

# The story of Daniel Dancer

Daniel was born in Harrow Weald in 1716 and was the oldest of four children.

Daniel was known as a miser; a person who hoards wealth and spends as little money as possible. He was not always an eccentric miser; in fact, he started off as respectable farmer. It wasn't until he inherited property that he started to display some rather odd behaviour. He soon decided to leave his land fallow (which means that he left it empty and didn't plant anything) in order to save costs, and his poor old horse was only allowed shoes for his back hooves.



Daniel's interesting lifestyle, (which included the decision to wash in puddles and never spend money on soap), didn't stop him having friends and family around him. You can't help but feel sorry for his sister who shared his tumble-down home. Every Sunday she cooked one piece of beef and fourteen dumplings, and that food lasted the siblings for the whole week! Although once Daniel found a dead sheep, and despite not knowing what had killed it, had his sister make the whole carcass into mutton pies.

Sleeping arrangements at the Dancer household didn't involve unnecessary luxuries such as beds! The siblings slept on piles of straw. The challenge of keeping warm in a house where fires were not lit was met by wrapping the straw around their legs. In fact one day the lack of fires was highlighted when a neighbour, Lady Tempest, gave the household a gift of a trout. How do you heat a fish to eat it without a fire? Daniel sat on the dish until he believed it warm enough to eat!

Daniel Dancer, earlier in his life had been a respected overseer of the poor. Despite his extremely odd behaviour villagers still looked to him whenever there were any attacks on their rights over Harrow Weald Common.

Eventually Miss Dancer fell ill, and her brother with typical cheapskate style refused to pay for the doctor, and unfortunately his sister died without making a will. It is thought she wished her share of the property to go to their neighbour Lady Tempest in return for her kindness. Her two other brothers claimed her estate, but Daniel fought them in court, claiming £30 per year for the thirty years he had 'looked after her' but he also wanted £100 for the last two years of her life because: 'during that time she has done nothing but eat and lie in bed'

Incredibly Daniel was awarded over one thousand pounds (a huge sum of money) for looking after his sister during her lifetime! Both this, and rumours of other money made Daniel Dancer's home a target for local thieves. The miser made the decision to board up the bottom half of his house, meaning he had to enter and leave his house by ladder (which he pulled up after him).

Daniel died in 1796, aged 78, and this is when the hidden treasures in his house were found:

- £600 in a cracked teapot (with a note saying 'not to be hastily overlooked')
- £200 found up the chimney
- £2500 found in a dung heap (we hope this was coins rather than notes!)

In those days that all added up to a humungous sum of money, but the discoveries didn't end there. In locked chests the following valuable items were found: plates, table clothes, 24 sheets and lots and lots of clothes!

All of Daniel Dancer's property was left to his neighbour Lady Tempest, but unfortunately, she died three months after the miser's demise. Rumour had it that she contracted her fatal illness from visiting Daniel on his deathbed!



Could the inspiration for Charles Dicken's famous miser Scrooge actually be Harrow's Daniel Dancer?

After Daniel's death, accounts of his strange lifestyle became famous and were published in magazines and newspapers! The author Charles Dickens heard about Daniel and included a bit about him in his book *Our Mutual Friend*, and then went on to create a story around the Dancer's reputation in the well-known book *A Christmas Carol*.