



# TOWSEY TALES

**NAME: Robert Harry Sparks, junior**

**BIRTH DETAILS: 1810 Leyton**

**DEATH DETAILS: 28 Mar.1869 Holborn**

**CHART REF: Towsey Chart C6**

**MARRIAGE DETAILS: 1st M: 2 Sep.1835 Marylebone**

**SPOUSE: Maria Klingender**

**MARRIAGE DETAILS: 2nd M:26 Apr.1851 Brentford**

**SPOUSE: Emma Helen Litchfield**

The life of the youngest of Robert Harry Sparks senior's three sons: Robert Harry Sparks junior, is most notable for a lack of any great, or even middling achievements.

It is most likely that Robert Harry Sparks junior started working in his father's business as a teenager. This would have been in about 1826. However the first record of his presence there, is at the time that his brother, Thomas Hougham Sparks, bolted to France with Amelia

Box in 1837, all of which you can read about on Thomas' Towsey Tale.

By this time, twenty five year-old Robert had been married for two years to Mary Klingender, (born 1811), the daughter of Frederick Charles Lewis Klingender, a schoolmaster in Hackney who was also at one time an Inn Keeper. He was born in Germany and naturalised in 1828, which was obviously many years after he had married Sarah Ann Rodwell, Mary Klingender's mother.

Robert was the only member of the family then working at Sparks and Co., though as a clerk rather than as a chemist and druggist, as his elder brothers had been. The technical side of the business and, perhaps, the general management, had been taken over by William Foster White: an intelligent young man of the same age as Robert.

There is an interesting account of a trial in November 1836, when a group of opportunist thieves stole two packages from the back of a wagon, owned by Robert Harry Sparks, as it took his personal possessions from a boat unloading at Smithfield, up to his house in St.John Street. The boat had come up from Ramsgate with Robert as a passenger.

It is not entirely clear if the Robert referred to is senior or junior. It could have been that Robert senior had been living in Ramsgate, prior to moving over to France. It is far more likely though, to have been the younger Robert, who was after all, living in St.John Street by then, and might well have been bringing household items up from his brother Tom's place.

*Henry Inskip, was indicted for stealing on the 9th of November, 2 boxes, value 10s.; 12 forks, value 8l. 10s.; 1 soup-ladle, value 3l.; 29 spoons, value 19s.; 2 sauce-ladles, value 1l. 12s.; 1 winestainer, value 1l. 12s.; 2 pairs of nut-crackers, value 10s.; 12 dozen knives, value 6l.; 12 dozen forks, value 6l.; and 1 guitar, value 10s.; the goods of Robert Harry Sparks.*

*ROBERT HARRY SPARKS. I came from Ramsgate on the 9th of November, and had twenty-four packages with me—they were my own property—they were marked "S. Passenger"—when I arrived in London, they were all put into my cart, and conveyed to my own residence in St. John-street—one contained plate, and another a guitar and some linen—those two did not arrive—I missed them on the following morning—I have seen the articles since, they are all mine, and were in those two packages.*

*JOHN CARLON. I am porter to Mr. Pugh, of King-street, Snow-hill. About twenty minutes past six o'clock on the evening of the 9th of November, I saw a loaded cart come along—I saw four men go behind it, and saw them take two packages out of the cart—they carried them towards the cab rank—they went to a cab, and one of them called out, "Harry, life your flap" (meaning the flap of the cab)—the prisoner was Harry, he was the cab man—I am sure of it—I knew him before, but did not know his name—he gave the name of Henry—he lifted the flap, and I called to*

him, and told him it was stolen property—he said it was all right—I said it was not, but I would have it right—he got up into the seat, and one of the men got into the cab—the prisoner put the smaller box at his feet, and the other was in the cab body—the prisoner attempted to whip the horse, and the horse gibbed—I told him that if he would drive that I had his number, and I called on the waterman to assist me, but he would not do it—this was in Smithfield—the man that was in the cab jumped out and went into Long-lane, three or four yards from the spot, and staid there—the prisoner came down, and went to Long-lane, and spoke to the man who had been in the cab—the prisoner stopped about two minutes, and then he came to me and asked what I meant to do—I said to bring the cab and property to the watchhouse—“Well,” says he, “Come along”—he came with me—I took it there, and gave it to Mr. George Godfrey, Inspector of the watch—I did not lose sight of the prisoner when he went and spoke to the man.

