

William Richard Cobay

Mayor 1914 to 1918

(1852-1920)



Hythe Pageant in aid of the Red Cross - the Mayor's car

Early Life and Family (1852-1870)

William Richard Cobay was born in Winchester, England, in 1852 and baptised there on 8 September. He was the fourth of at least six children of George and Hannah Cobay. His father was a prosperous innkeeper who later became a landowner and grazier. Public service ran in the family, with his father and brothers all serving as Mayor of Hythe.

By the age of 18, William had moved to London to work as a cabinet maker's clerk in Hackney alongside his brother Robert.

Business Career in London (1870s-1906)

William and Robert formed a successful partnership as house furnishers and decorators, moving from Hackney to Hanover Square and later to New Bond Street as Smee and Cobay.

In 1905, they refurbished the Royalty Theatre in Dean Street, praised by The Times as 'one of the brightest and prettiest theatres in London.'

The firm ceased trading in 1906, after which William returned to Hythe.

Return to Hythe and Local Enterprise (1906–1914)

Following the death of his brother Henry, William and Robert returned to Hythe to take over his business interests.

William played a major role in local development, transforming the Seabrook Hotel into the Imperial Hotel, developing the Metropole Hotel in Folkestone, and establishing the Metropole Laundry in Hythe.

Mayoralty and the First World War (1914–1918)

William was elected Mayor of Hythe in 1914 and was unanimously re-elected each year until 1918.

During the war, he raised over £23,000 for causes such as the Belgian Relief Fund and the Red Cross, and founded the Hythe Heroes Fund to support affected families.

Recognition and Legacy (1918–1920)

He was granted the Freedom of the Town on 15 November 1918. Though expected to be knighted, he died before this honour could be conferred.

His brother Robert later commissioned oak panels listing Hythe's Bailiffs and Mayors, which still hang in the Town Hall.



Death and Burial (1920)

William Richard Cobay died on 26 March 1920 in Hyde Park following an operation for appendicitis. He was buried in St Leonard's churchyard in Hythe with his family. (plots 192 & 205)



Overall Significance

Cobay's life combined business success with dedicated public service. His leadership during World War I and contributions to Hythe left a lasting legacy.

