notice for Henry Moon, Esq. MD of Lewes to Caroline, third daughter of Edward Gardner Esq. Of Stamford Hill and Paternoster Row! In 1851 this couple lived in Lewes.

James, John’s brother, may have married Mary Hooper Moon on 2 July 1861 at St Nicholas, Brighton. In 1861 Mary was the daughter of Henry Moon, Physician, living at 9 Old Steine, Brighton with his wife Caroline and 7 children aged between 25 and 9 weeks!

The logical explanation for this is that Caroline was Henry’s second (or later) wife.

The inclusion of the name Hooper is interesting as it will be remembered that John Robinson was listed in 1851 as nephew to Mary Hooper, given as being born in Lewes.

Circumstantial, but thought-provoking none the less.

John and Sarah Susanne moved to Oxford for John to study to be a Minister of the Church of England.

His entry in *Alumni Oxonienses* is:

> Robinson, Rev. John, 1s. John James, of London, gent. Magdalen Hall, matric. 12 May, 1858, aged 28; B.A. 1862, M.A. 1864, died 22 Nov., 1864.

John Robinson is listed as a Gentleman Commoner under Magdalen Hall in the *Oxford University Calendar* for 1859.

[Note that Magdalen Hall was no longer on the Magdalen College site, but was where Hertford College is now.]

Sarah Susanna is given, just as Susana, living at Park Town, St Giles, Oxford in the 1861 census with her daughter Mary aged two. The year and place of birth are correct, so even without John's presence it is almost certain to be her.

There is a Nurse and a House Servant in the household.

Further confirmation comes from the record of Baptisms at St Giles' Church, Oxford.

> 5 January 1859: ROBINSON, Mary, daughter of John & Sarah Susannah, Father a Gentleman commoner of Magdalen Hall, residence, Park Crescent.

The whereabouts of John in 1861 is somewhat speculative, as there is no suitable entry for him in the 1861 census.

He appears to be John Rebuins aged 32, a Visitor at 23, Mortimer Street, Marylebone with a family called Kirby. So far, there has been no suggestion that these people are in any way related!. He is stated to be born in Peckham but there is no occupation given.

He is accompanied by a James Rebuins aged 23 born in Blackheath, a Solicitor. The John Robinson in question had a younger brother, James, born in Blackheath and who was 12 when found in the 1851 census.

On the 1881 census, Rebecca Robinson, head, age 50, born in Peckham, Surrey, was residing at Heasmonds, Lovers Walk, Brighton, with James Robinson, age 42, a widower and solicitor, born in Blackheath, Kent.

Rebecca was John Robinson's next one down sibling, and this also tells us that James was a Solicitor!

Despite the rather mangled transcription by the enumerator, it would appear that the two Robinson brothers are together in 1861.

Heasmonds was the name of the estate at East Hoathly where the Robinsons lived and was probably fondly remembered by the family. It was where they lived until John Robinson lost money and the estate was sold, causing them to move.

Jackson's Oxford Journal of 26 December 1863 carried the information that the Rev John Robinson was ordained 'on Sunday last'. The 26th was a Saturday, but Sunday last would have been 20 December! He was said to be B A Magdalen Hall, Oxford.

He would appear to have already been appointed Curate to Headington Church as the same publication, on 19 December 1863, carried an advertisement asking for donations for the rebuilding of that church. These were to be sent to Rev J Robinson, Curate, and a list of other persons.

The advertisement is strongly worded, the Bishop himself "last year wrote thus":

> I rejoice to hear that the Parish of Headington is moving for the re-building of the Parish Church. I believe there is no parish in my whole diocese where the work is so urgently needed.

The Nave and South aisle appear to have been completed, but the North aisle remained to be done. It is possible that John could not keep from using his skills as an architect with this going on around him!

John was not to enjoy his church for much longer, for as was given in his *Alumni Oxonienses* entry, he died on 22 November 1864. He would appear to be a very 'hands on' minister, as *Jackson's Oxford Journal* states on 26 November 1864

> Nov. 22 at Headington, near Oxford, of small-pox, after a few days' illness, the Rev John Robinson M.A., Curate of the Parish, and eldest son of J. J. Robinson, Esq., of Box Grove, Guildford, in the 35th year of his age.

His sister Sarah wrote in 'Life Record':-

> After his ordination he was appointed to the sole charge of Headington, near Oxford, where, after a short career of remarkable usefulness, he died in November 1864 of small-pox, caught in visiting a sick man.

His grave is very near the main church porch, to the left (west) of the path, and the description in the transcription of monumental inscriptions is as follows:

> Headstone facing east with a two-inch-stone still surrounding the grave. Footstone inscribed "J. R".
>
> Sacred
> to the memory of
> The Rev. John Robinson M.A.
> late Curate of this Parish
> born November 28 1829
> died November 22 1864.