WILLIAM COURT. I am in the employ of Mr. Sparks. I drove these

packages and when I got home I missed two—these are the two packages I lost—I did not know what was in them or I should not have put them in the tail of the cart—I took them of the men at the water-side, and out them in.

GEORGE GODFREY. I received the property, and the prisoner—the prisoner told me that when he pursued the man that jumped from the cab he ran up a court and called, “Stop thief”—I went to the court the next morning and made inquiries, and there are not more than twelve houses there—they told me if there had been a cry of “Stop thief,” they must have heard it.

Prisoner's Defence. I had been on the rank about an hour, and I turned my horse's head, when two men called “cab”—it was not two men that called “Harry” to me—it was I called my fellow servant; one of them put the boxes into my cab, and then the witness said it was stolen property—my horse ran back, and the man got out and went to Long-lane, I went to him, and said “If that it your's, why don't you go to it”—he said he had lost his friend—he then up a court—I ran and called “Stop thief”—he pulled out a large thing, and said he would knock my brains out—I came to this man, and asked what I had better to with it—he said to take it to the watch-house—if I had known any thing of the men I would have told him of it—he did not tell me it was stolen before I got into the cab.

JOHN CARLON. I told him it was stolen before he got up, and he went round and got up—the property was taken from the cart not twelve yards from where he was.

GUILTY. Aged 21. — Transported for Seven Years.



Having been transported to Australia, Henry Inskip never returned to Britain.

In 1837, when Thomas Hougham Sparks had deserted his family and run off to Paris with another woman: Amelia Box (as covered in Tom's Towsey Tale), on the first occasion that they came back to London for two weeks, it was younger brother Robert, who arranged an apartment in which they could stay.

Robert and Mary, his wife, came and dined with them on most evenings during their stay and Robert's main topic of conversation during these meals, was his impending departure for Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania, in Australia), where he and Mary were going to become settlers.

Robert, Mary and their son, Robert, sailed to Van Diemen's Land, at about the end of 1838. There he was given land to farm in the north of the island, near the town of Launceston.

How this young man, whose life so far had been one of urban comfort and clerical employment, expected to suddenly prosper as a farmer, leads one to believe that the adventure of travel to a distant land and being allocated not just land, but convict labour with which to develop the farm, must have overridden any rational analysis of the actual work involved.



Although there were many free settlers in this remote British colony, its primary function was as a penal colony in which the dregs of English society were being dumped.

Even the government officials who were posted out to this remote wilderness, were not of the highest calibre. How many men with good prospects would, after all, opt for such a dead-end career path?

## The Hobart Town Courier and Van Diemen's Land Gazette Friday 13 September 1839

*Convicts in Australia would often be assigned to free settlers to work the land that they had been granted. The settler was responsible for the upkeep of the convict, who would usually serve just half their sentence before being granted a Ticket of Leave, or parole. They could also then be granted land and have convicts assigned to them.*

### BOARD OF ASSIGNMENT.

September 11th, 1839.

The following Assignments have been directed by the Board:—

From Launceston—R. Symmonds, Carrick; D. R. Parramore, Mount Leslie; Dr. W. Weymouth, Launceston; Mackillop and Anderson, Launceston; W. Humphreys, Cataract Hill; Jane Fawthrop, Launceston; W. Griffiths, Tamar; A. F. Rooke, Westbury; W. Jones, Launceston; P. Dalrymple, ditto; R. H. Sparks, Deloraine; T. Nowlan, Perth; J. Peck, Patterson's Plains; Wild and Robbins, New Plains; W. Capon, Launceston; Silcock and Mills, Tamar; John Limer, Sand Hills; J. Stoneham, Launceston; A. Ferragalli, ditto; S. Thomas, ditto; W. Field, ditto; M. Williams, ditto; M. C. Friend, George Town; A. Newell, Launceston; T. Dutton, Tamar; H. Jennings, Launceston; Jane Jordan, Kerry Lodge; W. Frazier, Evandale; S. Cox, Norfolk Plains, East.

