

The Reverend Morley Unwin and his Family

Morley Unwin, the second son of Thomas and Martha, was baptised on 31 July 1704 at Saint Peter Cornhill, London. Thomas Unwin was a goldsmith.

Morley's parents were married as soon as Thomas completed his apprenticeship. Their firstborn son, another Thomas, is listed as being baptised in 1702 followed by Morley, four more sons and finally a daughter Martha named after her mother.

Morley was probably educated at Charterhouse. It was close to his home in London and the school he chose for his son.

He was a Fellow of Queens' College, Cambridge, from 1727-1744. He was a Master of Arts and a Bachelor of Divinity, Superior Bursar, Censor Theologicus and Philosophicus, Dean of Chapel, and Catechist; also Chaplain in the Navy, Master of the Free School, Huntingdon and Vicar of Oakington, Cambs. He was Chaplain to the Earl of Harborough, who presented him to Richard, Bishop of Lincoln who canonically instituted him Rector of Wistow, Hunts, on 23 December 1737. Morley Unwin was the first Rector to be presented to Grimston by Queens' College, Cambridge and that was in 1742.

William Hayley tells us in his *Life of William Cowper* that

[Morley Unwin] had likewise been Lecturer to the two Churches in Huntingdon before he obtained from his College the living of Grimston. While in expectation of the preferment, he attached himself to a young lady of lively talents, and remarkably fond of reading, the daughter of Mr Cawthorne, a draper of Ely, and, on succeeding to the expected living, married her and settled at Grimston; but she not liking the situation, and wishing for a scene less sequestered, prevailed on her husband to establish himself in the town of Huntingdon, where he was known as well as respected.

Grimston, a quiet agricultural village, is about 8 miles east of Kings Lynn. Morley would not have been allowed to remain a Fellow of Queens' College as a married man and the living of St. Botolph's in Grimston was found for him.

Morley Unwin married Mary Cawthorne in the Lady Chapel of Ely Cathedral on 27 March 1744.

William Cawthorne Unwin, their son, was baptised at Grimston on 15 March 1745 and the entry, which Morley made himself in the Register of Baptisms at St. Botolph's has this one entry underlined. He must have been so proud, delighted and thrilled to be the father of a son at the age of 41. They left Grimston in 1746 and a daughter, Susanna, was baptised on 26 August 1747 at All Saints and St John's, Huntingdon. Morley and Mary Unwin moved to a house in the High Street in Huntingdon in 1748, where he prepared a few pupils for the university whilst a curate undertook his duties in Grimston.

William Cowper, at the age of 33, after a bout of severe depression during which he had attempted suicide, moved to Huntingdon on 22 June 1765. His brother John was a Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (also known as Bene't College from the neighbouring church of St Benedict) and the close proximity of Huntingdon to Cambridge allowed the two brothers to visit each other frequently.

William Cowper first met the Unwin family in September 1765; on 25 October he wrote to Joseph Hill:

I have added another family to the number of those I was acquainted with when you were here. Their name is Unwin – the most agreeable people imaginable; quite sociable, and as free from the ceremonious civility of country gentlefolks as any I have ever met with. They treat me more like a near relation than a stranger, and their house is always open to me. The old gentleman carries me to Cambridge in his chaise. He is a man of learning and good sense, and as simple as Parson Adams¹. His wife has a very uncommon understanding, has read much to excellent purpose, and is more polite than a duchess.

¹ A character in Henry Fielding's novel *Joseph Andrews*, 1742



Mary Unwin

The son, who belongs to Cambridge, is a most amiable young man, and the daughter quite of a piece with the rest of the family. They see but little company, which suits me exactly; go when I will, I find a house full of peace and cordiality in all its parts, and I am sure to hear no scandal, but such discourse instead of it as we are all better for. You remember Rousseau's description of an English morning; such are the mornings I spend with these good people; and the evenings differ from them in nothing, except that they are still more snug. And quieter. Now I know them, I wonder that I liked Huntingdon so well before I knew them, and am apt to think I should find every place disagreeable that had not an Unwin belonging to it...



