

The December 2013 update of our Canal 1 Boatfamilies tree added the Miller Crook family of boatbuilders based at Riley Green, Hoghton.

William Miller Crook was from the third generation of this family, and in 1877 he married Catherine Hayes, a Liverpool publican's daughter, in 1877 and moved via Burscough to Ince Blundell the following year. They had three children but soon separated, and in a move rare outside the aristocracy in 19th Century Britain, William filed for divorce because of his wife's adultery.

In his Petition for Dissolution of Marriage, presented in the High Court of Justice on April 16 1886, he described himself as a foreman boatbuilder of Bootle-cum-Lineacre. Having "made oath" he stated that under the name of William Crook he was lawfully married to Catherine Crook, then Catherine Hayes, spinster, on January 6, 1877, at the Register Office Barrow-in-Furness.

He said that he lived and cohabited with his wife at Barrow-in-Furness, at Burscough and at Bootle-cum-Lineacre. They had two daughters, Ellen Miller Crook born on July 1 1877 and Rachel Miller Crook born on November 3 1878, before parting by mutual consent In November 1878. They lived separately until February 1880 when they cohabited for a short time at his wife's parents' house before separating again the same month. A third girl, Catherine Miller Crook, was born on November 18 1880.

He stated: "I am informed and verily believe that on the 7th day of November in 1885 and on other days between that day and the 11th day of March 1886 the said Catherine Crook at 13 Railway Walk, Birkdale . . . committed adultery with James Moody" and "during the months of November and December 1885 and January, February and March 1886 . . . James Moody frequently visited Catherine Crook at Railway Walk and on divers occasions committed adultery."

The Petition was sworn before the Commissioner of Oaths (signature unreadable) in Liverpool.

No indication was given as to William's "informant", possibly his sister-in-law Ellen Merone. She, as Ellen Hayes, had married a jockey, Thomas Coop Merone of Italian descent, in 1863 and it was at their house in Railway Walk, Birkdale, that much of the alleged adultery occurred. Merone's death, of alcoholic poisoning, on November 5 1886 figures significantly in the "particulars of the adultery committed by the Respondent", which were given as follows in the court papers (with Merone misspelt Marone):-

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In the High Court of Justice, Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division

The 5th June 1886

Between

William Miller Crook, Petitioner, and  
Catherine Crook, Respondent, and  
James Moody, Co-Respondent

1. On or about the night of the 6th or morning of the 7th of November 1885 in kitchen of the house occupied by Respondent's sister Mrs Marone, 13 Railway Walk, Birkdale in the County of Lancaster with the Co-Respondent.

2. The next night in a bedroom at the same address with the Co-Respondent

3. During the night between 5th November 1885 - the day of the death of Mr Marone, Respondent's brother-in-law, and day of his burial - in the parlour (whilst Marone was lying there dead) with the Co-Respondent.

4. On one night between 5th November 1885 and the day of the burial of the said Mr Marone, on a sofa in the kitchen of 13 Railway Walk, Birkdale, and at many other times at 13 Railway Walk aforesaid ending the 19th November 1885 with the Co-Respondent.

5. On five different nights between the 28th December 1886 and the 1st January 1886 at the back of the house 142 Hampton Road, Birkdale, aforesaid with the Co-Respondent.

6. On the 23rd January 1886 in the stable behind the house 13 Railway Walk aforesaid with the Co-Respondent.

7 On the 10th March 1886 in the petty at the back of the house 13 Railway Walk aforesaid with the Co-Respondent

Delivered the 5th day of June 1886 by G W Eyre & Co, John Street, Bedford Row, agent for Cotton & Leake, Petitioner's solicitor.

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On June 11 1886, Catherine filed her denial. "The Respondent, Catherine Crook . . . denies that she committed adultery with James Moody as set forth in the Petition. Whereby the Respondent prays that your Lordship will be pleased to reject the prayer of the said Petitioner."

But on November 1 a Decree Nisi was granted, and May 10 1887, at the High Court in The Strand, London, before the Hon Sir Charles Parker Butt it was declared that sufficient cause had not been shown to the court within six months why the Decree should not be made Absolute, and the marriage was dissolved.