If the above men be not removed within a reasonable time, they will be assigned to other service.

JOSHUA SPORN,  
WILLIAM GUNN,  
RONALD C. GUNN.

Composing the Board of Assignment.

### Van Diemen's Land 26 June 1841

**I**N the matter of the Insolvency of Robert Harry Sparks, of Kingdon, Deloraine, in Van Diemen's Land, Farmer.—To the several creditors of the abovesaid insolvent, or their agents—Notice is hereby given, that the said Robert Harry Sparks having this day presented his petition to William Gardner Sams, Esquire, Commissioner of Insolvent Estates for Launceston, praying for relief, under the provisions of the Act of this Island, intituled "An Act to make provision for the more effectual distribution of Insolvent Estates," and the same having come on to be heard before the said William Gardner Sams, Esquire, be the said Robert Harry Sparks, was by

the said Commissioner declared Insolvent, and John Atkinson, of Launceston, Esq., was thereupon appointed the provisional assignee of the estate and effects of him the said insolvent. Notice is hereby given, that the Commissioner has appointed Wednesday, the 21st day of July next, at the hour of ten o'clock in the forenoon, at the Court House, Launceston, to be the day and place for the meeting of the creditors of him the said insolvent, for the proof of debts, the appointment of a permanent assignee, and otherwise proceeding in the matter of such insolvency.—Dated this 25th day of June, 1841.

HENRY JENNINGS,  
Solicitor to the said Insolvency.



We see that within a couple of years, Robert had failed to make a go of life on the land, but rather than return to England empty handed and an obvious failure, he took a series of minor government jobs in the colony, as evidenced by these newspaper reports.

The Courier Hobart, Tas.  
Friday 3 June 1842

**GOVERNMENT NOTICE. No. 121.**

Colonial Secretary's Office, 25th May, 1842.

The Lieutenant-Governor has been pleased to appoint Mr. Robert H. Sparks Inspector of Stock and Poundkeeper for the Sub-District of Westbury, vice Walker.

By His Excellency's command,  
G. T. W. BOYES.

The Courier Hobart, Tas.  
Friday 2 December 1842

**GOVERNMENT NOTICE. No. 305.**

Colonial Secretary's Office, 21st November, 1842.

The Lieutenant-Governor has been pleased to appoint Mr. Robert H. Sparks Inspector of Weights and Measures at Westbury.

By His Excellency's command,  
G. T. W. BOYES.

The Cornwall Chronicle Launceston, Tas.  
24 December 1842

**Public Pound, Westbury  
December 12th, 1842**

**IMPOUNDED** December 7th, by R.H.

Douglas: -

1 Strawberry bullock, DRY near thigh, and apparently IP near hip.

Damages claimed, £1: poundage fees, food and water, 9d per diem.

If the above animal be not claimed and redeemed within the time allowed by law, he will be sold by me at the above pound, on Wed. January 3rd, 1843, pursuant to the provisions of the Impounding Act.

Robert H Sparks, Poundkeeper

**11 February 1843**

**PUBLIC POUND, Westbury.**—Impounded, on the 15th inst., by Phillip Horton, overseer to W. Lyons, Esq., of Deloraine

One dark iron grey filly, no white, three years off, unbroken.

Damages claimed, £7. Poundage fees, food and water, 1s. 6d. per diem.

If the above animal be not claimed and redeemed within the time allowed by law, it will be sold by me at the above pound, on Wednesday, the 15th of February, 1843, according to the provisions of the Impounding Act.

