

The Hardwicke Story

One of the most notable graves in the Lye & Wollescote Cemetery is that of the Hardwicke family. Dr. Edwin Webster Hardwicke arrived in the town of Lye shortly after his marriage to Jessie Masterson in Cambridge in 1891. Their son, Cedric Webster Hardwicke, was born in Lye in 1893 and went on to become a major Hollywood star in the 1930s and 40s. A daughter, Muriel Burne Hardwicke, was born in 1896 and another daughter, Sylvia Constance, in 1902. Sadly, Muriel died in 1904 at the age of nine years and was buried in Lye Cemetery in a grave that bore a large stone cross and the image of an angel, both of which over the years had become detached.

More recent research has revealed that the Hardwicke's had another daughter, Sybil Mary born in 1898, though she is not listed on any census as residing with the family in Lye. In 1901, at the age of three years, she was living in Surrey with Frederick and Maud Cooke. Ten years later, in 1911, Sybil was still living with the Cooke family who had now moved to Folkestone. Maud Cooke was Jessie Hardwicke's sister. She and her husband Frederick had married in 1887 but do not appear to have had any children of their own and perhaps Jessie Hardwicke had allowed the couple to bring up her daughter Sybil Mary.

The Hardwicke family were members of St. Marks Church, Stambermill where Mrs Hardwicke was much involved with the activities of the church. It could be said that Cedric Hardwicke made his acting debut, at the age of seven, at a fund-raising concert held at St. Marks. However, following the death of their daughter, Muriel, it seems the Hardwicke family's involvement with the church ceased. The death of Muriel had a profound effect on Mrs Hardwicke who, it is said, often visited the grave in the cemetery to leave chocolate bars in the hand of the angel. Jessie Hardwicke died in 1924 at the age of 60 years and was buried in Lye Cemetery with her daughter.

In October of 2010 Marlene Price and I were invited to an event at the Thorns Community College to celebrate the launch of the college's 'Hardwicke Theatre'. The guest of honour was to be Sir Cedric Hardwicke's son, Edward Hardwicke, an

accomplished actor in his own right. In the 1980s TV series, *Sherlock Holmes*, Edward had played Dr. Watson along with the late Jeremy Brett as Holmes.

We were fortunate enough to be introduced to Edward Hardwicke, and he was pleased to be given a signed copy of our book on the history of Lye Cemetery, in which his grandfather, Dr. Hardwicke, was mentioned. Edward Hardwicke, a friendly and approachable gentleman, confessed that he knew very little about his family's history and had never known his grandfather who had died just three weeks after Edward was born. As a result we said that we would take a look at his family background and let him know of our findings, for which he was most grateful. Some weeks later we received a hand-written letter from Edward Hardwicke thanking us for our kindness.

It was whilst carrying out this research into the Hardwicke family that a curious discovery was made where it would seem that the family name had, in fact, originated as Webster. It also introduced us to a fascinating character who could have stepped straight out of the pages of a Dickens' novel, the wonderfully named Euphrates Webster Hardwicke.

Euphrates, was born in 1832 in Edwinstowe, Nottinghamshire, the illegitimate son of Anne Webster. The Webster family were prominent business people in and around Edwinstowe with interests in farming, land, property, a shop and a public house. Five years after Euphrates was born, his mother Anne Webster married John Ezra Hardwicke, supposedly an agricultural labourer though the couple moved away from Edwinstowe and set up a school in Suffolk. Euphrates, however, chose to stay in Edwinstowe and retained his surname of Webster. In 1841 at the age of nine years, he was living with his uncle, Miles Webster, at Black Hill Farm in Edwinstowe. Ten years later Euphrates was still living in the household of his uncle, now a shopkeeper in Town Street, with Euphrates working as a journeyman draper.

On the 14th of April 1858 Euphrates married Anne Burne in the village church of Eakring, six miles from Edwinstowe. Their first child, a daughter Annie Jane, was born in 1859. Their son, Edwin, possibly a twin, was born in 1861. Euphrates was now employed as a farmer and grocer but, soon after the birth of Edwin, Euphrates took the decision to leave Edwinstowe and start a new life in Cambridge with his wife and two children.

In the 1850s Euphrates' step-father, John Ezra Hardwicke, had become a Professor of Botany and in 1855 had a business in Bury St. Edmunds as a Medical Botanist which later expanded to include a wholesale druggist. After moving to Cambridge, Euphrates followed the career of his step-father, John Ezra, in the study of botany and medicinal plants and from then on their lives ran a parallel course, though how or where they studied is not known. This was a time when doctors made their own medicines, and plants were the main ingredient. The Apothecaries Act of 1815 had made the study of botany a compulsory part of medical education which would serve the Hardwicks well in the future.

Euphrates now took the surname of Hardwicke for himself and his family. He had taken a lease on a property in All Saints Passage, Cambridge where he set up as a herbalist. By 1871, Euphrates had moved to No. 10, Petty Cury where his business was variously described as Medical Botanist, Dispensary, Herbalist and Chemist. He became a member of the Association of Herbalists and the British Medical Reform Association.

