

Born	15 April 1824, Portland, Dorset
Baptism	19 October 1825, Portland, Dorset
Parents	Adolphus Frederick Meissner and Rebecca Kingscott Baker
Parent's marriage	12 August 1821, Bristol, Gloucestershire
Siblings	Adolphus Frederick (1822), Mary Sarah (1825), Louisa Rebecca (1827), Eliza (1829)
Wife	
Married	
Children	

When Charles was baptized, the family lived in Chesil, Portland.

His father, Adolphus Frederick Meissner, died in London on 9th or 10th November 1839, aged 42, at his father's residence. Adolphus and his father were both surgeons.

The family was in a desperate state, according to the newspaper.

Mr Meissner, a surgeon in the Isle of Portland, was suddenly cut off a few weeks ago by disease of the heart. He has left a Widow and five children; the two elder of whom are boys of 16 and 17 and are at sea; the three younger children are girls, are with their Mother, are left in a state of Total Destitution.

They are utterly unable to provide for themselves - there are no funds - no friends or relatives to help, nothing to keep them from suffering the utmost extremity of poverty. But there are many, both able and willing, to show mercy to the desolate Widow and friendless Orphans; and it is hoped that the urgency of their need will now plead in their behalf; and that the rude voice of pinching want shall not be suffered to remind them, that in a Husband and a Father, they have lost their only earthly stay.

A subscription has been opened, in the hope of obtaining means, sufficient to sustain them for the present; and to give the children such an education, as will enable them to support themselves hereafter.

The funds thus realized will be placed under the care of Captain Manning, Portland Castle; T Heath Esq, Pensylvania Castle; and the Rev D Hogarth, Rector of Portland.

Manning, Heath and Hogarth gave £10 each. The advert was also placed in a London newspaper, and by April 1840, over £130 had been raised.¹

3 days after the death of his father, an advertisement appeared in the newspaper for his job.

Weymouth Union. A vacancy having occurred in the medical Department by the death of Mr Meissner, application for a Medical Gentleman (legally qualified to practice) for the situation:

Medical Officer at the Portland District; salary £50 a year. The Medical Officer is required to attend all Cases of Sickness, Surgery, Midwifery and Vaccination, and provide Medicines which may be necessary for all Paupers within the district. He is also required to reside in Portland, and make Weekly Returns of Sickness and Mortality to the Board of Guardians, and attend the Board when summoned for that purpose. The Island of Portland contains a population of about 2670.²

The eldest son, Adolphus Frederick Meissner, entered the Merchant Navy in 1835. No evidence has been found of Charles entering the Merchant Navy, and he may have been a local sailor.

¹ Dorset County Chronicle, 26 December 1839, p1; Morning Herald (London), 10 March 1840, p1

² Dorset County Chronicle, 14 November 1839, p1

Dorset County Gaol and House of Correction, Prisoners committed for trial.

244. Charles Meissner (3 charges), age 23, received and committed 17 August 1847 for burglary. He was single, a sailor, and read and wrote well.

At the Dorset Lent Assize, 11 March 1848:

Charles Meissner, aged 23, was indicted for a burglary in the house of Richard Cox, at Weymouth, and stealing a silver watch and other articles, his property.

On the 11 August, Cox resided at the back of the Belvidere, at Weymouth, and went to bed at eleven o'clock, having fastened the doors. In the course of the night he was awoken by two distinct knocks; he then alarmed his wife and got up, and proceeded to the top of the stairs; he heard one of the doors of a room opened; he then went down stairs, and going into his room, saw a window open; he stood where he could command the entrance to the two lower rooms; he heard some one in the room; the prisoner sprang upon him, coming from the inner room; Cox got hold of him, and they had a scuffle for a minute or two, and then Cox threw the prisoner upon his back; the prisoner contrived to get Cox under; but he held the prisoner fast till his wife got a light; the prisoner then threw down a watch, and told Cox it was his; it had been taken from Cox's drawer; a policeman then came, and took some halfpence from the prisoner, which had been taken from off the table; there were several things tied up in a handkerchief; Cox gave the prisoner to the policeman, who saw the prisoner throw down the watch and give up the halfpence. When taken, the prisoner said he was very glad of it, as he should get transported, which was what he had done it for.

The prisoner in his defence, said he knew nothing of the robbery. The jury found the prisoner guilty.