ROBERT H. SPARKS, *Poundkeeper.*

*Launceston, Tasmania, early C19th.*



At some point between the end of 1842 and the start of 1844, Robert had become the District Constable at Westbury, which is just a little south of his failed farm, in the north of the island.



## INQUEST.

An Inquest was held on Monday the 26th February, at the house of William Bates, situate at the Arms of the Creek, in the sub-district of Westbury, before J. P. Jones, Esq., Coroner, and a Jury of seven of the inhabitants of Westbury, on the view of the body of John Ryan, a probationer belonging to the Deloraine station, who came to his death under the following circumstances, as given in evidence.

**William Bates.**—I am a settler residing at the Arms of the Creek; yesterday morning the 25th instant, about an hour after sunrise I was alarmed by three men coming to the door and asking for tobacco, I told them to wait and I would come out. A constable named Martin was stationed in the house, he opened the door and told them to stand, he pushed two of them in with his bayonet, the third ran away. Martin called to him to stop or he would shoot him, he continued running and Martin fired, the man instantly fell. Martin then told me to handcuff the other two, and we went down to the body. The man was 40 or 50 yards off before the constable fired. We have been robbed four times lately by the same parties, who are I believe absconders from the Deloraine Probation station. One of them was under arms on the other occasions, but did not appear on this. I know the deceased to have been with the party on all the occasions that we have been robbed. The shoes now taken off his feet are mine, he took them from me. The deceased and the other men were all armed with large cudgels, but they did not offer any violence to me or the constable.

**Benjamin Henry Mence.**—I am an overseer of the Deloraine Probation station; I know the deceased, he belonged to my class. His name is John Ryan, per *Constant*, and was under sentence of six months in chains when he absconded. He absconded on the 12th of February.

**Joseph Terry.**—I am a labourer, and reside

at the house of William Bates; I was in bed yesterday morning, and about an hour after sunrise was awakened by three men coming to the door and asking for tobacco, I told them to wait a minute. I did so because the constable was not ready. The constable James Martin then put on his belt and fixed his bayonet. He opened the door, told the men to stand, and pushed two of them in with his bayonet. He said to them "in you go," the deceased ran away. I heard Martin call to him and tell him to stop or he would shoot him, the man continued running, and when he was about 40 or 50 yards off, Martin fired and the man fell; he desired William Bates to handcuff the other two and he then went to the body. He came back and said "he is dead, we must bring the body in." I went down with Martin and the deceased was just breathing. I heard Martin say to him "what a foolish man you were not to stop." The man just said, "Oh!" We brought the body up to the house...

**Cross-examined by the Coroner.**

The same men have been here four times lately, they took away a quantity of flour, meal, tea, and sugar.

**E. S. Hall.**—Surgeon in charge of H. M. Hospital, Westbury. I have examined the body on which this inquest is held, and have found a hole penetrating through the body from the lower part of the back on the left side to the left of the belly. The appearance is that of a ball passing through, which in its course has very much fractured the bone, a quantity of fluid and coagulated blood, has escaped into the cavity of the belly. There were corresponding holes through his clothes. I have no doubt that this was inflicted by a gun shot, which gun shot has been the cause of his death. No sharp instrument could have done

It is possible the man might have lived an hour; but the wound was mortal.

**R. H. Sparks.**—I am district constable at Westbury; in consequence of repeated robberies occurring at Mr. Terry's, I sent five

constables to the Arms of the Creek. I subsequently withdrew four, and left one, James Martin, in charge, with orders not to go outside the house. I know Mr. Terry has been robbed four times, and I also know of another robbery having been committed by the party of which deceased was one. No particular directions are given to the constables as to firing, they act by the instructions which are contained in the book given to them when they are sworn in.

**Jas. Martin.**—I am a constable in the Westbury police; on the 22nd inst., I received orders to proceed to the Arms of the Creek, as Mr. Terry had sustained serious injury from bush-rangers. I was instructed to use every exertion to capture them. On Sunday the 25th three men attacked the house about daylight, they had bayonets, bludgeons, they demanded tobacco. I strapped on my belt and bayonet, went out and ordered them to stand. The man Ryan came round and made a blow at me with his bludgeon, he said "come on my lads, I'm off." I called to him to stand three times, but he still continued running. When he was 50 yards off, and I found that he would not stop, I fired and he fell. I aimed at his thigh, but the piece carried its charge a little higher than I intended.

