

# SAFFRON WALDEN HISTORICAL JOURNAL

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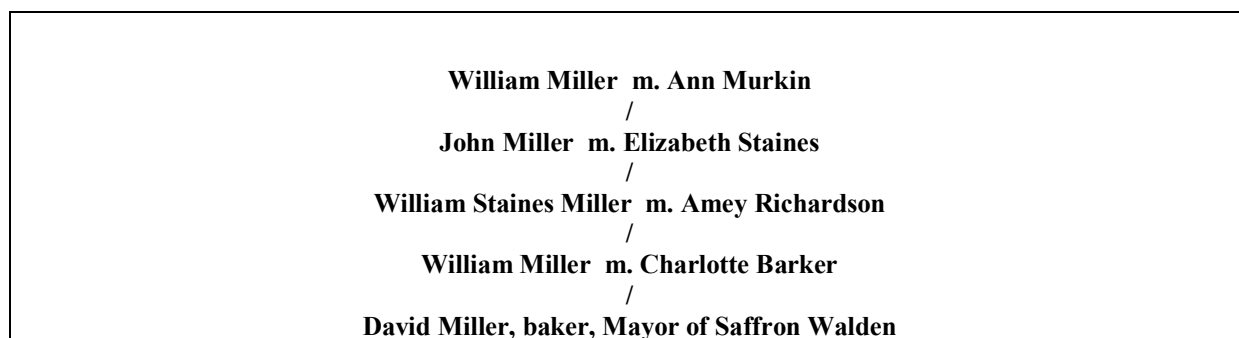
Enquiries re articles can be sent to [saffronwaldenhistory@gmail.com](mailto:saffronwaldenhistory@gmail.com)

## A Millers' Tale

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In 1798 two children were born, one in Saffron Walden and the other in Elmdon, who would eventually marry and start a chain of events which would link transportation and the treadmill to bakers and mayors of this Essex market town. The characters in this story are shown in the family tree below.



Family tree of the Millers discussed in this article.

### John Miller

In Saffron Walden, William and Ann Miller had their son, John, baptised on 15 July 1798. In Elmdon, Elizabeth, the daughter of Henry and Mary Stanes had been baptised on 25 February that same year. Twenty years later they were married. When Elizabeth Staines married John Miller in Saffron Walden on 1 November 1818, she was nearly five months pregnant and they decided to name their first born, William Staines Miller, thereby perpetuating her maiden name, in the manner of the somewhat more prestigious Gibson family. By the time William was five and admitted to the National School, the family had grown to include sister Sophia and brother Hezekiah. They were then living in Hockley's Buildings - cramped terraces which stood close to the junction of Roos Lane (later Debden Road) and London Road.

As an agricultural labourer, John earned little enough money to support his family and unemployment was about to make things worse. Poverty was commonplace in Saffron Walden in the late 1820s and as the family grew to include Ann and Lydia Eliza, the Millers received some relief from the parish. Inevitably, the appalling housing and insanitary conditions within Hockley's Yard brought illness to the family. Faced with such daily hardship they may well have spent temporary periods in the parish workhouse, which was situated just 100 yards away at the top of the High Street, close to where the *The Duke of York* now stands. In 1828, the parish gave a pair of shoes and seven shillings to the Millers, and soon after this the overseers complained against John Miller for refusing to maintain his family, and issued a warrant for his commitment to prison.<sup>1</sup> Within a few months John Miller was in much more serious trouble, after he was caught following a spate of thefts in the Saffron Walden area. He and several others were easily captured, as they had been drinking for hours beforehand and were 'freshy' with liquor, and some actually fell asleep after breaking into a chicken-house:

On the night of Saturday 8 November some villains went to Rosse farm to steal Mr. Turner Clark's poultry. They had killed four fowls when through the resolution of two of his sons and two lads, four fellows were taken and conveyed to prison. Two accomplices were received... Saville to hard labour at the treadmill for 12 months. Atkinson died previously in jail of a Brain-Fever...Wilson, Brewer and Miller conveyed to Chatham for transportation.<sup>2</sup>

John Miller was subsequently convicted on 19 January 1829 and, after a brief break for freedom through the prison wall, he was recaptured and conveyed to Chatham for onward transportation to New South Wales. However he remained on the hulk *Redemption* for several months and contrived to write home to his wife asking her to petition for mercy on his behalf. Elizabeth showed this letter to Turner Poulter Clark, farmer at Rosse Farm, who wrote on 23 December 1829 to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, as follows:

