

The Clergyman and the Cook

Ann Tomalak

In July 1861, Dover was buzzing about a court case, an affiliation summons naming the Rev. Charles Davies, a gentleman and Church of England clergyman who, it was said, held a living somewhere in Yorkshire, but had been staying in Dover with his family for some years. On the census return, taken a few months earlier, he was first described as “clerk in holy orders,” but this was crossed out and “Incumbent of Holy Trinity” written in. However, the parish records of Holy Trinity, Dover, show the incumbent at the time was A. J. Woodhouse and the curate H. J. Craig. Davies’ name does not appear at all.

Davies, aged 65 in 1861, lived at 22 East Cliff with his 70 year old wife, his unmarried daughter (39), a widowed step-daughter (26) and at least three servants. One of these was Catherine Anne Thompson, always known as Annie because both her mother and her employer’s wife were also named Catherine. Annie had joined the household as under-housemaid in January 1857, aged just 16. Already in residence was a cook called Eliza Ellender (36 in 1861), a widow who had previously lived on Woolcomber Street with her coach-painter husband.

The local newspapers, *the Dover Chronicle*, *Dover Express* and *Dover Telegraph* and *Cinque Ports General Advertiser*, each devoted several full columns to this salacious story on Saturday, 6th July, with lengthy follow-ups a fortnight later when the case concluded.

An account of the case unfolded before the magistrates, with Mr Minter appearing for the complainant, Annie Thompson, and

Mr Towne for the defendant, Charles Davies. The difficulty was that Annie’s statement alone was not sufficient proof of paternity; there had to be corroborating evidence. Davies was not in court, despite a summons delivered to him a fortnight before as he boarded the packet boat for Calais (there was no suggestion that he was absconding; he travelled frequently, including to France). He was accused of having fathered an illegitimate female child born to Annie Thompson on 30th March 1861. If this could be proved, the court would order him to pay maintenance. It seems, however, that he had always been willing to do this provided the child’s paternity was kept secret, so his true punishment was having the story revealed.

Annie, the court was told, was a respectable young woman, the daughter of a coastguard living at East Cliff. (In fact, the family had lived at 19 East Cliff for some years, but had moved out before this court case, possibly to a coastguard cottage in the same area.) She remained in service at no. 22 until January 1861, when she was twenty. But a “criminal intimacy” (as the court described it) developed between the two and, the previous October, she suspected she was pregnant and told Davies so, in the presence of the cook, Eliza Ellender. Davies doesn’t seem to have denied responsibility, but he did want the pregnancy confirmed. He was afraid the scandal would get out if she saw a doctor in Dover, so the three of them agreed Annie would visit one in Folkestone. Davies gave her 7s 6d for travel and expenses, later adding another half-crown, in total the equivalent purchasing power of £50 today.

Time passed, Annie's condition became obvious and the three of them cooked up a plan to preserve the good names of both Davies and Thompson. They decided there should be a pretend quarrel between master and maid about the amount of gas burnt in the house, since Davies complained if it was turned on too freely. Davies should criticise Annie's usage and she should take offence and give notice. After leaving, Annie was to ask her mother if she could go to her married sister in Lydd for a holiday. Soon after she arrived, she would receive a letter written by Davies and posted in London, but addressed in a woman's hand, purporting to come from an acquaintance, the maid of a Miss Broadwood, a lady who had been on a visit to Davies' house as she was a friend of his wife. The letter will say that the writer had heard of a job which would suit her - servant to a family going to Paris, and she should come to London to obtain it. Annie was to show the letter to her sister to explain leaving Lydd and pretend to set out for London. However, Davies would provide lodgings in Folkestone for her confinement and she should head there. Before she left Lydd, she was to write to her mother explaining the trip to London, while Davies would go to Paris to post a letter from Annie to her mother, announcing her safe arrival there.

The quarrel was staged as planned and Annie worked out her months' notice, but that posed a new problem. If she went home, her mother would surely notice the change in her figure, so she stayed on in Davies' house until it was time to go to Lydd on 14th January, now sleeping in Ellender's room. During that time, Ellender went to Folkestone and found apartments at a Mrs Taylor's, 5 Grace Hill, saying they were for the wife of a sergeant-major in a regiment coming from Ireland, who was arriving in advance of her

husband and the regiment, owing to the near approach of her confinement. Davies also sent her to Boulogne to look for a foundling hospital there - presumably Coram's in London was too close for comfort as Annie could so easily reclaim her child.

