

Rodney Street, Swansea



Wellness Centre and Spa 1877

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*The Rodney Street Wellness Centre and  
Spa*

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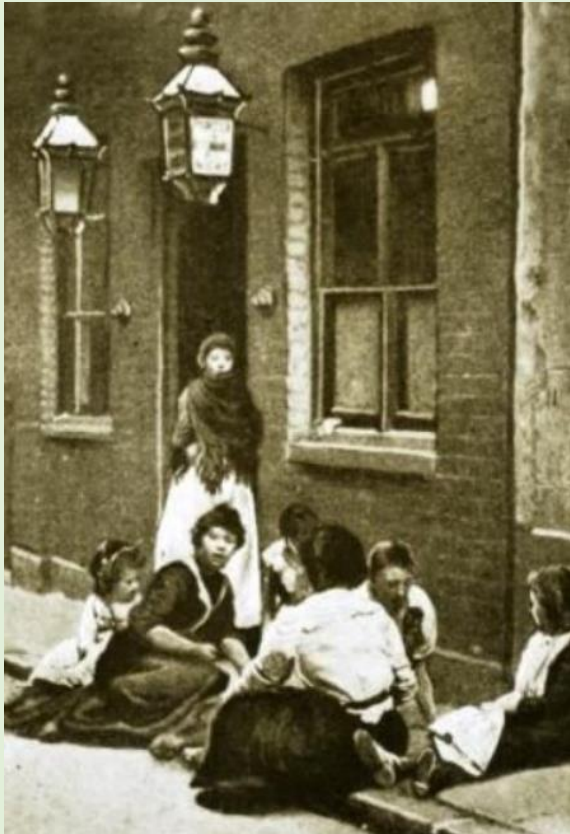
Isaac Alger was a naval veteran, a man of wisdom and experience, who knew exactly how the fearless Jolly Jack Tar preferred to relax. So he opened a brothel at 104 Rodney Street in Swansea. And as a result of that, he got himself into difficulties when he was arrested for attempting to murder Constable Payne by shooting him with a revolver.

I think I should explain.

January 1877 was a particularly tetchy time. There had been a police operation which had targeted a number of 'disorderly houses' across Swansea, in response to the robberies that were taking place within them. One of those Palaces of Pleasure raided had been 104 Rodney Street, managed by the thoughtful Isaac Alger.

Constable Payne said he and Constable Gill, who were carrying out surveillance work in plain clothes, saw six prostitutes and two men go into the house, just after eleven o'clock, steering themselves to glory in response, presumably,

to some kind of BOGOF offer. Payne and Gill watched the house through the night, until about half-past six in the morning and then entered through the back door, which wasn't locked, and went upstairs.



When he heard a noise down below in the kitchen, Payne called out to Alger and identified themselves as policemen, saying they wanted to look around. *'Hold on a bit,'* Isaac

replied and then there was a noise, as if keys were being jangled.

Payne carried on with his diligent investigations and knocked on the door of the back bedroom, which was opened by a woman he later in court described as '*a prostitute.*' Inside there were '*two prostitutes*' who were alone. He then tried the front bedroom. Again the door was opened by '*a prostitute.*' Inside there was another woman and two sailors. As an ex-teacher, I can assure you that there are easier ways of taking a register and more accurate ways too, since simple arithmetic would suggest that by his reckoning, he may have lost one of the original ladies.

At this point Isaac came upstairs. '*What are you doing in my house? Where is your warrant?*'

Payne told him that they didn't need a search warrant and showed him his warrant card instead, which identified him as a constable.

Isaac was not impressed. '*Look out for you brains!*' he shouted. Then raised his pistol, pointed it at Payne's face and pulled the trigger. The percussion cap exploded but thankfully the gun, although loaded, did not discharge.

Gill knocked him down with his truncheon, Payne fell on top of him and, together, they eventually wrestled the pistol from his hand. Alger was thus arrested and taken to the police station.

To be honest, I think Payne had every right to be irritated.

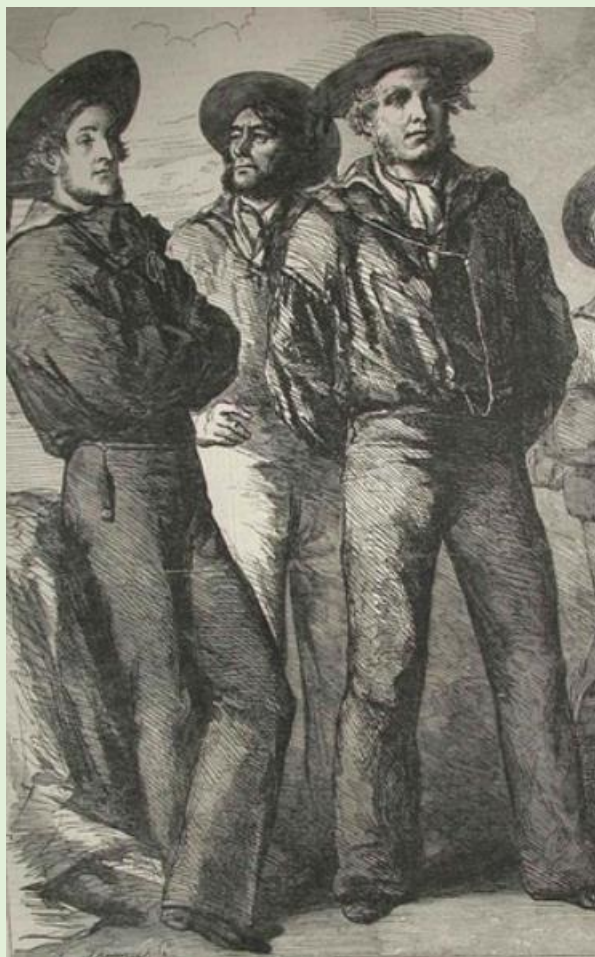
*'You knew what to expect if you came here,' said Isaac as they dragged him away. 'If the powder had not been damp, I would have settled one of you. If you had come in through, the window, I would have taken more time, and I should not have failed then. I always intended to do for the policeman that caught me.'*

