

This is a Story from 'A Few Forgotten Women'



This story was written, in January 2023, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of girls from Leeds, Girls' Industrial School, Yorkshire.

Hannah Smailes

Hannah was born in Leeds, the daughter of Elizabeth SMAILES and Thomas HOLMES. Although Elizabeth and Thomas do not ever seem to have married, it appears to have been a stable relationship. In 1851 Elizabeth was probably the Elizabeth HOLMES living with Thomas HOLMES and Joseph S HOLMES at 122 High Street, Leeds (HO107-2320/583/4). Thomas was 34 born at Fewston and was a boot & shoe maker. Elizabeth was 26, born Kippax, which fits with later census entries and her age at marriage. Their son Joseph, Hannah's elder brother, was born in Leeds and is probably the Joseph SMAILES born 25 Jun and baptised 13 Aug 1849 at St Peter's, Leeds son of Thomas & Elizabeth "SMAILES" of Back High Street. This was re-entered the next year as Joseph SMAILES born 25 June 1849 and baptised 20 May 1850 son of Elizabeth, spinster of High Street. This must have been quite humiliating for Elizabeth and may well explain why no baptism has been found for Hannah under either SMAILES or HOLMES.

However, this stable family background was to end abruptly in tragedy: the school admission register notes that Thomas “was killed at Leeds Water Works” but a newspaper report gives more information. His death was the subject of a coroner’s enquiry covered in the Leeds Times 16 June 1860: “The coroner on the same day [Wednesday] concluded an inquiry, opened on Monday, touching the death of Thomas HOLMES, a shoemaker, forty-four years of age, of Moscow-street, Leylands. Deceased, on Sunday morning, accompanied by John HODGSON, a bailiff of the County Court, left his home for the purpose of taking a walk. He was then in his usual health, but on approaching the new Workhouse, Burmantofts, he complained of dizziness, and would have fallen had not HODGSON supported him. He recovered but had only walked a little when he fell, and died in about three minutes, without either stirring or speaking. Mr H W PRICE, surgeon, who had made a post mortem examination, said the deceased had died from fatty degeneration of the heart.”

The death of a Thomas HOLMES was registered in Q2 1860, Hunslet, 44 years vol 9b p 161: this matches the age given by Thomas in the 1851 census. And also matches the burial at Beckett Street Cemetery of Thomas HOLMES shoemaker of 10 Moscow Street on 14 June 1860 aged 43 years.

Elizabeth was left with 2 children and in 1861 was a lodger in the house of Hugh KIRBY at 15 Mushroom Court, Leeds, along with Joseph and Hannah (RG9-3386/40/31). Elizabeth was aged 37, born Kippax, Joseph 11 born Leeds and Hannah 5 born Leeds. However, this arrangement does not seem to have lasted and at the time of Hannah’s admission to the school in 1863 Elizabeth was “homeless now in Asnley Gaol many times”.

Although Hannah had a number of other relations including her brother Joseph, who lived at the bottom of Quarry Hill in lodgings, an uncle James SMAILES who lived at Sea Croft a step-father Joseph RAWLEY, labourer, of Chapel Street, and a God father George RUMFITT? shoe maker, of 2 Moscow Street, Leyland, Hope Street. No one appears to have offered Hannah a home.

Hannah was “sentenced” to five years on 14 October 1863 her “offence” being destitution and homeless. However, this may have been quite a welcome move for Hannah since the admission register notes that “she was often left without a home and much neglected”. Moreover, she had been a day scholar at the school for 3 years although one wonders about the tuition since in 1863 she could not read, write or cypher (basic maths skills). Her entry to the school as a day scholar around 1860 coincides with the death of her father.

Unusually there is a description of her physical appearance at this time: she had light brown hair and eyes, was tall and slender and had a light complexion. At the time of sentencing the admission register suggests Hannah was 11 so born around 1852 but on the 1861 census she was only 5 and she may well have been the Hannah SMALES whose birth was registered in the June Quarter of 1855 in Leeds, mother’s maiden name blank suggesting an illegitimate birth. This may help to explain why, despite good conduct from 1863-7, she was unable to settle in the work placements found for her. In 1867 she was sent to Mrs Parks at St George’s Terrace, Wade Lane but was “too little for the place”. In 1868 she was sent in service to Mrs Spice, Service Cottage, Minfield but “did not give satisfaction. She ... her time ... and wished to be back to her mother became disagreeable in her conduct and had to be sent back to school.” Since

she was 3 years younger than the age given on admission she may well have been too young to be sent into service.

