

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.

Matilda Jane Stewart

Matilda's admission form for the Industrial School does not tell us very much about her. She is 12 years old and was born in Leeds; Her father is dead, and her mother Ann's occupation is given as begging. The family address is given as Brick Street and Marsh Lane. Matilda's offence is listed, and incorrectly spelled, as "Unmanagable". Her committal date is 12 November 1866 and she was given three years by Edward Tra[illegible] and J D Leacock Esqrs. Sadly, there is no description of her. She was unable to read, write or cypher (Maths). Nothing is written in the "Conduct during detention" and "Conduct after detention" columns.¹

Two newspaper articles (transcribed below) give background information on Matilda and what led to her sentence. She and her older sister Ann aged 15

¹ 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

were both deemed unmanageable by their mother. Ann, apparently regularly came home drunk, associated with prostitutes, stole items from her mother which she then sold and spent the money on her “dissipated lifestyle”; and got in rows with her mother. Her mother, listed as a widow of Brick Street, feared that Ann was a corrupting influence on Matilda who was also associating with prostitutes and a few weeks previously had been in a “helpless state of intoxication”. Their mother is not named in the articles². At this point in my research it seemed that their mother was to be pitied as a widow with out of control children but as will be seen later in the story, all was not as it seemed.

There is a Matilda J Steward aged 6 with a sister Ann aged 9 in the 1861 Census living with their widowed mother Mary, (not Ann) at 6 Brick Street³. Mary’s occupation is given as Lodging House keeper. Despite the fact that the surname has been spelled Steward and the mother’s first name differed from the Admissions Register, I thought that this was probably the correct girl, as she lived at Brick Street which was mentioned in both the Register and the Newspaper articles. Interestingly, the three all have different birthplaces; Mary in Cambridgeshire, Ann in Leeds and Matilda in Scotland. I have not found a birth registration for either Ann or Matilda in England and Civil Registration does not begin until 1855 in Scotland so we will probably never know exactly where Matilda was born but it is something that Matilda would claim on each census except 1921 (when her birthplace was given as Leeds, however, the census schedule seems to have been filled in by her son who was living with her and

² Leeds Times, 17 November 1866, Page 3. Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer, 17 November 1866, Page 10. British Newspaper Archive, both accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

³ RG9 3380 Folio 71 Page 4 1861 England Census www.ancestry.com

who may have assumed his mother's birthplace as being Leeds⁴). There is a transcription on Ancestry of a baptism in Bassingbourn, Cambridge on the 9th March 1823 of Mary Ann Blows, daughter of Isaac and Elizabeth Blows⁵ and this would appear to be Matilda's mother as will be shown by other documents.

Ann and Matilda Jane Stewart were baptised on the same day, 15th September 1856 at St Peter's Church, Leeds, which helps by giving their birth dates of 13th February 1852 for Ann and 1st August 1854 for Matilda which both tie in with the newspaper article and Matilda's age in the Admissions Register as well as the 1921 Census. Their parents' names are William and Mary Stewart of Brick Street and William's occupation is given as a flax dresser.⁶ The date of birth and the Brick Street address indicate that this was the correct Matilda.

Searching for a death for her father William before 1861, I found a burial in Beckett Street Cemetery on 17th November 1857 for William Stewart aged 36 of Goulden Yard Brick Street⁷. This would seem to be the correct man.

I looked for a marriage between a William Stewart and a Mary and found a wedding in Hunslet between a William Stuart and Mary Blows⁸, daughter of Isaac Blows. However, this did not take place until the 20th March 1857. Their

⁴ 1921 England Census: The National Archives, Kew, London, England: RG15; Piece number 22217; Schedule number 56. www.findmypast.co.uk

⁵ (Transcription of) England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538 – 1975 www.ancestry.com also at <http://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/JWKN-V24>

⁶ West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms 1813 – 1910. Leeds St Peter 1856, page 130 www.ancestry.co.uk

⁷ Leeds, England, Beckett Street cemetery, 1845 – 1987. Burials – Anglicans. Ref LC/CEM(B)/1/1. Numbers 1 – 18747, 1845 – 1862 www.ancestry.co.uk

⁸ West Yorkshire Archive Service; Leeds, Yorkshire, England; Yorkshire Parish Records; Reference number RDP44/3/1 West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns 1813 – 1935 www.ancestry.co.uk

abode is given as Grope Lane whereas our William and Mary were living at Brick Street six months previously. What makes me think that this might be the right couple is that William is a flax dresser, also, could they have given a fake address to disguise the fact that they already had two children? Interestingly, and this was when she seemed to be less worthy of sympathy, this Mary had remarried in 1862⁹, four years before Ann and Matilda were accused by their “widowed mother” of being unmanageable and by 1866 she had a 2 year old son. It is definitely the same Mary who married William Stuart in 1857 as she is a widow and the daughter of Isaac Blows. Her second husband is a carpet weaver (this could be important later in the story) named Charles Parker Charlton, seemingly known as Parker, who was also widowed. Why did Mary seem to lie about her marital state in front of those sentencing her daughters? The 1871 Census¹⁰ shows Mary and Parker living on Brick Street with their 7 year old son George. Other households on the same page are in Goulden’s Yard which was named in the Burial Register for William Stewart.

