

I came across this story whilst doing some family history research of my own in Hull Library.

What follows is a faithful copy of how it appeared in the Hull and North Lincolnshire Times.

I was immediately fascinated and couldn't resist looking a little deeper into the facts that it threw up. At the end of the story I have placed a timeline of events and a few conjectures of my own based on facts I have collected so far.

John Sinclair certainly had a bee in his bonnet about something when he came back from serving in the Federal Army during the American war. Had his wife got away with a double murder? Or was she just the victim of a madman's rage? Look at the facts and decide for yourself.

### **Attempted Wife Murder In Barton Upon Humber**

Hull and North Lincolnshire Times Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> October 1868

*'Police, Tuesday.- (Before Thomas Tombleson Esq.) - John Sinclair, a shoemaker, was brought up in the custody of the police, charged with threatening to murder his wife, Jane Sinclair, at Barton.*

*Failing to obtain sureties, the prisoner was sent to the House of Correction at Kirton Lindsey for two months.'*

Hull and North Lincolnshire Times Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1869

*'Special Petty Sessions, Monday (Before Thomas Tombleson Esq. and Major Taylor) - John Sinclair was brought up in custody, on remand charged with placing his wife Jane Sinclair, in bodily fear.*

*The prisoner was liberated from Kirton Lindsey House of Correction on the 19<sup>th</sup> December where he had been incarcerated for two months for a similar offence.*

*The prisoner went to his wife's house, she having obtained protection for the property.*

*Richard Jickells, brother in law of the prisoner said: "On the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of December the prisoner threatened to take his own life, and that of his (the prisoner's) wife; if he were hanged for it."*

*Witness was not afraid of the prisoner personally, but his sister (the prisoner's wife) was much afraid of him.*

*The bench ordered the prisoner to find two sureties in £10 each to keep the peace for two months. In default the prisoner was committed to Kirton House of Correction for two months.'*

Hull and North Lincolnshire Times Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> July 1869

**'ATTEMPTED WIFE MURDER** - On Saturday a shoemaker, named John Sinclair, a man about 46 years old, attempted to kill his wife by stabbing her with a knife. The consequences of the rash and murderous act well nigh proved fatal to the unfortunate woman, Jane Sinclair. About two years ago Mrs. Sinclair obtained protection for her property; her husband had at that time been absent several years, and had been serving in the Federal Army during the American War. Sinclair came back to Barton ill-used, and threatened to murder his wife.

In default of finding sureties he was sent to gaol for two months and almost within a week of the termination of his sentence he repeated the offence, and was again sent to prison.

After his release he threatened to murder his wife, and but for the timely interference of the neighbours he would have completed his purpose.'

'The accused was brought before the magistrate at Barton on Monday. As he appeared to be suffering from illness he was

accommodated with a chair. - John Todd, a relative of the prisoner's wife, was the first witness called, and deposed as follows:

"I am a labourer at Barton, and was in the house of the prisoner's wife (who is parted from her husband) on Saturday night, between seven and eight o'clock, when the prisoner came in, and after some conversation he said to me, 'I want to talk with you.'

I said 'Well.'

Prisoner said 'You behaved very bad to me last night in shoving me out of the house, you threw me on my back.'

I said 'Nowt but right.'

The prisoner then used foul language and his wife said, "Go out of the house, I don't want a row."

Prisoner pushed her with his left hand and knocked her down.

I then caught him under his chin and knocked him down. As soon as he was down upon his back I saw the shoemaker's knife (now produced) in his right hand. I then got hold of him by the throat, as I feared the use of the knife and held him down until I got assistance. The prisoner was then dragged out of the house by the legs. As soon as I got up I found a man named Coulam, who came in and placed Mrs. Sinclair on a sofa, and she became sick."

*Mr John Morley, Surgeon, Barton upon Humber deposed that he was sent for between 8 and 9 o'clock on Saturday evening. Saw the prisoner's wife on a sofa downstairs. Sent her upstairs with her mother and sister.*

*"As soon as she was undressed I followed her upstairs, examined her, and found a wound one inch long and half an inch deep on her left side, on a line with the eighth rib, and about eight inches from the spine. Fat was protruding from the lips of the wound. Her stays were cut, and there was blood on the chemise about the size of a crown piece."*

*By the Bench: "It was such a wound as might have been made by the shoemaker's knife now produced."*

*The prisoner declined for the present to put any questions to the witness.*

*Prisoner was then remanded.*

*On Wednesday the prisoner was again placed at the bar.*

*Jane Sinclair was the first witness called. She gave her evidence in feeble accent and appeared to be very weak.*

*She said "The prisoner came to my house on Saturday night. I was then in the sitting room; my youngest little girl and John Todd my brother in law, were also there.*

*The prisoner sat in a chair and said to me, 'I'll have a warrant and send you to prison, the same as you sent me for*

*four months.'*

*I said 'What for? What have I done amiss?'*

*Prisoner said, 'You were seven months gone in the family way when I went away.'*