On 14 Oct 1868 her time at the Industrial School expired and she went out into the world, probably aged around 13. On discharge her character was "Good", and she could by then read and write and had basic arithmetic skills and moderate general knowledge.

In 1871 Hannah SMALES was a servant in the household of Jabez WHITFIELD and his family living in Thornhill Street, Leeds (RG10-4505/34/24). She was aged 16 and born in Leeds. On 17 Jun 1876 she married James BLAKEY at Leeds Parish Church. She was 22, a spinster and living in Garden Street. No occupation or father's name were given. She was able to sign her name confidently. The marriage was witnessed by Joseph SMALES who may have been her uncle or brother and Amelia BLAKEY. James BLAKEY was 22, a shoeing smith living in Wharf Street, son of Robert BLAKEY a butler.

The marriages produced

Alfred BLAKEY, birth registered Q2 1877 Leeds, vol 9b 457, MMN SMALES
Baptised 8 Jul 1877 Christ Church, Leeds. Parents James, blacksmith & Hannah living at 25 Bl...net Street.

James Henry BLAKEY, birth registered Q3 1878 Bramley, vol 9b 448, MMN
SMALES, death registered Q3 1879 Bramley, 0 years vol 9b p 199

Ada Elizabeth BLAKEY, birth registered Q2 1880 Bramley, vol 9b 425, MMN
SMAILES

Robert Arthur BLAKEY, birth registered Q2 1882 Bramley, vol 9b 404, MMN
SMALES

Lilian Gertrude BLAKEY, birth registered Q2 1886 Bramley, vol 9b 389, MMN
SMALLS. Born 12 May baptised 1 Aug 1886 at New Wortley, Yorks. Parents
James, farrier & Hannah, living at 46 First Avenue. Death registration Q3 1886
Bramley, 0 years vol 9b p 244.

Alfred and Ada Elizabeth grew to adulthood and had children. Robert Arthur
married but had no children, James Henry and Lilian Gertrude died as infants.

Hannah BLAKEY died on 15 Jun 1887 and was buried at New Wortley Cemetery,
Leeds (Find A Grave). Death registration Q2 1887 Bramley, 33 years vol 9b p
257. She appears on 8 Ancestry Public Member Trees as the wife of James
BLAKEY, two give her mother's name as Elizabeth SMALES but none appear
aware of her time at the Ragged School or the identity of her father.

Finally, Hannah's mother, Elizabeth SMALES married William ROWLEY, widower,
45, labourer on 27 Jul 1867 at St Peter's, Leeds. She was aged 45 and a
spinster, both were living in Moscow Street. Her father was Charles SMALES a
glass blower. The marriage was witnessed by Samuel HYDE and Edwin MOORE.
Neither party could sign their name. This confirms that Elizabeth was not
married to Hannah's father Thomas HOLMES. It is not clear whether William
ROWLEY is the same person as James RAWLEY named as Hannah's step-father

when she was committed to the Ragged School. Elizabeth was buried in Beckett Street Cemetery, Leeds aged 68 on 1 Nov 1896. Her place of residence was Leeds Workhouse and she was a widow.

The stories of Hannah and her mother Elizabeth show how precarious the lives of women could be without a man to support them and how quickly things could fall apart. For Hannah, entry to the Industrial School may well have been welcome as it offered stability and familiarity in comparison with the chaos of her mother's life at that time. She emerged able to earn her own living and make a good marriage to a respectable craftsman. It is to be hoped that Elizabeth too achieved security with her late marriage to William in the familiar surroundings of Moscow Street.

Sian Plant January 2023

Sources used:

West Yorkshire Reformatory School Records 1856-1922, originals at West Yorkshire Archives Service WRT/1/72–77, 81–84 accessible on

www.ancestry.co.uk

1851 Census

1861 Census

1871 Census

1881 Census

General Register Office Online Indexes

Ancestry Public Member Trees

West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1813-1935
(Ancestry)

West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1910
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UK and Ireland, Find A Grave Index, 1300s-Current

Leeds, England, Beckett Street Cemetery, 1845-1987 (Ancestry)

Leeds Times 16 Jun 1860 (FMP)