Also in the 1871 Census we find a Matilda I (again, a bad transcription of a J) Steward aged 17 working as a servant in the household of Riley Taylor (a linen draper), his wife Jane and their daughter Annie aged 6, at 8 Old Market, Halifax. Her birthplace is given as Scotland¹¹.

⁹ West Yorkshire Archive Service; Leeds, Yorkshire, England; Yorkshire Parish Records: Reference number RDP68/5/63 West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1813 - 1935 www.ancestry.co.uk

¹⁰ 1871 England Census. The National Archives; Kew, London, England: RG10: Piece number: 4553: Folio 84: Page 19 www.ancestry.co.uk

¹¹ 1871 England Census. The National Archives, Kew, London, England: RG10: Piece Number 4391: Page 1: www.ancestry.co.uk

Matilda Jane Steward, surname spelled the same way as in the 1861 Census, married John Biner Geldard, a widowed boiler maker, on 18th October 1879 at St Peter's Church in Hunslet¹². She was 25 and he 26. She gives her father's name and occupation as William Steward, carpet weaver (in fact, the occupation of her step-father Charles Parker Charlton). She made her mark on the Register entry.

The 1881 Census has Matilda and John living with John's widowed father Moses at 12 Leathley Street, Hunslet. Two of John's siblings, James and Mary are also living there as well as two children enumerated as grandchildren; Annie aged 5 and John aged 1 month¹³. The latter is Matilda and John's son¹⁴ but the former proved more difficult to find. There is an illegitimate birth of Annie Stewart in the September Quarter of 1875 and registered in Hunslet¹⁵. In the 1891 Census, we find that John and Matilda have a daughter named Annie who is 15 and works as a thread spinner¹⁶. The family are living in four rooms at 8 Chambers Street in Hunslet and also includes three sons, John aged 10, Moses 7 and Albert 1. Further research is needed to discover who Annie's father might be and to confirm whether the Annie Stewart registered in Hunslet in 1875 is indeed Matilda's daughter. An Annie Steward Geldard marries Edward Malarky in 1903

¹² Originals at West Yorkshire Archive Service; West Yorkshire, England, Church of England, Marriages and Banns, 1813 – 1935: Hunslet Moor, St Peter.

¹³ 1881 England Census: The National Archives, Kew, London, England: RG11; Piece 4486; Folio 45; Page 14 www.ancestry.co.uk

¹⁴ England and Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837 – 1915; www.ancestry.co.uk

¹⁵ England and Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837 – 1915; www.ancestry.co.uk

¹⁶ 1891 England Census; The National Archives, Kew, London, England; www.ancestry.co.uk

and gives her father's name and occupation as John Geldard, Boiler Maker¹⁷, so this would appear to fit with her at least being Matilda's daughter.

The 1901 Census shows Matilda and John living at 51 South Accommodation Road and sharing four rooms with their children; Annie 25, a glass marble sorter; John 20, a Boiler Maker's Apprentice; Moses 17, an Iron Moulder's Apprentice; and Albert aged 11 who although not listed as such, should have been a scholar¹⁸.

The 1911 Census has a widowed Matilda aged 56, living in four rooms at 2 Chambers Street with her son John aged 30, daughter in law Beatrice 32 and their 1 year old son – yet another John, along with her other sons Moses now 27 and Albert 21¹⁹. Although it has been crossed out, Matilda had filled in the fertility question and we discover that she had given birth to eight living children but four had died. A search of the GRO Index found seven children with the surname Geldard, or variations of it, and a mother's maiden name of Stewart/Steward plus the Annie Stewart mentioned earlier. Emily was born on 12th February 1880²⁰ and died in July²¹ that year shortly after being privately baptised²²; Walter was born in 1882²³ and died aged 1²⁴ also shortly after being

¹⁷ Originals held at West Yorkshire Archive Service; West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns 1813 – 1935; Parish Records; Reference Number RDP44/15/6: www.ancestry.co.uk

¹⁸ 1901 England Census. RG13; Piece 4189; Folio 75; Page 40: www.ancestry.co.uk

¹⁹ 1911 Census: The National Archives, Kew, Surrey, England: RG14: www.ancestry.co.uk

