

The Yacht Inn Tragedy

by Mike Royden



Trinity Church, Yacht Inn, and Custom House.

Approaching ten in the evening on Friday 6 June 1879 was another quiet night in the Yacht Inn. So much so, that publican Daniel Miller had joined his regular customer and local coachbuilder, Tom Apsey, for a beer at his table in the snug. In the lobby, old Mr Eaton was selling pots of hot peas as usual by the door, while the piano player had just rattled out another tune on the upright. He was wondering if he had made the right decision to give up coopering and step up to running his own place, after moving to Chester nine months earlier from London. His mother's sister, Eliza, ran the Ship Inn in Handbridge with husband Alex, and had let him know the licence for the Yacht was available. It was supposed to be a fresh start after losing his young twenty-two-year-old wife Emily, after just a few months of marriage in 1874.

Aunt Eliza visited Daniel and Martha every week, sometimes twice, and with Alexander, the four had dinner together the previous evening. Martha was too unwell to eat. When the women were alone later, Martha confided in Eliza she was 'worried with trouble' and then mentioned Daniel's favouritism towards his first four children rather than their own. Eliza said it was nonsense



and it was quite the reverse. Martha agreed he was a good man, saying, 'He is too good, I have been nothing but expense, and doctor's bills ever since he had me.' But Eliza could see there was something more, and told Martha to come and visit, get some air, talk things over.

In fact, Martha was Daniel's third wife. He had married Mary Ann Coles when they were both very young in Southwark where they grew up. Daniel was nineteen and Mary eighteen. They had six children, although two hadn't survived past childhood. Mary Jane, seventeen, and Lydia, fifteen, were not at home and were now in service, but ten-year-old Emma was a good help in the house upstairs and the pub too, and young George helped in the cellar. Martha didn't help in the bar, nor did she touch alcohol. Besides, the infants were enough to cope with. That night Martha had retired to bed as usual at eight, with little Alice aged two, and baby Elizabeth Mary - or Lizzie May as he was wont to call her. He was worried about Martha. She hadn't been well since the move to Chester, her health was delicate and she seemed very depressed since Lizzie's birth, more so in the last two weeks. In fact, she had been receiving treatment from Mr Watson the surgeon of Foregate Street for four burst blood vessels. Martha had also been coughing up blood, a sign of consumption. **[No doubt today, she would have been treated for Tuberculosis as well as post-natal depression].**

That trouble last month when his waiter John Badger turfed out the two buskers for insulting his piano player hadn't helped matters, especially when it ended up in court. The two musicians, a Liverpool lad and an Irish girl with a fiddle, had stopped by to ask if they could play as they were short of money. He was already paying the piano player 16s a week, but he relented as long as they passed the hat around. The lad took to throwing insults and John eventually threw him out, but he came back in, too much drink filling him full of bravado. This time John pushed him through the door and he fell to the pavement and cracked his head. The infirmary kept him in and John was arrested, although the case was dismissed for lack of evidence. Then Daniel lost the maid, the Welsh girl Mary Ann, only on Monday - she upped and left for her home in Coedpoeth before anyone was up. She said it was because he didn't give her enough food, and she just left without notice. Times were hard, but he wondered if it was something else. His wife had been away that weekend, she left early on Friday morning and didn't return until late Monday night. He was beside himself with worry and had sent several messages to the Ship, thinking she might be there with his aunt.

Suddenly, he was jolted from his thoughts by Emma shouting through the door to come quickly, as she had heard dreadful screams coming from the bedroom. He raced up the stairs with Aspey in tow, and had to kick the locked door open. Bursting inside, he was greeted with a scene of horror. There was blood everywhere. Martha was sat on the bed, wide-eyed staring wildly, grasping her neck, where he could see a deep wound oozing blood. Next to her on the bed lay Lizzie May, her throat cut, and his eyes quickly went to the cot. He rushed forward and grabbed the infant in her blood-soaked nightgown, her throat sliced too, and he cradled her as her arms flopped down. Aspey saw what looked like an ordinary kitchen table knife stained with blood on the floor by the bed as he held on to Martha's wrists, before Daniel pleaded with him to fetch a doctor. It was a short dash to the home of Dr Waters, who told him to call for Mr Harrison the surgeon. In the bedroom, Daniel could wait no longer, and carrying Alice, he rushed to Dr Hamilton's house to bring him back to the Yacht. By the time Aspey returned with Waters, Dr Hamilton was already there and all went upstairs to see what could be done. Inspector Farrell, with Sergeant Plimmer and P.C. Dougherty arrived shortly afterwards and carried Martha into the front bedroom, so they could carry out their investigations in the crime scene.

