

Emsworth Ropemaking

by Trevor Davies

Tony Yoward wrote an article in the 1991 edition of *The Emsworth Echo* describing the local ropemaking industry. His article mentions the ropewalk that ran alongside what is now the A259, which was known as the turnpike in the 19th century (Fig. 1). The ropewalk ran from Thorney Road to the entrance to Prinsted Lodge (now the entrance to the One Church).

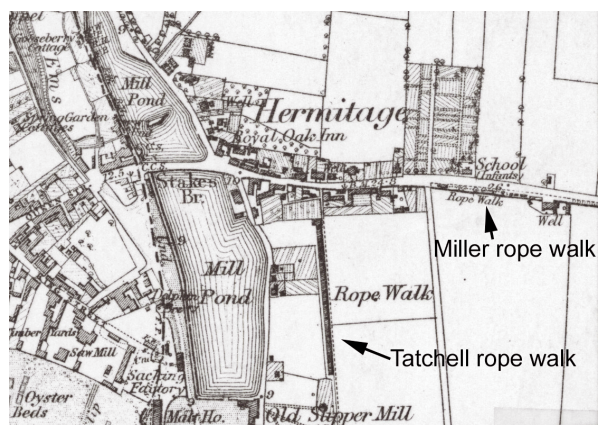


Fig. 1. An extract from the 1870 Ordnance Survey map showing the ropewalk running alongside the turnpike from Thorney Road to Gosden Green

Recently, a number of newspaper articles referring to this ropewalk have been found. They reveal both details of the ropewalk and a fascinating story of its operations.

In 1836, a 60-year lease of the ropewalk was granted to Adolphus Miller. We know Adolphus was something of an entrepreneur because in the *Hampshire Telegraph and West Sussex Chronicle*, on 22nd January 1848, he was advertising Lymington salt, rock salt and 200 tons of soap ashes (potash) for sale.

However, his various business ventures could not have been profitable and on 23rd November 1850, a notice of a sale of his stock in trade was issued (Fig. 2) because he had filed for bankruptcy. This notice reveals the scope of his business interests.

In *The Hampshire Independent* dated 19th April 1851, the property related to the business was auctioned. The details of the

EMSWORTH.
IN BANKRUPTCY.
To Ropemakers, Sailmakers, Dealers in Salt, and General Dealers.

TO be SOLD by PUBLIC AUCTION, by Mr. J. N. ROBINSON, on the premises, Emsworth, on Tuesday, November 26, 1850, commencing precisely at eleven o'clock, by direction of the Assignees of Mr. Adolphus Miller, Ropemaker, Sailmaker, and General Dealer.—The Manufactured and Unmanufactured **STOCK-IN-TRADE, TRADE REQUISITES, HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE** and **EFFECTS** of the said Bankrupt; consisting of about one and a half ton of new patent-laid rope, a quantity of twice-laid ditto, one and a half ton of jute hemp, and five cwt. jute tow, six cwt. of white rope and lines, consisting of reef, box, and clothes lines, cart rope, halters, and wanties, 20 dozen assorted sailmakers' drag, fillerson, and shop twine, a quantity of fishing and pig nets, coir door mats, nine bolts of navy canvas, 146 one cwt. and 48 half cwt. new roped coal sacks, 99 new corn sacks, and 60 painted salt bags, about ten ton of table salt, and four ton salt for agricultural purposes, three gross of sailmakers' copper and iron thimbles, two beams and scales, a quantity of iron weights, a three-wheel wheelbarrow, sack cart, three sack looms, spinning wheels, reels, &c.

The Household Furniture comprises the usual furniture of a parlour, three bed-rooms, kitchen requisites, &c.

Catalogues may be had on the premises, or at the Auctioneer's Office, 76, Broad-street, Portsmouth, the day previous to the sale.

WILLIAM BELL, Esq.
3, Coleman-street Buildings, Montague-street, London,
Official Assignee.

Messrs. COLE and RATCLIFFE,
Ryde, Isle of Wight,
Solicitors to the Assignees.

Fig. 2. Extract from the *Hampshire Telegraph and West Sussex Chronicle*, on 22nd January 1848, announcing the sale of Adolphus Miller's stock in trade

whole property included the ropewalk 1200 feet long and 12 to 18 feet wide, tar house, yarn house, rope house and dwelling house and other assets. The benefit of this newspaper report is that it explains exactly where the ropewalk was located and how long it was.

To place this ropewalk in context, the Chatham Dockyard ropewalk is 1135 feet long – slightly shorter. Ropewalks of this length produce rope that is a cable (just over 600 feet) long, after allowing for the reduction in length inherent in the ropemaking process.

There must have been no bids for the business, because the next record on 19th March 1867 in *The West Sussex Journal*

is the report of a court case. Adolphus Miller (senior) has now died and left the property to his older son, George, who is now in Australia and who has in turn let the ropewalk to his younger brother Adolphus Miller (junior). Adolphus becomes embroiled in a dispute with Andrew Bone Hatch who farms the land to the south of the ropewalk, concerning access to the land while ropemaking was in progress. The court report helpfully again details the exact location of the rope walk – the turnpike road (now the A259) is to the north and Gosden Green to the south. Adolphus wins his case.

Adolphus continues to be sensitive about access to the ropewalk. On 6th November 1867, he was accused of assaulting Alice Willis (aged 13) who was sweeping leaves from the garden in front of her mistress' house across the ropewalk. The case was considered by the County Bench in Chichester who fined Adolphus 2s. 6d., with costs of 11s. 3d.

Further newspaper reports imply that this ropemaking business was not a success. During this time, sail was giving way to steam and the demand for rope must have been falling. There is no mention of this ropewalk on the 1908 Ordnance Survey map, although the Tatchell ropewalk next to the Sussex Brewery is shown.

My thanks to Ros Cheetham who, knowing my interest in Emsworth ropemaking, spotted these newspaper reports and so helped to uncover these fascinating historical details.