*I said 'You rascal, what do you mean?'*

*I then got up and walked towards the kitchen; when I saw the prisoner start to his feet and put his hand to his bosom.*

*The prisoner then rushed towards me. I fell down and felt my back like to break. That is all I remember. When I came to myself I was laid upon a sofa in the room. I was not aware I had sustained any injury."*

*John Todd, labourer, Barton, repeated the evidence which he gave on Monday, and also added that Robt. Brumpton came to the house, and the prisoner went through his (Brumpton's) legs out of the door.*

*The prisoner here said, " The first and last statements of the witness do not correspond."*

*William Coulam deposed: " I am a brick maker living at Barton, nextdoor to Mrs. Sinclair. On Saturday evening last, from a quarter to half past seven, I heard a scream of murder. I went to Sinclair's house and found Mrs Sinclair cruddled down on her side near the back door. Several men*

were taking the prisoner out of the house as I went in. I never interfered with the prisoner. I picked Mrs. Sinclair up and set her in a chair against the fire. She complained of her side hurting her."

Prisoner; "Was it in the front room or the back kitchen where you found Mrs. Sinclair?"

Witness: "In the back kitchen."

Robert Brumpton, a working maltster, deposed as follows:

"I was in the street opposite to Sinclair's house on Saturday night. I heard someone cry 'Murder!' A woman came out and said, 'Will none of you come in, we shall have murder done in this house tonight.'

I ran straight into the house.

The prisoner was laid on his back in the passage and I helped Thomas Cook to drag him out. I perceived the knife produced in the prisoner's right hand, and when we got him out I took the knife from him and put it in my pocket. I held the prisoner till the policeman (Blades) came.

John Beck, of Barton, gentleman, deposed that on Saturday morning, about eight o'clock, he saw the prisoner going past Robert Stevenson's shop in High Street, which is fifteen yards from Sinclair's street.

"I heard the prisoner say, 'They have poisoned a child of mine and Mrs. Bethell, and before I sleep I'll wash my hands in their heart's blood.' I never saw the prisoner in my life before. His language was very bad and he was much excited. Made me notice him, prisoner was passing his wife's house at the time."

By the prisoner: [sic] "You were with Franklin, the coal loader at the time. I am certain you said what I have stated."

Prisoner: "The Lord have mercy upon your soul."

Mr John Morley repeated the evidence he gave on Monday, and added: "The clothes produced are those worn by Mrs. Sinclair. The direction of the wound was near the base of the heart. It was a downward thrust with a knife."

Superintendent Thoresby deposed to receiving the prisoner into his custody.

Witness charged him with having attempted to murder his wife by stabbing her with a knife.

In reply the prisoner said, "She has not received any bodily injury has she?"

Prisoner repeated the question.

Witness received the knife, which he produced, from Robert

*Brumpton, and the clothes from Mrs. Todd. They were marked with blood and had evidently been pierced with some sharp instrument. Prisoner afterwards said, "I am not drunk but mad."*

*The witness then put in two convictions against the prisoner, on which he had suffered two month's imprisonment for each offence, that of threatening to murder his wife.*

*The prisoner was fully committed for trial, for unlawfully, maliciously and feloniously wounding his wife.*

LINCOLNSHIRE RUTLAND AND STAMFORD MERCURY 18<sup>TH</sup> JULY 1869

*The man named Sinclair who was apprehended for stabbing his wife has been committed for trial at Lindsey Sessions.*

Here is a timeline of EVENTS and FACTS I have discovered about this case. I would like you to take this opportunity to play devil's advocate and see what YOU can come up with.

Jane Jickells and John Sinclair were married in Sculcoates Hull in the March quarter of **1850**.

The **1851** census for Hull reveals that they lived at 37 Duke Street, John being a 28 year

old Bootmaker, born in Ireland with his wife Jane aged 25, also described as Bootmaker and recorded as being born in Barton Lincolnshire. In this census they have no children living with them.

Their eldest child Rebecca Sinclair was born in Hull in the march quarter of **1853**.

According to the 1861 census for Barton upon Humber their second child Hannah Sinclair was born in Barton on the 5<sup>th</sup> February **1858** and baptised at St. Peter's Church on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February **1858**.

The **1861** census also reveals that Jane (formerly a housemaid) was now living in 'Back Lane' Barton upon Humber with her two daughters, but her husband was absent the night the census was taken. Could he have already gone to fight in the Federal Army in the American Civil War of **1861-1865**?

Possibly not, because another daughter, Mary Ann Sinclair was born in Hull on the 8<sup>th</sup> July **1864** and baptised at St. Mary's Church, Barton upon Humber on 31<sup>st</sup> July **1864**.

All these children can be accounted for in the **1871** census so none of them can be the child John Sinclair refers to as the one *'they'* have supposed to have murdered.

*"They have poisoned a child of mine and Mrs Bethell."*

Further research of the census uncovered that there was only one Mrs Bethell residing in Barton in the 1860's.