William Unwin

Yours, dear Joe,
WC

By November 1765 Cowper is telling his friends of his imminent removal into the home of the Rev. Morley Unwin, adding in a postscript,

I know nobody so like Mrs Unwin as my Aunt Madan, I don't mean in person, for she is a much younger woman, but in character.

- a clear indication of his respect for Mary's intelligence and the attraction she held for him. Aunt Madan was, before her marriage, Miss Judith Cowper and a notable bluestocking: she was Alexander Pope's beautiful 'Erinna' for whom he wrote 'Letter to a Lady'.

Cowper gives us an insight into the life of the Unwin family in Huntingdon in a letter of 20 October 1766 to his cousin Maria Cowper.

...I am obliged to you for the interest you take in my welfare, and for your inquiring so particularly after the manner in which my time passes here. As to amusements, I mean what the world calls such, we have none; the place indeed swarms with them, and cards and dancing are the professed business of almost all the gentle inhabitants of Huntingdon. We refuse to take part in them, or to be accessories to this way of murdering our time, and by so doing have acquired the name of Methodists. Having told you how we do not spend our time, I will next say how we do. We breakfast commonly between eight and nine; till eleven, we read either the Scripture, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of those holy mysteries; at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day; and from twelve to three we separate and amuse ourselves as we please. During the interval I either read in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but, if the weather permits, adjourn to the garden, where with Mrs. Unwin and her son I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea-time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors, or sing some hymns of Martin's collection, and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the best and most musical performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we are home again. When the days are short, we make the excursion in the former part of the day, between church-time and dinner. At night we read and converse, as before, till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns or a sermon; and last of all, the family are called to prayers. I need not tell you, that such a life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness; accordingly we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren. Mrs. Unwin has almost a maternal affection for me, and I have something very like a filial one for her, and her son and I are brothers. Blessed be the God of our salvation for such companions, and for such a life; above all, for a heart to like it...

Yours ever, my dear cousin,
W.C.

The piety, tranquillity and erudition of Morley's family home was exactly what Cowper needed at this time.

Tragedy was now to befall the Unwin family

On Sunday the 28th of last Month the Rev. Mr. Unwin, Rector of Grimstone, in Norfolk, riding from Huntingdon to Gravelly, was thrown from his Horse near Godmanchester, whereby his Skull was fractured in a dreadful Manner; and, although all possible Assistance was immediately given, he died the Friday following.

Northampton Mercury, Monday July 13th 1767

On 13 July 1767, just twenty months after moving in with them, Cowper writes:

My dear Cousin,

The newspaper has told you the truth. Poor Mr. Unwin being flung from his horse, as he was going to his church on Sunday morning, [28 June 1767] received a dreadful fracture on the back part of his skull, under which he languished till Thursday evening, and then he died. This awful dispensation has left an impression upon our spirits, which will not presently be worn off. He died in a poor cottage, to which he was carried immediately after his fall about a mile from home; and his body could not be brought to this house till the spirit was gone to Him who gave it. May it be a lesson to us to watch, since we know not the day nor the house when our Lord cometh!

Your affectionate friend and servant,
Wm. Cowper.

Morley Unwin's deep love for Mary and his son William, daughter Susanna, and other members of his family and household is clear from his will.