In 1871 Susanne Robinson was still at Church Street, Headington, as Clergyman's Widow. Her daughter Mary is not with her. She may have followed the family tradition and gone away to school as a suitable Mary is at Kensington Garden Square, Paddington as one of five pupils.

In 1881 she is at the Vicarage, St Andrew's House, Headington with her daughter, now aged 22, and a family surnamed Cousins. The husband is a compositor and apparently carried on his own work while his wife was a servant to the family. There was also a four-year-old son, so Susanna must have been a fairly generous employer for her time. There was also another female servant.

In 1891 Susanne is “Living on her own means” at 15, Park Crescent, St Giles, Oxford with two female servants.

She cannot be found in 1901 census but the death of a Sarah Susanne Robinson aged 71 was registered at Westhampnett in the June quarter of 1899. The combination of names is not common and the age would give a year of birth of 1828, so possibly our lady. There was no marriage for a Sarah Susanna between the years given, 1891–1901.

She is not included in the inscription on her husband’s gravestone at Headington.

On 20 April 1881 her daughter Mary (22) was married at St Andrew’s Church, Headington to William James Herman Newman (25), who was the son of William Newman, a Clerk in Holy Orders. Mary is described as the daughter of John Robinson, who of course was also a Clerk in Holy Orders. The witnesses were James Robinson and Esther Gardner.

In the 1891 census William Newman was Vicar of Steeple Barton in Oxfordshire, is aged 35 and was born in Surbiton, Surrey. He and Mary have in the household, as cousin, a John Charles Reynolds Robinson.

In 1901 there is good and bad news. The good news is that William Herman Newman is a Clerk in Holy Orders at the Vicarage, East Dean in Sussex, , where Sarah Susanne was buried on 26 June 1899, so she was probably living with her son-in-law and daughter at the time of her death. The bad news is that William is a widower. The death of a Mary Newman was registered at Westhampnett in the December quarter of 1900, she was 41.

Unless the family tradition of sending children to school was followed, there appear to be none.

In 1911 William is still at the Vicarage in East Dean and has remarried. His wife, Louisa Jane, is a local woman. The census record shows that they had been married one year. The handwriting, presumably William’s is tiny, very neat and artistic.

There is a marriage for William James H Newman registered at Docking in the September quarter of 1909 to Louisa Jane Switzer.

Louisa J Switzer had been Housekeeper at the Vicarage in 1901. Docking registration district is in Norfolk. Did they run away for a quiet wedding, possibly conducted by a friend or relative of the bridegroom?

In 1901 William’s brother, Arthur, was a Theology Student – but it was probably not he who performed the ceremony as in 1911 he was at the Vicarage of Wykeham, Yorkshire. Not impossible, though, if he had been in Norfolk prior to this.

This is the Robinson family as far as it can be traced by on-line methods.

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I think that all relevant references have been given in the text, except to mention that **Sarah Robinson**, John's sister, was the founder of Soldiers' Institutes in Portsmouth and Alexandria and was a tireless worker for the care and well being of soldiers.

Many of them had nowhere to go when not in Barracks, or when they came to ports such as Portsmouth on troopships. They often had considerable amounts of money to spare and were easy prey for the beer shops and brothels which abounded in Portsmouth at the time.

Having worked in a similar establishment in Aldershot, Sarah bought premises in Portsmouth's High Street in 1873 and set up a place where soldiers could find companionship, quiet, reading and writing materials, clean beds and wholesome food at low prices.

This did not make Sarah popular with the people of Portsmouth! One November 5th she was burned in effigy on Southsea Common!

She also set up a Coffee Shed at the docks to care for the soldiers disembarking, and provided places for their families if they had come to Portsmouth to meet them. Warm clothing was often supplied to women and children who had come home with the troops as they had often left India in warm weather only to reach England in the cold.

Sarah's Institutes were run on temperance lines and there were also arrangements for morally uplifting lectures and Bible readings.

Sarah spent much of her own fortune in this work, travelling thousands of miles, even to Scotland, to speak to groups in order to raise funds, in spite of the fact that she was in constant pain with a curvature of the spine for which she wore a special steel corset.

She was born in 1834 in Peckham and died in a house especially adapted for her disability in Burley in the New Forest in 1921.

She was cremated at Woking Crematorium and her remains were interred at Brookwood Cemetery together with those of her brother, James, who predeceased her by a few months.

She wrote numerous pamphlets which were distributed in large numbers to servicemen and their families, and at least three books, two of which have been mentioned above. These three have been studied at Portsmouth Central Library

> **Yarns**, 1892. No publisher, but my copy says that it was printed at the Grafton Printing Works, Holloway, London and sold only at the Soldiers' Institute.
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> **Life Record**, Nisbet 1898
>
> **My Book**, Partridge, 1914

There is an *ODNB* entry for Sarah, compiled by Sue Morgan, latest version 2007, though Ms Morgan may be adding more detail later!