The plan might have worked except for one accident. The letter sent to Lydd got into the wrong hands. Annie was out walking on the beach when it arrived and one of her sister's children played with it, tore the envelope open and the letter fell out. The sister picked it up and, thinking there was no harm to it, read it and found it suspicious. She immediately contacted their parents. Her mother then told Annie not to leave her sister's house. She gave birth to her daughter there six weeks later. By that time, there was a new housemaid at 22 East Cliff, Susannah Prescott, aged 18.

Annie would not tell anyone who the father was, as Davies had solemnly bound her to secrecy. But before the birth, thinking she might not survive it, she wrote a letter to her parents naming the child's father, sealed it and placed it in her luggage, to be returned to her parents if the worst happened. In fact, she did become dangerously ill and, supposedly on her deathbed, she told her sister about the letter. Annie recovered, but her sister had already sent the letter to her parents. It read:

Lydd, 24th March 1861.

In case of death, I write this for the good of my child, should it live.

The right father of the said child is the Rev. Charles Davies of 22 East Cliff, Dover. It is my wish, should anything occur, that this be given up to my father, John Thompson.

Signed by me, Anne Thompson.

This letter was eventually read in court. Annie's father testified that after he read it, Mrs Ellender visited them. He complained about her attempt to "decoy" his daughter, which she denied. She then grabbed the letter and threw it into the fire saying, "That will tell no tales" – but it was only a copy. From that point, both sides lawyered-up, as we might say. Annie's parents applied to Davies for compensation for the injury done to her and negotiations went on without success. Davies told her father he would be "a foolish fellow to make any further stir in the matter," but John Thompson declared he would have what remedy the law allowed him. There were various threats and claims, including to report Davies to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

A letter from Davies to Annie's solicitor, Minter, first claims the "deathbed" letter was written while she was of unsound mind or (looking at the phraseology) not written by her. He then says, "However this may be, I am afraid that against an order of affiliation, if she seek it, there is no appeal and therefore I must submit to it." But he goes on to claim the "seducer" was the butler of a family visiting Dover fully three years before!

Though publicly denying paternity, Davies seems very willing privately to take responsibility for Annie and the baby. He gave her a sovereign before she went to Lydd. Letters from Ellender to Annie were produced in court. One addressed to Lydd read:

My dear girl, I have not much time but do you want any money? If so, I would send a post-office order. I have a very great deal to say but time will not allow.

His very best love - all are quite well.

Your loving friend, E. Ellender.

On the reverse was the address in Folkestone, the story about the fake

husband and instructions to burn the letter. Later, Annie received £7 from Ellender (purchasing power about £700 today) for the expenses of the confinement and baby linen. The cook twice visited her in Lydd. Annie also received a note in printed characters from Davies enclosing 7/- in postage stamps. The note read "this will be repeated weekly while persons are prudent and hold their tongues." (That would equate to a relative income of over £1000 per month today).

More of Ellender's letters to Annie were also read to the court and suggest genuine affection and care. She was addressed as "dearest Annie." Ellender was making arrangements for her future once she was well enough to travel, offered her money and sent kisses for the baby. She even passed on love from Sarah, presumably a mutual friend. Yet at the same time it was becoming apparent to the court that she was Davies' accomplice or agent, not acting on her own account. Where would a mere cook find the sums of money involved? She was no longer just a witness to corroborate Annie's story, but a "person of interest."

In the way of such cases, Annie's character came under close scrutiny in court. She was described as a young woman of quiet, lady-like carriage and some personal attraction. The questions put to her are mostly not recorded, but her answers suggest Davies' lawyer proposing other putative fathers for the child. Annie denied intimacy with any other man. She admitted she knew all the female servants of Col. Carmichael, who lived for a time next-door at no. 21, and also his manservant Stewart, but was never familiar with him. He certainly never came through the window into her room, nor she into his. No, there had never been a complaint to the colonel about them. Nor

did she know a young man called Joseph Young, and she knew Charles Willow only by sight.