**Rebecca Bethell**, widow of Peter Bethell - Gardener who back in the 1851 census were neighbours of the Jickell's family (Jane's parents) in Winship Road Barton upon Humber.

Winship Road appeared on the 1851 census AFTER Caistor Road and BEFORE

Deepdale, Beaumontcote etc.

Sometime in **1867** Jane Sinclair obtains protection for her property - her husband has been absent several years serving in the Federal Army in the American Civil war.

**February 11<sup>th</sup> 1867** - Rebecca Bethell Changes her will '*revoking all previous wills,*' and leaves everything to Jane Sinclair and Elizabeth Heseltine (Mrs. Bethell's niece). Except her '*desk with drawers and explanation testament*' which goes to her cousin Thomas Skinner of Luds, Yorkshire.

This explanation testament would have made very interesting reading considering the facts that John Sinclair seems to think he was in possession of. But unless Thomas Skinner has handed it down in his family, I can only conclude that it's secrets have vanished into the mists of time.

**Hull and North Lincolnshire Times Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> July 1867**

*Barton Police- A girl named Fanny cooper is in custody charged with attempting to poison herself with Laudanum. She will be brought up again on Monday.*

Laudanum (a mixture of alcohol and opiates) was widely used in the Victorian era as a painkiller and was prescribed for almost anything from simple headaches to T.B. It was common practise to give crying babies a spoonful to make them sleep better.

As the above newspaper article shows, Barton was no exception and indeed there was a druggist shop in High Street, Barton in the 1860's and 70's.

*"They have poisoned a child of mine and Mrs Bethell."*

**November 26<sup>th</sup> 1867** - Rebecca Bethell dies age 76. Her death certificate says she died of 'Bronchitis' which she had suffered for three weeks previous. Her address is Caistor Road, Barton and her death was registered the next day by one Charlotte King of Barrow Road, Barton.

Could Mrs Bethell have been treated with laudanum to ease the pain of her bronchitis?

**November 26<sup>th</sup> 1867** - Rebecca Bethell's death appears in the Hull and North Lincolnshire Times Obituary Column stating only *Rebecca Bethell aged 76 years*.

**November 29<sup>th</sup> 1867** - Rebecca Bethell is buried at St. Peter's Church Barton.

**March 27<sup>th</sup> 1868** - Rebecca Bethell's will is proved at Lincoln by William Hilliard Goy (Solicitor) Effects under £200. No Leaseholds.

**April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1868** - The will (I assume) is read.

**October 20<sup>th</sup> 1868** - John Sinclair first charged with threatening to murder his wife.

**December 19<sup>th</sup> 1868** - John Sinclair released from The House of Correction.

**December 19<sup>th</sup> AND 20<sup>th</sup> 1868** - John Sinclair threatens to take the life of Richard Jickells (Jane's brother) and Jane Jickells if he were hanged for it.

**December 27<sup>th</sup> 1868** - John Sinclair appears at Barton Special Petty Sessions on remand charged with placing his wife in bodily fear. In default of finding two sureties of £10 pound each he is committed to Kirton House of Correction for two months once again.

**July 5<sup>th</sup> 1869 (Saturday)** - John Sinclair tries to murder his wife by Stabbing her with a shoemaker's knife.

**July 7<sup>th</sup> 1869** - John Sinclair brought before the magistrate at Barton.

**July 9<sup>th</sup> 1869** - John Sinclair placed before the bar and ultimately committed for trial at Lindsey Sessions.

I have found no more mention of John Sinclair in any further edition of the Hull and North Lincolnshire Times and he doesn't appear in any future census returns for Barton upon Humber. Nor does he turn up in any of the Births, Deaths or Marriage registers for St. Peter's OR St. Mary's Church, Barton upon Humber.

I can only assume he was found guilty of attempted murder at Lindsey Sessions and until I can get to Lincoln archives to prove my theory that is all I can tell you about John Sinclair.

*"They have poisoned a child of mine and Mrs Bethell."*

After thoroughly searching both St. Peter's and St. Mary's burial registers I can find no trace of a 'Sinclair' child's burial anywhere between 1858 and 1875.

There is, however, on **January 6<sup>th</sup> 1867**, in St. Peter's Church burial register, Barton upon Humber, the burial of a child named **Jessie Jickells** aged 1 year.

Whether this child will turn out to belong to Jane Sinclair (nee Jickells) is yet to be uncovered.

As for Jane, she appears on the **1871** census for High Street Barton, aged 45 and described as Charwoman. Living with her is her 6 year old daughter Mary Ann, and a woman named Elizabeth Mover, 71, who is described as a Boarder and who is a Pauper. Jane it seemed, lived to old age and was buried in Barrow Road cemetery where her headstone can still be seen today.

Did she get away with murder?

Or was John Sinclair such an ogre that Mrs. Bethell felt sorry for Jane and changed her

will to help a woman who's violent husband kept on deserting her?