The Jury retired, and after being absent nearly 2 hours, could not agree, five being of opinion "Man-slaughter," two "Justifiable Homicide." The Coroner therefore took the Majority. A verdict of manslaughter against James Martin was returned, and he was fully committed for Trial.

The Cornwall Chronicle  
Launceston, Tas.

Wednesday 6 March 1844

Perhaps it was as a result of the case shown here, where one of his constables had shot and killed a thief, that it was decided that he did not have the right skills to command men in that role. Then again Robert might have decided to move south for any number of other reasons, but we see that five months later he has been appointed poundkeeper as well as inspector of weights and measures, at Brighton, which was a town just outside the capital of the colony at Hobart Town, in the south of Van Diemen's Land.

The Cornwall Chronicle Launceston, Tas.  
Wednesday 28 August 1844

The Lieutenant-Governor has appointed Mr. Robert H. Sparks to be Poundkeeper, Inspector of Stock, and Inspector of Weights and Measures, at Brighton.

The Courier (Hobart, Tas.),  
Saturday 7 September 1844.

GOVERNMENT NOTICE. No. 141.

Colonial Secretary's Office, 21st August, 1844.

The Lieutenant-Governor has appointed Mr. Robert H. Sparks to be Poundkeeper, Inspector of Stock, and Inspector of Weights and Measures, at Brighton. By His Excellency's command,  
J. E. BICHENO.

Since their arrival in the colony, Robert and Mary had had two more children: Harry in about 1840 and Ernestine, (named after Mary's sister), born in 1841.

Eighteen months after Robert's new appointments at Brighton, we see that the family is back in London, where Robert's wife, Mary died in March 1846.

In 1851, Robert Harry Sparks junior, was working at Saint Bartholomew's Hospital (Saint Bart's, as it has always been called), where he held the position of Steward. He was responsible for acquiring the food stores, hardware,



stationery, bedding and coal for the hospital. I doubt though, that his duties extended to the acquisition of dead bodies for the education of the surgeons.

Just across the road from the hospital, there used to be a pub, in the back of which was a room set aside for the reception of (hopefully fresh), bodies that grave robbers had lifted from churchyards under the cover of darkness.

The proximity of the pub to Saint Bart's meant that the surgeons could easily flit across the road, without attracting attention, to inspect each new corpse before it was slipped into the hospital when nobody was watching. This inspection prior to

payment was necessary, to ensure that the sallow-faced merchants of death, who were not renowned for their business ethics, would not try to pass off a product that had passed its sell-by date. It could be difficult to keep the students of human anatomy focussed on the job when maggots were crawling all over the place.

The public were so incensed by the outrage of having their loved-ones stolen from their last resting place, that

they would, if they could afford it, employ a guard to spend the night in the graveyard, next to the freshly departed, until such time as it was presumed that the corpse would no longer hold any attraction. Of course these guards could not always be trusted. They were just as likely to turn a blind eye to the dastardly crime, for a small remuneration of course. An added inducement for their co-operation, was the thought that if they did not assist the morally vacuous robbers, the shovels that had been brought along to dig the earth, could just as easily be used to bash the guard over the head, thereby ensuring that the robbers had a saleable product with a minimum of effort.