Annie's mother, Catherine, gave evidence of her good character and added that Ellender had come to see her a few weeks before the birth and offered 5/- a week for her silence; the child could not be brought to East Cliff and the father was to remain unknown.

The court then adjourned, so that both Davies and Ellender could be summonsed. A fortnight later, when the case resumed, they still did not appear. Ellender had apparently replied that they could summon her as much as they liked but they would not get her to say a word. The court was warned not to take Davies' absence as prejudicial or an admission of guilt. In fact, he was in London, being tried in an ecclesiastical court for seduction. His lawyer there claimed this was an attack on a respectable clergyman in hope of obtaining hush-money of £100 or £150. Davies also had a counter-claim for defamation of character against John Thompson being heard at the Court of Queen's Bench at around the same time. His letters to Towne came from addresses such as 48 The Strand (29th April 1861) and Lombard St (4th May 1861).

The resumed case descended into spats between the lawyers over whether Ellender was Davies' agent or not, and the abuse offered to Davies by John Thompson. The court was cleared and when the public and press returned, the mayor gave judgement that the Bench found Davies was the father of the child and ordered him to pay 2s 6d per week for her maintenance (the most permitted, comparable to Child Benefit today).

So, Annie got justice of a kind, but not the

sums of money previously offered for her silence, which would have helped her bring up her daughter in a little more comfort. But then, the case was never really about them, it was a battle between the two men; the clergyman who preached morality to others but took advantage of a young woman in his own household and tried to cover it up, and the outraged father who, in guise of protecting his daughter's reputation, hoped to avoid the shame an illegitimate child would bring on the whole family.

Not surprisingly, all parties disappear from public records after the trials. In the 1871 census, 22 East Cliff is standing empty, while no. 19, Anne's childhood home, has become a boarding house.

The 1861 census for Lydd records Annie living with Thomas and Rebeca Dowle as a "niece", her occupation ladies' maid (sic); her month old daughter is listed as "granddaughter".

But we know the baby survived. Catherine Selina Annie Thompson was baptised on 1st May 1861 at All Saints, Lydd. Her mother, Catherine Annie Thompson, was described as a single woman in the register. No father was given. Catherine Selina married Thomas William Paine at All Saints, Lydd at the end of 1893. She was a spinster of Guston, Dover, he a bachelor, born 1857 in Lydd. (Curiously, the Dover coastguard cottages around East Cliff were technically in Guston, so perhaps Annie did return with the baby to live with her parents.)

We will never really know what was going on at 22 East Cliff. There were three female family members living there, plus the third servant. Did none of them notice what was happening? Or were they just glad Davies' attentions were focussed

elsewhere? Were they afraid to speak out, and who could they have told? Eliza Ellender is the real enigma. She seems genuinely fond of Annie, helps her, makes sure Davies does right by her, gets seriously involved in the arrangements for the birth and the ongoing support of mother and child, keeping the money flowing, and yet has an active role in the conspiracy to keep everything secret. Most amazingly, she takes a trip to France to find an orphanage. Did she speak French? Whatever relationship she had with Davies, it was more than cook and employer.

Perhaps the last word should go to the editor of the Dover Chronicle who, in the Saturday 20th July issue, castigates Davies, saying he has disgraced his sacred profession, is discreditable and untrustworthy. The paper regrets the meagre recompense that is all the Bench could award and says of Davies, "Let him –

if he would answer to his God, to conscience and to his fellow men – make every amend which now remains in his power to the fallen one and her family. He has wealth: let the poor seduced girl and her unfortunate child be kept from want, and her blighted circumstances, for which he is responsible, be lightened as much as is possible."

NOTE. It is notoriously difficult to translate historic monetary sums into modern values. The proportion of income spent on essentials such as food, clothing and accommodation varies hugely over the centuries. Additionally, live-in servants would receive these basics "free," so what we think of as pitifully low wages (Annie might have earned £20 pa) was theirs to spend as they wished. For example, 7/- in 1861 equates to a purchasing power of £35 today but, comparing the wages of the average worker, it would be closer to £274. For a full discussion see <https://www.measuringworth.com/index.ph>

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