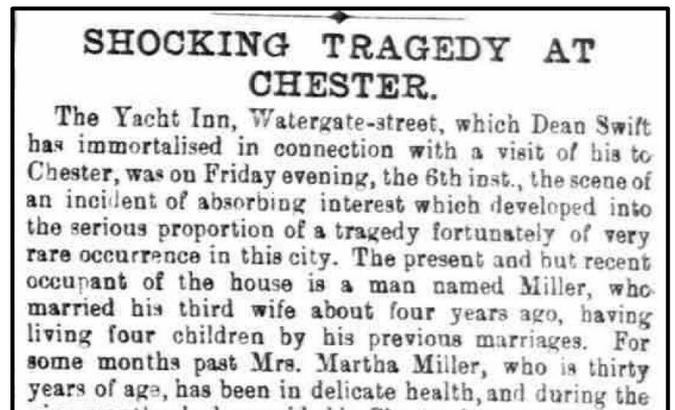
Hamilton stitched the baby's throat and dressed the wound, while Harrison tried to do the same to Martha, but she was having none of it, and began tearing at her throat. She became so violent that they had to send out to the Infirmary for a strait-jacket to restrain her. Two nurses arrived from the Deaconess Institution to help, before a distraught Aunt Eliza arrived after young George had rushed to the Ship to fetch her.

Martha was put to bed, while Eliza sat with her through the night and into Saturday. During the day Martha began to ramble. "Bronchitis, measles, and whooping cough, and now they say I'm in a decline. We will all four go together." Eliza asked her what she meant, but she just stared and didn't recognise her. She continued to babble similar nonsense throughout the day, and had no recollection of the events of the previous evening.

Hamilton continued to visit, but when he came on the Sunday morning, his attempts to save baby Alice had been in vain, the shock to her little body had been too great, she had lost too much blood, and she died in her cot.

Just before noon, Martha was becoming wildly agitated, and Hamilton was sent for again. On arrival, he found that she had released one of her hands from the strait-jacket, and had loosened one of the tapes which held it around her neck. She had tied two ends to the rails of the bed and she

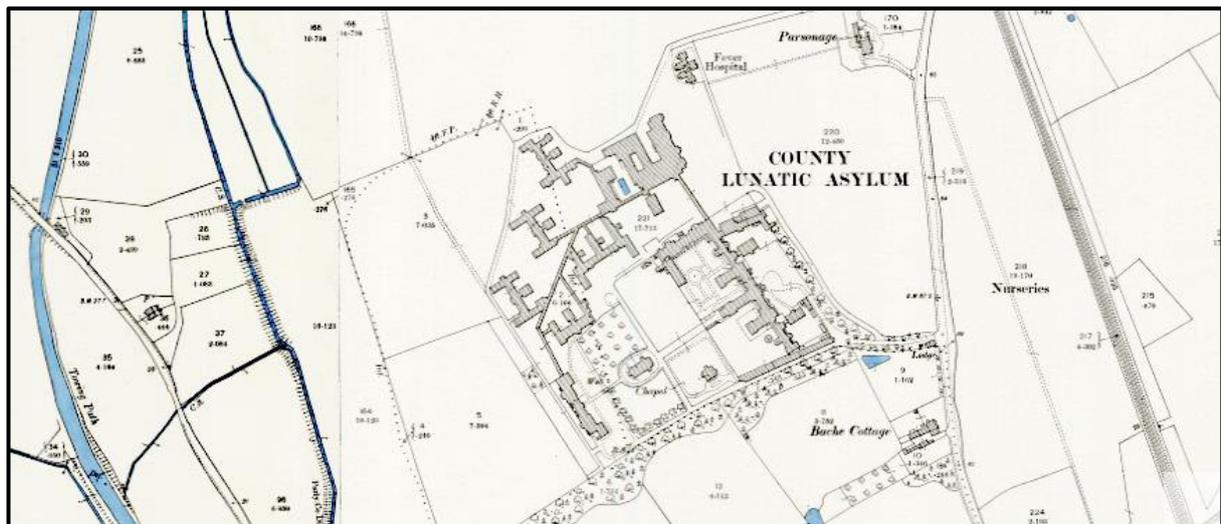
was forcing her neck backwards trying to strangle herself. Daniel was desperately holding both her hands to prevent her tightening the tapes as she became more violent. Hamilton rushed to cut the tapes while they did their best to restrain her.



The following day, the Coroner began the inquest on Alice in the Town Hall, and the jury filed into the bedroom at the Yacht to see her lifeless form, before returning to the court. Over three successive Mondays they heard in great detail from all the witnesses concerned, before they retired to consider their verdict. The Coroner was most concerned to discover more about Martha's state of mind throughout the proceedings, but the jury took only forty minutes to return a verdict. They stated that although there was strong opinion that she was insane at the time, there was not sufficient evidence to convince them, therefore she should be charged with wilful murder.

