

William Richard Cobay

1852-1920

William Richard Cobay was a prominent businessman and the Mayor of Hythe during World War I, from 1914 to 1918.

William Richard Cobay was born in Winchester, England, in 1852.

Mayoralty: He was elected as Mayor in 1914 and re-elected unanimously every year until 1918. He was not an Alderman at the time of his first election.

Wartime Contributions: During his tenure as mayor, he was highly regarded for his philanthropic efforts. He donated to and raised over £23,000 for various causes, including the Belgian Relief Fund and the Red Cross. He also established the "Hythe Heroes Fund" to assist families in need who were bereaved or incapacitated due to war service.



Business Ventures: William was a successful cabinet maker and upholsterer, a partner in the London firm Smee and Cobay, which held a showroom on New Bond Street. The firm ceased trading in 1906, and William returned to Hythe.

Local Development: He was instrumental in local development, notably purchasing and refurbishing the derelict Seabrook Hotel, transforming it into the Imperial Hotel, which still operates today. He also developed the Metropole Hotel in Folkestone and established the Metropole Laundry in Hythe.

Legacy: After the war, he was granted the Freedom of the Town, a rarely bestowed honour. He died before he could be knighted.

He died in Hyde Park 26/3/1920 following an operation for appendicitis. He was buried in St Leonard's churchyard in Hythe with his parents and brother. (plots 192 & 205) <https://www.hythecivicsociety.org/post/st-leonards-graveyard>



A set of oak panels with gilt lettering, listing all the Bailiffs and Mayors of the town, was commissioned by his brother Robert in his memory and still hangs in the Town Hall.

Family: His father, George, served two terms, and his brother Henry also served as Mayor of Hythe three times. Another brother, Robert, was mayor in 1911.



Information supplied by Ann Petrie & other sources.