No. 10 Petty Cury was next door to the *Falcon Inn* and in the mid-19th century, the *Falcon* yard was notorious as a focus of urban squalor where whole families lived in one room and young girls worked as prostitutes. There is a reference to the *Falcon* in Samuel Pepys' Diary where he records that in February of 1659 he went to '*the Falcon in Petty Cury where we found my father and brother very well*'.

In the 1870s Euphrates Hardwicke once again changed his name and incorporated his original surname of Webster becoming known as Euphrates Webster Hardwicke, a name he retained for the rest of his life and which would have looked impressive above his business at No. 10 Petty Cury. Euphrates could now afford to employ a live-in general servant, a nursemaid for his growing family, and a page boy. However, tragedy struck in 1872 when Euphrates' wife, Anne, died on June the 6th at the age of thirty-five years. Thirteen days later, on the 19th of June, their son Bertie also died, aged seven. Both Anne and Bertie were buried in the same grave in Mill Road Cemetery, Cambridge.



Grave of Annie Hardwicke, Bertie and Euphrates Webster Hardwicke in Mill Road Cemetery, Cambridge

Euphrates never re-married and continued with his business at No. 10 Petty Cury, Cambridge for the next twenty years. It was from this address that his eldest son, Edwin, began studying to become a doctor. He could not have had a more ideal background when, from an early age, he had lived in surroundings where herbal medicines were being dispensed to the people of Cambridge. Edwin would, undoubtedly, have been encouraged by his father, Euphrates, whose own half-brother and nephew also became doctors. Edwin entered Cambridge University becoming a B.A. in 1884 and a B.C. in 1891, by which time he was House Surgeon, Duty Registrar and Surgery Practitioner at the County Hospital in Huntingdon. He met and married Jessie Masterson and soon afterwards they came to live at the house near Lye Cross.

Meanwhile back in Cambridge, Euphrates made one further move to Alexandra Street before retiring to Fulbourn in Cambridgeshire where he died on the 24th of November 1896, aged sixty-four. He was buried in the grave in Mill Road Cemetery with his wife, Anne, and young son, Bertie. Probate was granted to his spinster daughter, Annie Jane, and his eldest son, Edwin Webster Hardwicke, M.D. Euphrates' effects amounted to just over £1500, a considerable sum for that time.

For forty years Edwin Webster Hardwicke was a respected and much-loved doctor in Lye. He was Medical Officer of Health for Quarry Bank UDC and Medical Officer for the Lye & Wollescote District, Stourbridge Union. In the early part of the 20th century he was one of the first people in Lye to own a motor car, believed to be a French Darracq model manufactured in 1900. Dr. Hardwicke had employed Alfred Perks as his groom to take him on his rounds in a pony and trap. However, on acquiring the motor car, Alfred was sent to Birmingham to learn how to drive the new automobile and thus became Dr. Hardwicke's chauffeur. This experience stood Alfred in good stead when, during the First World War, he served as a driver of London buses sent to France to ferry troops to the front line and return with wounded soldiers.

When Edwin Webster Hardwicke died in 1932 his family requested that *'No obituary notice should appear in the newspapers and that his funeral should be of the simplest nature, and should interfere as little as possible with the normal life of the community in which he worked and which he loved'*. He was duly buried in the grave in Lye Cemetery with his wife and daughter.

Edwin's son, Cedric Webster Hardwicke, was famous as one of Hollywood's great character actors during the first decades of talking pictures and was once described as 'one of the greatest actors of his day'. Though he started his career as a stage actor, Cedric Hardwicke actually made two silent films in England before the First World War when he enlisted and served as a lieutenant in the 9th Northumberland Fusiliers. His career as a film actor really took off when he went to Hollywood in the 1930s and he was knighted by King George V in 1934 at a time when very few actors received such an accolade. A story has been handed down that the King was rather deaf and misheard the name 'Hardwicke', referring to Cedric as 'Sir Pickwick'. Sir Cedric Hardwicke travelled quite extensively and published his memoirs, *'A*

Victorian in Orbit, in 1961. He died in New York in 1964 and his ashes were scattered at Golders Green Crematorium in London.

A few months after our meeting with Edward Hardwicke at the Thorns Community College in October 2010, we wrote to let him know that the Bereavement Services department of Dudley Council had agreed to a basic restoration of the Hardwicke grave in the cemetery, reuniting the cross and the angel with the lower structure. Strangely this letter remained unanswered. We later learned that, sadly, Mr. Hardwicke had died on the 16th of May so would never know the origin of his ancestry, and especially that of his grandfather, the much-loved Dr. Hardwicke of Lye, and his Medical Botanist great-grandfather, Euphrates Webster Hardwicke. Their stories and the grave in the Lye & Wollescote Cemetery have now become a part of Lye's history.



The restored Hardwicke grave in Lye Cemetery