

A VICTORIAN PHILANTHROPIST

George Herring (1833–1906), was born in Clerkenwell and brought up in very poor circumstances. He began his career as a carver in a boiled-beef shop on Ludgate Hill, though this has been disputed. By saving money and judicious betting on horse races he soon built up his income. He then established himself as a turf commission agent, gradually increasing his business.

In 1855 he was an important witness against William Palmer (1824–1856), the Rugeley Poisoner, an owner and breeder of racehorses who was convicted of poisoning a fellow gambler, John Parsons Cook. At Tattersall's and at the Victoria Club Herring built up a reputation as a man of strict integrity, and was entrusted with the business of many leading speculators, who included the twelfth earl of Westmorland, Sir Joseph Hawley, and the duke of Beaufort. Briefly Herring also owned racehorses, and in 1874 Shallow, his best horse, was a winner of the Surrey stakes, Goodwood Corinthian plate, Brighton Club stakes, and Lewes autumn handicap, four out of the ten races in which he ran.

Although remaining an *aficionado* of the turf and interesting himself in athletics, Herring left the racing world for that of high finance in the City, where, in association with Henry Louis Bischoffsheim (1829–1908), he made a fortune. He was chairman of the City of London Electric Lighting Company, and was connected with many similar ventures. His powers of calculation were exceptionally rapid and accurate.

A 'rough diamond' with an unassuming lifestyle, Herring spent his remaining years and large fortune on a range of charities. From 1899 until his death he guaranteed to contribute to the **London Sunday Hospital Fund** either £10,000 in each year or 25 per cent of the amount collected in the churches. In 1899, 1900, and 1901 the fund, exercising its option, took £10,000 annually; in 1902, £11,575; in 1903, £12,302; in 1904, £11,926; in 1905, £12,400; in 1906, £11,275. The form of the benefaction spurred subscribers' generosity.

Herring also supported a Haven of Rest: almshouses for the aged in Maidenhead, where he had a house. With Howard Morley he started the Twentieth Century Club at Notting Hill for working gentlewomen, and was a generous benefactor to the North-West London Hospital at Camden Town, of which he was treasurer. In 1887 he first discussed with 'General' William Booth the Back to the Land Scheme, the Salvation Army's plan for relieving the unemployed. In 1905 he proposed to advance £100,000 to the Salvation Army for the purpose of settling poor people on marginal land in the United Kingdom. Once established as petty cultivators, able to support their families, the settlers were expected to pay back the advance, which was then to be given by the Salvation Army to King Edward's Hospital Fund in twenty-five annual instalments. Herring eagerly defended the scheme when it was criticized as impracticable, and it was put into operation. The sum actually received from Herring was £40,000 under a codicil to his will. With this an estate was purchased at Boxted, Essex, comprising about fifty holdings, which Herring had visited and approved shortly before his death. In accordance with a decision of the court of chancery, the entire control of the scheme was vested in the Salvation Army, with Booth as sole trustee.

Herring married, on 16 September 1872, Miriam Yates Sanguinetti (*b.* 1851/2), daughter of Isaac Yates Sanguinetti, merchant. He lived a retired life and eschewed public recognition. He died on 2 November 1906 at his Bedfordshire residence, Putteridge Park, Luton, after an operation for appendicitis. He also had residences at 1 Hamilton Place, Piccadilly, London, and Bridge House, Maidenhead. The urn containing his remains, which were cremated at Woking, was buried under the sundial at the Haven of Rest Almshouses at Maidenhead. After legacies to his brother William, to other relatives, friends, and charities, the residue of his estate was left to the Hospital Sunday Fund, which benefited to the extent of about £750,000. The bequests to charities under the will reached a total of about £900,000.

On 15 June 1908 a marble bust of Herring, by George Wade, presented by the Metropolitan Sunday Hospital Fund as residuary legatees under his will, was placed in the Mansion House. On a brass plate beneath the bust is inscribed a letter received in 1905 by Herring from Edward VII, who warmly commended Herring's quiet and modest philanthropy.