At the police station, Isaac Alger was charged with attempting to murder Payne by shooting him with a pistol, which was loaded. *'But, only the attempt mind, only the attempt.'* added Isaac. Suddenly that distinction was an important one.

When Isaac was asked in court whether he wanted to ask Payne any questions, he said, *'I have not heard a word he has said.'* He remained in custody. His face was bandaged and bruised.

Now, you must understand that the detention of her husband in these circumstances did not sit well with Triphena Alger, who, as you may appreciate, experienced serious cash-flow issues as a result. Consequently, it had to be a case of 'business as usual,' an imperative that very soon impinged upon the constables. And in a bizarre development, history went some way towards repeating itself.

You see, in March it was Triphena's turn to be charged with keeping a brothel. The very same one, as a matter of fact. Constable Willis reported that at 11.30 pm he saw three prostitutes (who he recognised) and some sailors go into the house, presumably to add something more to this wonderful year. Willis went to the front door, and Constable Gill went to the back door. They knocked, but got no answer and so in



a repeat of the previous incident, the police men stayed outside all night. You might think that there were better things for constables to be doing during a cold dark March night, but then perhaps they had targets to meet. In fact,

they remained there until 5 am, which in some ways was an achievement, given the temperature.

When he got inside and went upstairs, Willis saw the three women in one room and two sailors in another but, shockingly, there were articles of women's clothing in the same room as the men. They were asleep, but of course, why not? Who are so free as the sons of the wave?

Triphena, the landlady, had been in bed downstairs, oblivious to this shocking scattering of garments.

Willis told her firmly that she would be reported. Triphena, not surprisingly, said that she had little choice since *'you have taken my poor old man away.'* She was striving to get some money together to defend him and anyway, what evidence was there that anything 'disorderly' was going on?

When the case came before the magistrates Mary Richards, a sailor's wife, was a witness for the defence. She lived in Argyle Street, but was at the house 'assisting' Mrs. Alger, though to do what, exactly, is never made clear. Two sailors had arrived drunk and asked to be allowed to sleep there, presumably so that they would be ready to fight and to conquer again and again. In fact she was the one who put them to bed.

The prosecution then used the ace that they were keeping up their sleeve, their clinching argument. Why, she was asked, didn't she open the door to the police when they knocked? However, it wasn't quite as effective a point as they had hoped.

*'I did not know they were policemen,'* she replied confidently. *'They were step-dancing in the street and singing and walking backwards and forwards.'* How was she to know they were constables? They could have merely been drunks.

Constable Payne, rather shamefacedly, admitted they had indeed been walking backwards and forwards, because the night was a very cold one and they needed to keep warm. This was clearly not an address at which poor constable Payne had a great deal of luck.

The case was adjourned whilst they searched for further evidence but, obviously, the case was going nowhere, and it was allowed quietly to fade away.

It goes without saying that you will have sympathy for Mrs Richard's point; only a person who has lost all interest in life itself would ever allow singing step-dancers into their property. The constables lost all credibility with the singing, if you ask me, especially for those whose childhood included, as did mine, the cruel torture of the song *The Laughing Policeman*, which was always on *Children's Favourites*. And who, pray, were these tin-eared minors for whom this abomination was a favourite? I still carry that pain with me, everywhere. But I digress.

When Isaac finally found himself in court in March, his defence lawyer, Mr Rowlands, put up a spirited defence. Alger had taken an objection to the policemen who, he said, acted illegally by entering the house without a warrant, and as a result Isaac felt justified in resisting them, since he was in fear of being attacked. That was quickly dismissed - no man had a right to shoot at a trespasser. Rowlands then tried to



argue that Alger had attempted to discharge the *'pistol merely to frighten the policemen,'* which was not altogether persuasive since it was loaded and pointed at Payne's face .

The jury, after a brief deliberation, found Isaac Alger guilty of an attempt to inflict grievous bodily harm, but with a recommended for mercy on account of his long period of service in the navy. I imagine this was a reference to his time in uniform, and not to 104 Rodney Street. The Judge, with a heart of oak, sentenced him to 18 months' imprisonment, and you can be sure that Triphena was not the happiest madame in Sandfields at having to revise her robust business plan, going forward.



A failed murder indeed, and we should be pleased that it was. But there are 25 murders and manslaughters from Swansea available for you to read in my book, ***Swansea Murders***.

You can buy a copy from my website for £11.99, including delivery.

Go to [www.geoffbrookes.co.uk](http://www.geoffbrookes.co.uk)

To find out more about the book here is a brief introductory video for you