²⁰ Gelder, Emily; Mother's Maiden Name Stewart; 1880 M Quarter in Hunslet; Volume 09B, Page 307 www.gro.gov.uk

²¹ England and Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837 – 1915; www.ancestry.co.uk

²² Originals at West Yorkshire Archive Service: West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1813 – 1910; Parish Records; Reference Number RDP44/14/2 www.ancestry.co.uk

²³ England and Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837 – 1915; www.ancestry.co.uk

²⁴ Geldard, Walter; Aged 1; 1883 D Quarter in Hunslet; Volume 09B; Page 163 www.gro.gov.uk

baptised²⁵; Mabel born in 1891²⁶ lived only a few months²⁷ as did Matilda's last child Clarence²⁸ ²⁹. The only children who appear to have been baptised are Emily and Walter. A quick flip through the surrounding pages of the 1911 Census show that other women of a similar age had also lost significant numbers of children.

Matilda appears on the 1921 Census still at 2 Chambers Street with her son John, daughter in law Fanny Beatrice and 11 year old grandson John who goes to school full time³⁰.

A search has been made in the British Newspaper Archive for both Matilda Stewart and Matilda Geldard but the only articles relate to a Matilda Stewart who was remanded in custody for stealing items a number of times in Hull from June 1869 (when our Matilda should still have been at the Industrial School) up to the late 1870s. It is not impossible that it is her, but this Matilda is referred to as a "young woman" and in June 1869 Matilda would have been just shy of her 15th birthday and so it seems unlikely. Nothing has been found under the name Matilda Geldard.

²⁵ Originals at West Yorkshire Archive Service: West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1813 – 1910; Parish Records; Reference Number RDP44/14/2 www.ancestry.co.uk

²⁶ Geldard, Mabel; Mother's Maiden Name Stewart; 1891 J Quarter in Hunslet; Volume 09B; Page 332 www.gro.gov.uk

²⁷ Geldard, Mabel; Aged 0; 1892 M Quarter in Hunslet; Volume 09B; Page 201: www.gro.gov.uk

²⁸ Geldard, Clarence Binner; Mother's Maiden Name Stewart; 1893 M Quarter in Hunslet; Volume 09B; Page 264 www.gro.gov.uk

²⁹ Geldard, Clarence Binner; Aged 0; 1893 J Quarter in Hunslet; Volume 09B; Page 184 www.gro.gov.uk

³⁰ 1921 England Census: The National Archives, Kew, London, England: RG15; Piece number 22217; Schedule number 56. www.findmypast.co.uk

Matilda Jane Geldard nee Stewart died in April 1935³¹. It is not clear whether she was buried or cremated on the 24th April but her final resting place is at Hunslet Cemetery.³²

Leeds Times 17 November 1866 Page 3

The next cases were of a painfully immoral character. Ann Stewart fifteen years old, and Matilda Stewart, twelve years of age – the daughters of a widow residing in Brick Street – were now charged by that parent with not only being dishonest but immoral. The eldest girl, it appeared, had been in the habit of indulging to excess in liquor, and then gone home in an intoxicated state, and kicked up a violent row. Upon being remonstrated with, she would take off to houses of ill-fame, where she would remain for two or three days, indulging in orgies of a disgraceful character. She had also stolen articles belonging to her mother, and squandered the proceeds of their sale in dissipation. Mrs Stewart also urged, with some feeling, that Ann was engaged in training up her sister in the same evil courses of life to which she had abandoned herself. Ann was now ordered to undergo one month's imprisonment, and will afterwards be confined in a reformatory for five years; whilst her sister Matilda was ordered to be sent to the Certified Industrial School for a term of three years' servitude.

Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer 17 November 1866 page 10

Ann Stewart was charged with breaking several squares of glass in her mother's house, in Brick Street, Marsh Lane. The mother said that her daughter was a

³¹ England and Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837 – 1915; www.ancestry.co.uk

³² <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/226891825/matilda-j-geldard>

most unmanageable girl. She had always done everything for her that a mother could do and she had invariably received from her in return the most abusive and heartless conduct. She was the associate of prostitutes, and persuasion could not induce her to lead a moral and respectable life. She was also charged by the mother with seducing her younger sister Matilda Stewart, 12 years of age, and rendering her equally incorrigible. Only a fortnight ago, the younger of the two had been taken in a helpless state of intoxication; she was also the associate of prostitutes. The former (Ann) was sentenced to one month's imprisonment, and afterwards to be sent to the Reformatory for three years , and the younger prisoner Matilda was ordered to be sent to the Industrial School for three years.

Wendy Durston January 2023