However, before the warrant could be issued, she had, by now, been removed from the Yacht Inn to the Chester Asylum in Upton, on that first Thursday after the death of Alice, while Lizzie May was taken to the Infirmary on the same day.

For poor Daniel, there was little time to grieve. No sooner had the proceedings of the inquest concluded, that he was summonsed to appear before the Board of Guardians, who wanted to be reimbursed in full for the expenses already incurred for Martha's care in the Asylum, and to set a rate for her future care. Despite Daniel's protestations that he was unable to pay due to trade falling off since the tragedy and having a family to support – as well as a piano player costing him 16 shillings a week – the Board had no sympathy, and a court order was made against him for full redress and her future upkeep.



Martha was too unwell to face charges and remained in the Asylum. But just a few months later there was a final twist, when on 6 October she gave birth prematurely to a baby girl. The whole ordeal was just too much for Martha, and she passed away three days later on 9 October 1879 aged only thirty. To recall Martha's rambling words to Aunt Eliza; is this what she really meant by 'We will all four go together'?

The new born infant, also named Martha, was taken to the Yacht Inn and given to her father, although the dreadful events of that year had yet to end for Daniel, as she was to live for just a few short weeks, and died the following month. Both Mother and child were buried in Overleigh Cemetery.

By 1881, Daniel was still landlord of the Yacht Inn, where also at home were his children Lydia (17), George (15), Emma (12), and also young Lizzie May, now aged four having

survived her injuries. As Daniel tried to rebuild his life, he married again for the fourth time to Catherine Fletcher in Chester on 22 May 1882 when he was 43 years old.

8	st	de	de	1	Daniel Miller	Head	Mid	40	Publican	Middlesex	Hounslow
					Lydia	do	Wife	17		Kent	Taversham
					George	do	Son	15	Shop-boy	Middlesex	Handsworth
					Emma	do	do	12	Scholar	do	London
					Elizabeth	do	do	4		Kent	Belling
					John Parr	Lodger	Wife	24	Ship	Stew'd at Sea	Salop
					Ludwig Mohler	Boarder	do	41	Pianist	Prussia	Kanover

Within two years Daniel Miller had decided to seek yet another fresh start, but in this case on the other side of the world in Australia, and he would take all his children with him. Mary Jane (now 22), Lydia and Emma went on ahead together, leaving London on 18 November 1884 on the vessel *Chyebassa*, arriving in Brisbane on 13 January 1885, while Daniel left with young Lizzie May and son George the following month on 4 December 1884, on the *New Guinea*, arriving on 8 February.

His new wife Catherine did not join him. Had the marriage failed? Was she too ill and hoped to follow on? Whatever the reason, Catherine passed away in Chester in July 1888, aged fifty-four.



New Guinea

NO.	SURNAME.	CHRISTIAN NAME.	ADULTS.				CHILDREN.				REMARKS.	
			MARRIED.		SINGLE.		CHILDREN, 1 TO 12.		INFANTS, UNDER 1.			
			M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.		
	Poverty		6	6	18			1	4		1	
	Pierce	Walter			17							
		Sarah					16					
	Tobin	Patrick			23							
	Turk	Francis Ch.			19							
	Taney	Wm Jno			24							
	Wilkinson	George F	44									
	"	Mary		41								
	"	George						9				
	"	Ada							7			
	"	May							3			
	"	Emily					12					
	"	Williams			17							
	"	Joseph			15							
	Wilding	George F	25									
	"	Alice		23								
	"	Alice							2			
	"	Grace									8m	
	Warrilon	George			20							
			8	8	25	2	2	2	7		2	
Brisbane												
Full Payers												
	Alingush	Fridolf			33							
	Polown	Charles	45									
	Dussell	Henry			24							
	Hay	Forrest Wm			32							
	Huntley	Isaac	34									
	Harps	Robert			28							
	Miller	Wm. Daniel			15							
		Elizabeth							6			
	Moore	Nemuel			40							
	Patessa	John	30									
	"	Alice F		22								
		Allen Guinea Russell Mon 44									1	Born in Kagay
			3	1	6				1			

Miller	M ^r Daniel	45	
	Elizabeth		6

Miller	George	19	
M ^r Daniel	Ed		

Passenger list for the 'New Guinea' showing Daniel Miller on board with his daughter Elizabeth, and son George.





The family settled in suburban Brisbane.

Daniel's move to Queensland seems to have been successful. His children married, had their own families, and their descendants still live in Australia today. After almost three decades in Australia, Daniel Miller passed away on 1 January 1913 in Rosalie, Queensland, at the age of seventy-three, and was buried the following day in Toowong Cemetery, Rosalie.