The same prisoner was then indicted for a burglary in the house of Thomas Street, at Radipole, and stealing a pair of boots.

On the evening of 2 August, Street found his kitchen window open, it having been broken; he missed porter, cigars, and halfpence; his till had been forced open; a pair of boots had been taken from under the table; he saw the boots again on 12 August in the hands of the police. A man named Burke knew the prisoner, and bought a pair of boots off him in August, which the Police took from him; he gave the prisoner 4d and another pair of boots. The prisoner was in custody at the time the boots were found, and when the policeman told him so, the prisoner said he had committed the robbery, and should not deny it.

The prisoner, in his defence, said he was quite innocent; he knew nothing of it at all; and dare he say, if they brought up another pair of boots, these people would swear to them.

The jury found the prisoner guilty, and he was sentenced to 10 years transportation.

There was a third charge of burglary against him but it was not tried.³

After his trial on 11 March 1848 where he was sentenced to 10 years transportation, Charles was transferred to Millbank Prison on 12 April 1848. Three months later, on 13 July 1848, he was moved to Pentonville prison.

At Pentonville Prison, Charles, aged 24, weighed 8st 13lbs, was from the Isle of Portland, his father Adolphus Meissner was dead, and his character was good. He was sent to Portland Prison on 9 August 1849, and from there to the *Stirling Castle* hulk at Portsea on 4 September 1849.

The 1851 census, Portsea, Portsmouth:

Chas Meissner, prisoner, unmarried, 25, sailor, born Portland, Dorset

Later in the year, on 9 July 1851, Charles got his wish and boarded the *Minden* to be transported to Western Australia. His conduct on *Stirling Castle* hulk was exemplary, according to the hulk record that accompanied him on the voyage.⁴

³ Salisbury and Winchester Journal, 18 March 1848, p3

When Charles arrived in Western Australia on 14 October 1851, he had earned £3.10.10 at the various prisons and had 6d private cash, a total of £3.11.4 owing to him. The money could have been helpful as a Ticket of Leave was issued to Charles on arrival. Charles, however, appears to have taken to drink like so many other convicts.⁵

6 August 1852, Fremantle. Charles Meissner, 806, ticket-of-leave holder, drunk and disorderly; sent to Convict Establishment for 14 days. Received at the prison on 9 August.⁶

30 August 1852. The undermentioned prisoners will be released from the Associated Room; their Tickets of Leave have been returned and forwarded to the North Fremantle Station: 365 William Walker, 899 Richard Goldsmith, 568 James Cribb, 1114 William Hooker, 806 Charles Meissner.⁷

Shortly after being released from Gaol, Charles was found drowned in Sept 1852. An inquest was held, but only a brief mention appeared in the newspaper, and his name was incorrectly reported as Honeychurch. A sad end for Charles.⁸

We have already reported that a Pensioner named John Day lost his life about a fortnight since, by the swamping of his boat between Fresh-water Bay and Fremantle; and we have now to state that a Ticket-of-leave holder named Honeychurch shared the same melancholy fate at the same time. Both bodies were found after having been about ten days in the water. Inquests were held upon them in Perth and Fremantle, one body having been taken to each place, and verdicts of accidental death were returned in both cases.

Family in England.

His mother, Rebecca Meissner, was living in Weymouth on the 1841 census. The two youngest daughters were at a school run by Mary Ann, Elizabeth and Anna Baker at Clyst Honiton near Exeter in Devon, possibly relatives of Rebecca Meissner née Baker. The other children have not been found on the 1841 census.

Rebecca applied for Administration of the estate of her husband, who died in 1839, in 1848.

By 1851, Rebecca and her three daughters lived in St Peter Port, Guernsey.

Rebecca Meissner, 67, widow, retired school mistress, born England.

Mary S, 25, schoolmistress

Eliza, 20, governess

Louisa, 24, schoolmistress

And one house servant.

Rebecca Meissner died in 1860 at Guernsey.

⁴ TNA, HO8/101; PCOM2/62; HO24/4; HO8/109

⁵ SROWA, Acc 128/17

⁶ Inquirer (Perth, WA : 1840 - 1855), 18 Aug 1852, p2

⁷ SROWA, Superintendent orders, SO1-3, image 240

⁸ The Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News (WA : 1848 - 1864), 1 Oct 1852, p4