My Lord I take the liberty of addressing your Lordship on behalf of John Miller late of this Parish labourer who was sentenced at the last Epiphany Quarter Sessions held for this Town to be transported for seven years for robbing me, in Company with two others, of Fowls - He has written to his wife from Sheerness stating that he is now on the Bay Ship and that he is fearful he shall sail in a few days - As I do really believe that this was his first offence of Felony and as I also believe that he had not previously been in a Prison for poaching or any like transgression I humbly beg the favour of your Lordship to prevent his being sent out of this Kingdom (crossed out) Country especially because I think he was led to the commission of the theft in question by being drawn into bad Company and he has a Wife and five small children - His Wife is an industrious and respectable woman and his Parents bear a good Character. Your Lordship's attention to this application will be esteemed a great favour. I am my Lord, Your Lordship's obedient humble servant.<sup>3</sup>

The appeal was to no avail and John was transferred to the *Nithsdale* to begin the long voyage to the distant Colony of New South Wales on 1 January 1830. The ship arrived in Sydney on 12 May that same year having taken 131 days to make the passage. The master of the vessel was Thomas Christian and the surgeon was Robert Malcolm. Only one of the 184 people sentenced to transportation died on the voyage. Bad though the journey must have been, John had been spared the horrors of transportation in earlier times.<sup>4</sup>

Once in Australia, John's skills as a sawyer, would have been much in demand in the developing Colony, and as a consequence his treatment may have been less harsh than others. He certainly survived, and in August 1834 was granted a Ticket of Leave, and allowed to remain in the District of Evan. He was eventually given his Certificate of Freedom in January 1836. From this, we learn of his appearance: medium height, ruddy complexion with sandy hair and red whiskers, several missing teeth, and a scar on his hand (perhaps from his work as a sawyer?). We do not yet know what happened to him after this date except that he never came back to England.

By 1841, his wife, Elizabeth, was 43 years old and eking out a living in Gold Street, partly supported by the wages of her son William, 22, working as a labourer. She objected when the census enumerator described her as 'widow' on the return completed on the night of 6 June 1841 and ensured that the offending reference was struck out. While Elizabeth was to work as a washerwoman for several more years, she would never see her husband again. She died in her own home of a strangulated hernia on 26th June 1868, aged 72, attended by her friend and close neighbour Susan Day. It would be left to William to forge the next link in the chain through a relationship with a young and spirited Walden girl, Amey Richardson.

### **Amey Richardson**

In 1840 the good folk of Essex read of the criminal exploits of a gang of thieves operating in and around Walden. Then came the news in the *Essex Standard* of 'The Capture of a Daring Gang of Burglars': 'On Monday morning last information reached this town that another desperate burglary had been committed (making this the fifth in the same number of weeks) at the farm-house of Mr John White, Bricked House, Debden.'<sup>5</sup> After an arduous search by a 'vast number of respectable inhabitants...over hill and dale, they were rewarded with success, by finding the objects of their labour secreted in a corn-field at Farnham, where they were reposing from the effects of stolen liquor, etc. Two men and three women were secured, with a considerable portion of the stolen property in their possession'. This included 'money to the amount of £12 to £14, two watches, some silver spoons, several bottles of wine and

liquor, a great quantity of table and bed linen and every article of wearing apparel which had not escaped their notice’.

At their trial at Essex Quarter Sessions in October 1840, five men and three young women including 16-year-old Amey Richardson, heard the evidence mount against them: ‘Daniel Andrews, a horse-keeper at Quendon three or four miles from Mr White’s, deposed that at 2 in the morning the mail changed horses, soon after he saw 7 or 8 men and women going towards London; they walked fast, and all had bundles on their backs’. Another witness, Eliza Archer from Newport had already sworn that she could identify all eight of the accused even though they were strangers to her: ‘They walked by slowly; she noticed them particularly after the language they used; they were saucy to her’. Amey may have had her hopes raised when ‘Mr Knox, in addressing the jury, said he never saw a case in which proof was so deficient as it was with regard to the women in this case’. If she did, they were quickly dashed when ‘the Chairman, in summing up, said if the Jury considered that the females, though not in the house, were outside watching, they might find them guilty under the indictment’.

