

Charlotte Hopkins

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Killed in The Currant Tree Inn

West Cross, Swansea



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September 1893

The Killing of Charlotte Hopkins

Casual, unplanned, actions can have awful consequences which can never be undone. Think for a moment about Edward Fitzgerald and only then tell me that I am wrong.

The whole sorry mess started in September 1893 when Anne Fitzgerald, who was working as a cleaner and chambermaid in the Languard Bay Hotel, was arrested at her home in Tichborne, Mumbles for petty theft. She had accumulated a fine range of the hotel's used bed linen and crockery plus an extensive collection of tickets for the many articles she had pawned. She blamed it all on drink and said



she didn't know what she was doing. The magistrates sighed and sent her to prison for two months, with hard labour.

Her husband, Edward, was a ship-carpenter and returned home from sea after a nine months' voyage on the day she was arrested. It wasn't quite the welcome home that he had expected and he began to drink heavily. *Hitherto he had been a quiet, inoffensive man, bearing an excellent character, but misery at this particular time seemed to follow in his wake.* On Friday night, 10 September 1893, he turned up at the Currant Tree Inn, on the site of what is now the West Cross Inn.

It was a popular place and the owners William and Charlotte Hopkins much respected. They were both from Blackpill, where his father had been postmaster and her mother managed the Woodman Inn.

Fitzgerald turned up and ordered a drink but Charlotte refused to serve him since he was already drunk and asked him to leave. She told her husband not to worry and go and have something to eat in the kitchen. 'It's alright,' she said, 'I can manage this man, he is very quiet.'

But he wasn't.

According to some witness Fitzgerald suddenly became enraged and started swearing. Charlotte went to the front door to invite him to use it and came back down a narrow passage. where she met Fitzgerald. She pressed herself

against the banisters of the stairs to allow him to pass, and he struck her on the left side of her face, banging her head against the banisters. Charlotte, obviously shocked, called out 'Oh, William, this man has struck me.'

Her husband ran out of the kitchen and grabbed hold of Fitzgerald outside, knocking him to the ground. He got up and staggered away and William went back to Charlotte. She continued serving her customers but soon felt unwell and went to bed. In the middle of the night, she complained of feeling weak and of fierce pains in the head. A doctor was summoned, but she fell into unconsciousness. She deteriorated quickly and died on Monday evening.

Three little children have been robbed of a fond mother, and a husband of a true and loving wife, by the blow of a drunkard.

Fitzgerald was already in the cells when he was informed of her death. This was *sad news which deeply affected him*. The local community was outraged.

When he appeared in court he pleaded innocent to the charge of manslaughter. He repeated what he had said to the police at the time of his arrest – that there had been no blow but that he had merely pushed her. A witness, Charles Quick, confectioner, of Calvert-street Swansea, saw things differently. He said Fitzgerald had hit her with his clenched fist in the face, knocking her head against the banisters. Others had seen it too.

Dr Keal said her death was the result of *epilepsy caused by slight concussion and nervous shock*. He found a bruise on her right temple where it had struck the banister and thought it was extraordinary *that so slight an injury as a superficial bruise should result in death*. William agreed that she was not a strong woman but said that she had not been troubled with epilepsy before. The court however believed that it was nothing more than a tragic accident.

Fitzgerald was found guilty but with a recommendation for mercy. The judge agreed. He was sentenced to one month's imprisonment. And of course by this time Mrs Fitzgerald had been released from prison after serving two months for petty theft.

Want to read more about death and murder in Swansea?
Then look for my book, Swansea Murders, on my website.
Here is a video introduction.