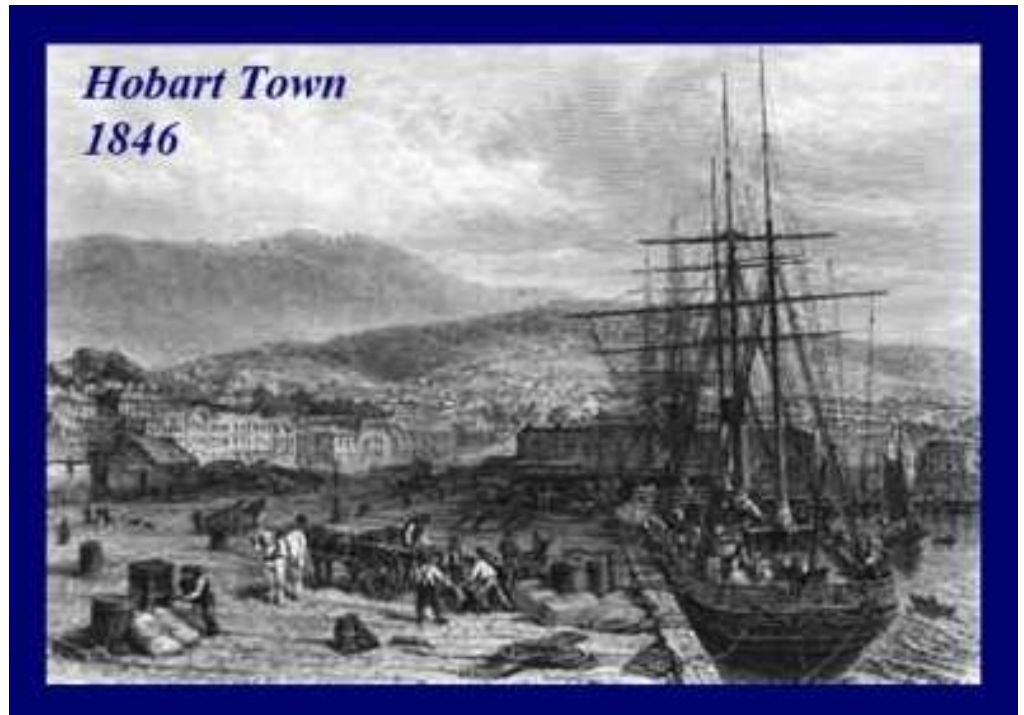
Robert is shown on the 1851 census as living alone at Saint Bart's, with a housekeeper.

It is presumed that his two boys would have been away at school and Ernestine, his nine year-old daughter was staying with William Foster White, who by then had taken over control of Sparks and Co. and was living, with his wife and servants, above the shop in St. John Street, which was just a ten minute walk, through Smithfield Market, to Saint Bart's.

William White was also involved with Saint Bart's, becoming their treasurer in 1861. He was also elected Master of the Worshipful Company of Distillers in 1864, and Master of the Guild of Merchant Tailors in the following year.

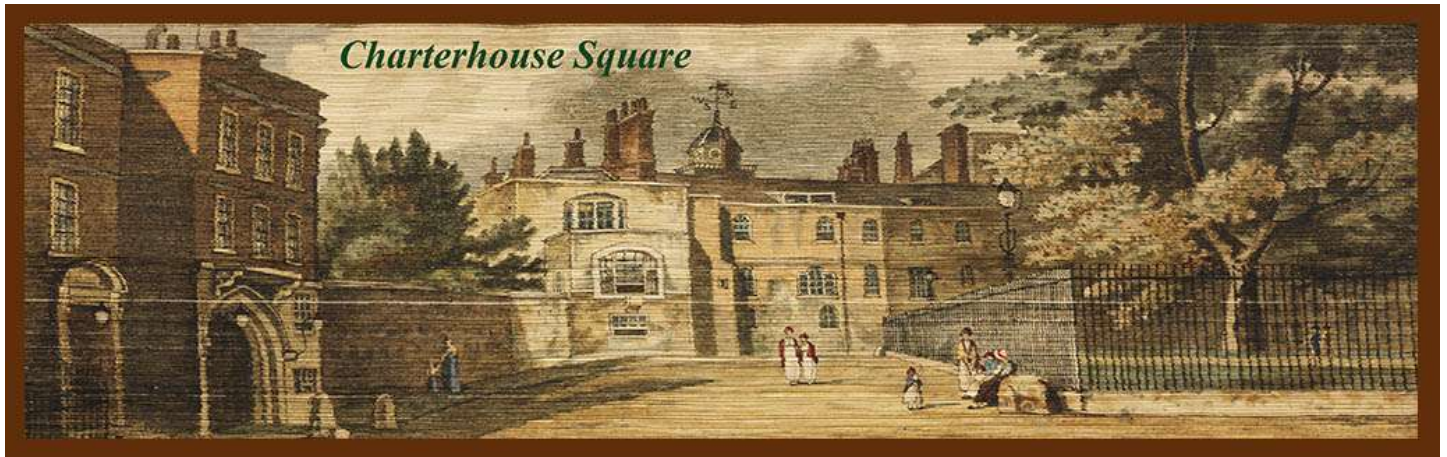
It could be then, that either R.H. Sparks helped his old friend William to get involved with Bart's, or the other way around.