Inevitably a verdict of guilty was returned against all the prisoners and the newspaper reported that ‘the girls on hearing the verdict, laughed’. Amey was later acquitted of another charge of stealing a gauze handkerchief, before being joined by the rest of her gang for sentencing. All her male companions were sentenced to transportation, four for life and one for 15 years.<sup>6</sup> Amey and her female friends were given 12 months hard labour at separate gaols in Colchester, Ilford and Chelmsford. Amey was duly conveyed at parish expense to Springfield Gaol, Chelmsford on 14 October 1840. She completed her sentence, surviving the hard labour on the treadmill.<sup>7</sup>

On her release, Amey made her way back home to her parents, William and Sarah Richardson, nee Dear, in Saffron Walden. Within months she was making eyes at young William Miller of Gold Street, son of John, transported to New South Wales eleven years previously. William and Amey’s first child, William, was born out of wedlock on 27 October 1843, and they married in Saffron Walden on 6 September 1845. The transportee, John Miller was named as the groom’s father and William Richardson as Amey’s father. Elizabeth left her mark as a witness whilst Amey proudly signed her name on the marriage certificate. Within a year, Amey’s husband was working as a shoemaker, their second child Sarah had been born and they had moved from the squalor of Foundry Lane to the equally poor conditions of Roos Lane, where John and Elizabeth Miller had struggled to survive 20 years earlier.

About this time, in late 1846, the Town Council were attempting to deal with complaints about the ‘nuisance’ that was Hockley’s Yard, where a dozen families were sharing two privies.<sup>8</sup> Amey and William went on to

have another eight children: Fanny, James, Emma, Eliza, Hezekiah, Elizabeth, Jane and Edward Thomas. All were born between 1846 and 1872 at their home in Hockley's Yard.

By 1881 William was recorded as being a former labourer, so Amey would have been dependent upon the meagre wages of their blind son, Hezekiah, working as a general labourer and their daughter, Elizabeth, a general servant. Twenty-three-year-old Emma was already nearly blind and unable to find work while Jane, 12 and Thomas, 8, were attending school. By 1901, Amey was a widow and, at the age of 76, was still looking after Emma, by now blind, in the same house. Remarkably, Amey went on to live for another 16 years, when she died in her 93rd year on 7 January 1917 in the Union Workhouse Infirmary. The death certificate of this former member of a once notorious gang of burglars, was signed by Hedley Bartlett and the informant was H.S. Long, Master of the workhouse.

### **\*William Miller**

Amey's first-born, William had also first worked as a labourer on the farms around Walden, while his younger sister Sarah found employment as a domestic servant. In 1863, now a malt-maker, he had met up with Charlotte Barker from Castle Camps and that Christmas, he married Charlotte, the daughter of Moses Barker and Eliza Free. William and Charlotte prospered together and Eliza, the first of their 10 children, was born in 1865. William soon attained a more secure job as a Storekeeper in a Clothing Store, before moving his wife and family to better housing in Mount Pleasant, Debden Road. At the time of the 1881 census, Charlotte, not content with bringing up her large family, was also caring for her 82-year-old grandmother, Elizabeth Wilson, née Halls. Charlotte's own mother, Eliza Free, had died soon after Charlotte was born in Castle Camps and it appears likely that she then moved to West Wickham to live with her grandparents Elizabeth and Thomas Free. When Elizabeth's husband died she remarried and along with her husband Thomas Wilson, continued to care for Charlotte. Elizabeth died on 9th September 1886 aged 88 attended by her granddaughter in the family home in Saffron Walden. Charlotte became ill soon afterwards and died of breast cancer in 1900 at the age of 53. The family had just moved to their new home close to The Duke of York at the top of the High Street. She had lived just long enough to see three of her sons make their own way in life. Peter took up the painting and decorating trade; David became a journeyman baker and Mark became a blacksmith.

Their father moved his remaining family to their new home. Another of his sons, John Miller, was by then working across the way at 7 London Road, at his older brother's successful confectionery and bakery business. William Miller re-married after Charlotte's death to Mary Ann (previous name is, as yet, unknown). The 1911 Census records that he was 67 and,

by then, working as a journeyman house painter and she was 66. William died in 1914 aged 70 and is buried with his first wife, Charlotte, at Radwinter Road Cemetery. Mary Ann Miller died aged 85 in The Peoples Home, Saffron Walden.