This is the last Will and Testament of M^r Morley Unwin Rector of Grimston in the County of Norfolk. I Give to my Dear Wife five hundred pounds over and above the sum which she is intitled to by our Marriage Articles. I Give to my Brother, John Unwin and to my Son William Cawthorne Unwin fifteen hundred pounds in Trust to plane the same out upon Government or other Security as they shall think proper and to pay the Interest or Dividends arising from the same every half year as they shall receive it to my Daughter Susannah Unwin whose receipt shall be a full discharge from time to time. But it is my will that if the person in whose hands the said fifteen hundred pounds is now vested shall be minded to continue the same upon the present Security that it remain as it now is unless either of the Trustees shall Chuse to Change the Security and place the said fifteen hundred pounds in the publick funds or upon Government Security. And in that case I direct that either of the Trustees shall upon giving Six Months notice to the person in whose hands the fifteen hundred pounds is vested have full power to roll in the same and to plane out the said sum in the joint names of the said Trustees for the use of my said Daughter and pay her the dividends from time to time as they shall receive the same until the day of her marriage and till such time as the principal Sum of fifteen hundred pounds be paid but my mind and will is that my said Daughter shall not Marry without the consent of her Mother and the Trustees before mentioned or such of them as shall be then Living. And if my Daughter shall Marry without such consent I hereby revoke the said Legacy and order it to Sink into the residue of my Estate in Case my Daughter should live to the age of Twenty five years and be then unmarried. I hereby empower her by her Last Will to give and Dispose of one thousand pounds to whomsoever she shall think fit and in case my Daughter should dye before Marriage I give six hundred pounds to my Brother Thomas Unwin and the like sum my Sister Martha Unwin part of the said fifteen hundred pounds. I give to my Brother Matthias Unwin ten Guineas and all my wearing apparel Given only excepted if he shall think it worth his acceptance. I give Martha Sales now an apprentice at Mansfield one hundred pounds upon the day of Marriage provided she Marrys with the consent of my Wife. In the meantime I will that my Executor herein afterwards pay her interest for the same at four pounds percent the Interest to Commence from the Day of my Death and to continue till the Day of her Marriage and till the principal sum of one hundred pounds be paid provided as before mentioned She

marries with the Consent of my Wife. I Give unto the said Martha Sales five pounds for Mourning. I Give to the Rev. Dr. Everard of Lynn Dr. Patricks Commentary in two Vol^s full. I Give to Mary Samrock and Elizabeth Forgham five pounds each if they be respectively living in my family at the time of my Death. I Give to my Brother John Unwin one hundred Guineas. I Give to my Cousin Stephen Unwin Ten Guineas. *I Give to my Brother John Unwin all my Right Tithe and Interest in and to the next presentations to the united parishes of St. Mary Woolnoth and Saint Mary Woolchurch in Lombard Street London in Trust for the benefit of my Son William Cawthorne with full power to my said Brother to Change Such or otherwise dispose of my said Right of Presentation at the request and with the Consent of my said Son for whose Sole Benefit the said Right of Presentation is intended by the aforesaid Trust. And I Direct that any receipt or writing Executed by my said Brother with the Consent aforesaid shall be a full and absolute Tithe to any person or persons to whom the said Right of presentation shall be in any Circumstances Conveyed or Transferred. And in case of my Sons Demise before the age of Twenty four years I Give the said Right of presentation and all my tithe and Interest therein to my Brother John Unwin in further Trust to Sell and Dispose of the same as he shall think fit and to give a Discharge to a purchaser for the same and the Money arising therefrom to Divide Share and Share alike to my wife and daughter whose respective receipts shall be full and eternal Discharges to my said Brother provided nevertheless that if my said Brother shall chuse to take the said Right of Presentation after the Demise of my Son under the age of Twenty four years paying for the same Six hundred Guineas to my Wife and Daughter Share and Share alike it shall be his own to all intents and purposes upon such Payment. But if my Daughter should Marry without the Consent of her Brother and my Brother John Unwin I will that the whole Sum of Six hundred Guineas be paid to my Wife Exclusive of my Daughter having any Share or part thereof. I will that the Rent of my House for half a year and housekeeping for three Months after my Death be paid out of my Estate. I give to my Wife all my plate, linen and china and household furniture also all my wine and other liquors. The residue and remainder of my Estate I Give to my Son William Cawthorne Unwin and I appoint my Son Sole Executor of this my Last Will and Testament and thou Most Wonderful God have Mercy upon me through the attainment and satisfaction of Jesus Christ my Redeemer! The contents upon the otherside and the above are written by my own hand. Morley Unwin. March 14 1767.*

Signed and published and certified as the last Will and Testament of Morley Unwin the Testator in the presence of us and in the presence of each other who have subscribed and signed as witness thereof.

April 30:1767

The section of the will relating to St Mary Woolnoth (my italics) appears to explain how John Newton came to be appointed Rector of this prestigious living in the City of London, where he moved after leaving Olney in 1780. It may be assumed with some confidence that William and Mary Unwin decided to award the living to their old friend when it became vacant.

© Joan Jones