It was in April 1851, at the age of 41, that Robert married Emma Helen Litchfield. They had five children together, between 1853 and 1860 and it was in the year of the first birth, that Robert took up a position as manciple (one who is responsible for the purchase and distribution of food supplies for a school, hospital, etc.), at Charterhouse, in Smithfield, which is just around the corner from Aldersgate Street, where



his grandfather, Thomas Sparks had built his distilling and merchant business, over seventy years earlier. It was also just a short walk from Sparks and Co. in St. John Street.

One reason for Robert shifting from Saint Bart's to Charterhouse, might have been that Charterhouse offered better accommodation in which he could build a new family.



The Charterhouse started as a Carthusian priory in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and by the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, was accommodating a boys school, as well as an alms house and hospital for elderly gentlemen who had fallen on hard times.

Robert was given a house in Charterhouse Square and a salary of £250 per annum. We see in the 1861 census, that he is living there with the children of his second marriage, and his son Harry, from his first marriage, who was working as a railway clerk.

Robert's first son, Robert Frederick, had by this time, moved north to Liverpool, where he set up a business trading cotton from Mobile, Alabama.

R.F. Sparks married Sarah Suther Mackay, in Liverpool in 1861. They had five children there, between 1861 and 1870, during which time Robert Frederick travelled frequently back and forth between Mobile and Liverpool. The family then moved over to Mobile, where they had two more children, in 1872 and 1874.

Both Robert F. And Sarah Sparks died in Alabama, in 1881, possibly from a wave of Yellow Fever that had swept through the area at that time. Their children then returned to Liverpool, where they were brought up by Sarah's family.

Robert Harry Sparks junior spent the rest of his life within the modest but comfortable surroundings of Charterhouse and died there in March, 1869.

It seems that he had not left a will, perhaps because he did not have enough assets to warrant one. It is likely though, that his first wife, Mary had a small inheritance of her own.

Although we do not know exactly what was going on, there are documents that show that Robert and Mary's daughter, Ernestine, was granted the administration of her father's estate, by the probate office, in August 1878: nine years after his death. In the following month, Ernestine was also granted the administration of her mother's estate.

That all seems quite straightforward and logical, but then both of these were revoked on 14<sup>th</sup> January, 1879 and, a few days later, Emma Helen Sparks, Robert's second wife, was granted the administration of her late husband's estate.

It is easy enough to see logic in this decision of the probate office, but what then raises the eyebrow, is that in the following month, Emma was also granted administration of Mary Klingender's estate.

There could be a couple of reasons for this court decision. It was either decided that Ernestine was not, for some reason, a fit person to be given such responsibility or, less plausibly, that a will by R.H. Sparks had suddenly been found, naming Emma as executrix. Unfortunately we do not know all of the details of Ernestine's life, except that she married three times.

The first husband was Robert Francis Finnis, who had been a lieutenant in the Indian Army and then died in Argentina in 1868. The second marriage, in 1871, was to William Henry Toomer, a widowed hay and coal merchant, who already had five children of his own. He died in 1905, after which Ernestine, at 69 years of age, married another widower, William Davis.

Ernestine lived to 84 years of age, dying in Camberwell, South London, in 1925.