## **David Miller**

David Miller's bakery receives a mention in Stanley Wilson's book, *Saffron Crocus*. Describing the conditions prevailing in the Union Workhouse at the end of the 19th century, Stanley Wilson writes:

Tenders for supply of food, clothes, coffins and brandy were made to local shopkeepers and the lowest tender was always accepted by the Guardians. On some occasions short-weight bread was supplied, robbing paupers of their meagre rations. All this stopped when David Miller, a young baker, submitted the lowest tender. He refused to deliver short weight loaves and short weight flour in league with workhouse staff. This caused a great, angry sensation among the Guardians of the Poor. Later Mr Miller became a local Alderman, Mayor of the Borough and a member of the Guardians Committee. He prospered as a business man, which shows that at the turn of the century some people thought that 'honesty was the best policy'.<sup>9</sup>

David Miller was Mayor of Saffron Walden on five occasions from 1920-30. The thriving bakery and confectionery business passed to his son, Edgar, and then to his grandson, another David Miller who, during 1970-1, also served as Mayor of Saffron Walden and was Chairman of Uttlesford District Council.

Meanwhile, John Miller had waited until he was 21 before marrying Sarah Rose Braybrooke on 26 December 1901, and they were soon bringing up their own large family in Hunters Yard, off Debden Road, where their seventh child (mother of Maureen Nesbitt) was born in 1918. Soon afterwards John Miller bought the shop just down and round the corner next to the *Duke of York* and ran a successful tobacco and sweetshop with his wife until he died in 1957.

John's widow, Sarah Rose moved into one of the four houses previously owned by her husband in Fairycroft Road (formerly Foundry Lane). When her health failed she was moved to St. James' Hospital, sadly known to Amey and by Sarah's generation as the Workhouse, where she died in 1972, aged 90.

For around 150 years successive generations of this particular Miller family have lived in a specific area of Saffron Walden, centered around the London Road/ Debden Road junction, with but one notable exception – that of John Miller, born in 1798, who ended his days almost 15,000 miles away on the other side of the world.

## **Notes**

1. Overseers' accounts 1828-9, ERO D/B2/PAR3/59.
2. Quoted in Cooper, J., *The Well-ordered Town: a story of Saffron Walden 1792-1862* (2000), p.106. This book was the starting point for the authors' research.
3. Home Office Criminal Petitions Series 1, Section Lo59: PRO HO17/63.
4. The high death toll on earlier convict ships is described in Hughes, R. *The Fatal Shore* (1987, repub. 1996), p.145.
5. *Essex Standard*, 17 July 1840.
6. *Essex Standard*, 30 October 1840.
7. Process Book of indictments ERO Q/SPb 23; Calendar of Prisoners ERO Q/SMc 7.
8. Cooper, *op.cit.*, p.20.
9. Wilson, S., *Saffron Crocus* (1972), p.60.

**\*Update on the Millers' Tale - September 2013. See William Miller\***

That Christmas, he used his day off work wisely and married Charlotte, the daughter of Moses Barker and Eliza Free, thereby forging another interesting link in the chain. This marriage not only connected two families from Saffron Walden and nearby Castle Camps but also linked two remarkable stories of survival in the face of hardship. Research has shown that the great grandfather of Charlotte Barker was, like her husband's great grandfather, sentenced to 7 years transportation. On Tuesday 5th November 1816 Richard Free was arrested and charged with knowingly receiving 24 turkeys, the property of AG Wright Esq.[1] On Monday 26th January 1817 he was taken from Castle Camps to Cambridge gaol and on to Portsmouth[2], where, at the age of 43, he was incarcerated on the prison hulk \*Leviathan\* to await transportation.

The \*Leviathan\* had been a 90 gunner in Nelson's Trafalgar Fleet when seaworthy but in 1817 was a rotting home to 600 prisoners. The work details, living conditions and deplorable treatment of prisoners at that time are graphically documented in "The Fatal Shore" by Robert Hughes, through the use of contemporaneous records.[3]

Whilst William Miller might have known of his great grandfather's transportation to New South Wales, Charlotte Barker might not, as Prisoner 3651 Richard Free remained on the hulk for more than 5 years before being granted a Free Pardon on 22nd April 1822.[4] He would then have been paid enough to return to Castle Camps, his wife Elizabeth King and their surviving children. Thereafter he clearly prospered as he is recorded on the 1851 census as a farmer of 11 acres employing 2 people. Parish records confirm that he died aged 84 in 1853 in Castle Camps.

**Notes**

1. 8 November 1816 *Cambridge Chronicle*.
2. 28 May 1817 *Bury and Norwich Post*.
3. Hughes, R., *The Fatal Shore*. Chapter 5, pp 140-141.
4. Prison Hulks Registers and Letter Books 1802-1849.

**Note: the authors are still seeking information about the fate of John Miller in New South Wales after 1846-9 and would be pleased to hear of anyone who can help. Email via [saffronwaldenhistor@gmail.com](mailto:saffronwaldenhistor@gmail.com)**