FUNERAL NOTICE.—The Friends of
Mr. WILLIAM DANIEL MILLER,
deceased, are respectfully invited to at-
tend his Funeral, to move from the resi-
dence of his daughter, Mrs. J. M'Carthy,
Elizabeth street, Rosalie, THIS (Thurs-
day) AFTERNOON, at 3 o'clock, to the
Toowong Cemetery
K. M. SMITH, Undertaker.

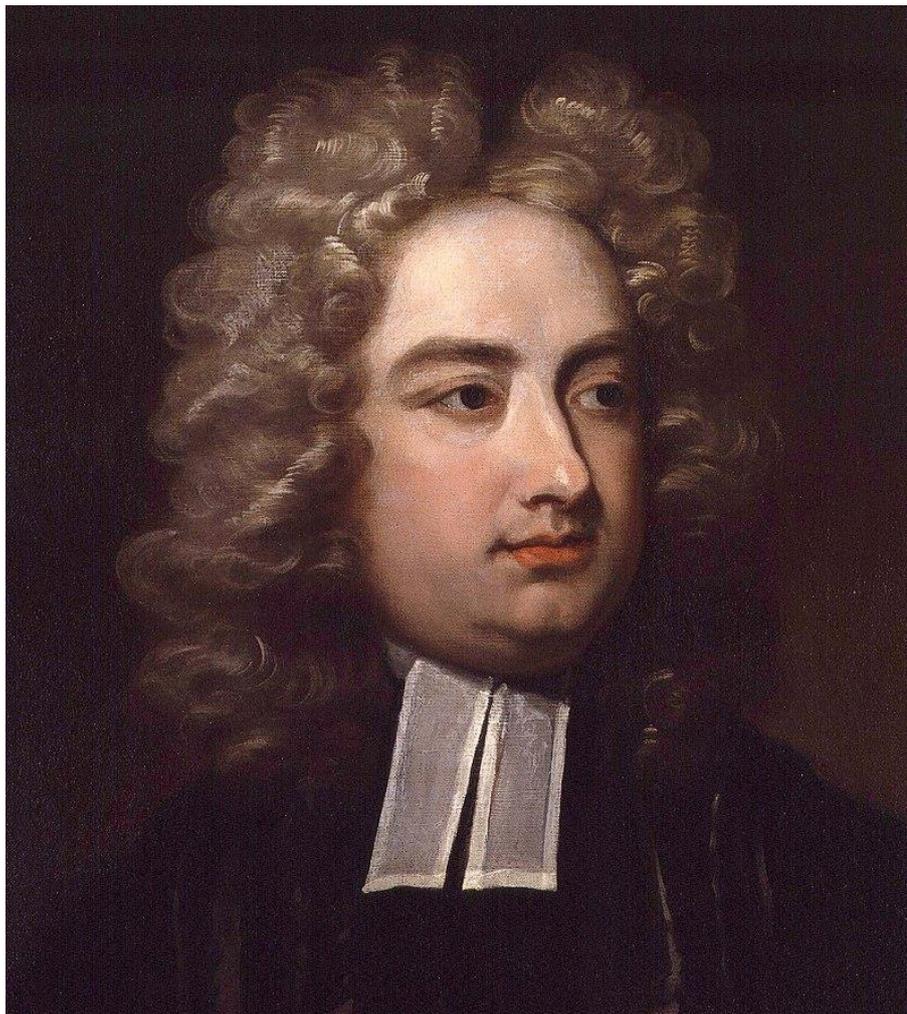
Before Daniel's time, the old Yacht Inn had once been quite the place to be, frequently patronised by the well to do, and was described by Thomas Hughes in *The Stranger's Handbook to Chester* (1856) as 'without exception the most picturesque and curious of all our Chester inns' and who also tells us that a regular visitor was the famous satirist and author Jonathan Swift, on his frequent trips to the city in his capacity as Dean of Dublin Cathedral. Although, he wasn't always impressed by his experience, composing a verse after one particular visit to the Yacht,

*My landlord is civil, but dear as the devil:
Your pockets grow empty with nothing to tempt ye:
The wine is so sour, t'will give you the scour:
The beer and the ale are mingled with stale:
The veal is such carrion, a dog would be weary on:
All this I have felt for I live on a smelt.*

On another occasion he was so incensed when dignitaries of the Cathedral, whom he had invited to a supper, failed to turn up, that he scratched a damning message into the glass window with his diamond ring,

Rotten without and mouldering within: This place and its clergy are both near akin

Today, no sign of the Yacht Inn remains, having been demolished, along with its priceless window, in 1965, to make way for the new St Martin's Way inner ring road, although it is said the foundations and cellars still exist beneath the left-hand carriageway.



Jonathan Swift





The photos taken from the same spot, show the Yacht before the road widening and after its demolition. Map above shows Chester in 1905. The Yacht was on the corner of Watergate Street and Nicholas Street.

