

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in March 2023, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who appear in the 1901 census for St. Joseph's Inebriate Reformatory, Ashford, Middlesex and Farmfield Reformatory for Inebriate Women, Horley, Surrey.

Louisa Mary Goldfinch's Story

Louisa was born on 2 February 1869 in Streatham, Surrey, the daughter of Gilbert and Ann Goldfinch née Day.ⁱ Her birth was registered in the March quarter of 1869 in Wandsworth registration district.ⁱⁱ She was baptised on 2 May 1869 at Christ Church, Streatham. The family was 'of New Park Road', and her father was a gardener.ⁱⁱⁱ In 1871, Louisa was living at 5 Bleak Hall Lane, Streatham, Surrey with her parents, four older sisters and a younger brother, her father was a gardener.^{iv}

In 1877, Louisa's father was convicted of embezzlement, having obtained £3 10 shillings by false pretences. He was sentenced to twelve months imprisonment.^v

By 1881, she was a scholar living with her parents, two older sisters, a younger brother and sister, her father was a gardener 42 Talma Road, Brixton.^{vi}

Louisa Mary Goldfinch married David George Yeoman on 25 December 1890 at Brixton, Surrey. Her address was given as 42 Talma Road, Brixton. Louisa signed the register. The witnesses were H J and Fanny Goldfinch, her younger brother and sister. Her twenty-nine year old husband was a mechanic and her father was a gardener. Her husband also gave his address as 42 Talma Road. Was he a lodger, or was this a house of multiple occupancy.^{vii} In the 1891 census, Louisa and David were living at 42 Talma Road with her widowed mother, her husband, a 'mechanic pianoforte fitter up', her older sister, a lodger and a visiting schoolmistress.^{viii} Louisa and David had three children born in Brixton, Stanley Theodore in 1892, Alfred Edward in 1893 and Dorothy Gertrude in 1898.

In the 24 December 1900, following a committal by Lambeth Court, thirty-one year old Louisa, a milliner, entered the Farmfield Reformatory for Inebriate Women, Charlewood, near Reigate in Surrey. This was her fourth conviction. Louisa had been found to be drunk in a public place and was to remain there for six months.^{ix} She was therefore at Farmfield in the 1901 census.^x She was discharged on 24 June, only to relapse be readmitted for a three year sentence.^{xi} On admission in 1900, Louisa was described as being five feet tall and weighing 108 pounds. She had blue eyes, brown hair and a fresh complexion. She had been to a public day school and could read and write well. She had left her parental home at the age of twenty two. She was the fifth of six children and her father had died of a hernia. Louisa's father was noted as a drinker. Louisa's condition was said to be clean but miserable. She was said to be depressed and although her physical health was good, she suffered from insomnia; she had

bruises on her right arm and shoulder. Her periods of drinking were 'continuous' and made her gloomy; she normally drank stout or ale.^{xii}

Louisa's behaviour whilst at Farmfield was described as quiet and industrious. The casebook states, 'She is anxious to do well. I visited husband on 13 January 1900 on her behalf but he said he would not risk having her home again. He would see, at the end of another year, if she still kept steady, what he could do for her. She is an exceedingly nice woman. A respectable young married woman for some unknown cause suddenly took to taking too much ale. Says it was due to her husband keeping her short of food and money.'^{xiii}

In 1901, Louisa's husband and three children were living in a shared house at 4 Stansfield Road, Brixton.^{xiv}

In May 1905, Louisa was charged with being drunk and disorderly on Acre Lane, Brixton. The newspaper account stated that Louisa had only been released from Farmfield two months previously, after a three year stay. Her husband reported that he had had a lot of trouble with her during this time. Louisa had apparently tried to obtain admission to the Torey-Alexander Mission and refused to give her address when she was arrested. Louisa was ordered to pay the doctor's fee of seven shillings and six pence. Her photograph can be seen in the Habitual Criminal's Register.^{xv}

On the 7th of November 1905 thirty-six year old Louisa Yeoman alias Jones of Bromfelde Road, Clapham, Surrey, was convicted at Westminster Court and sent to a certified inebriate reformatory for three years. She was described, in the Habitual Criminal's Register, as being five foot tall, of proportionate build, with

a dark complexion, black hair, blue eyes, a straight nose and oval face. It also mentions that she had a mole on her left cheek. She was said to frequent Clapham and Wandsworth Roads.^{xvi} This incident was reported in the press and it was commented that the spells in the inebriates home had not done any good.^{xvii}

In 1911, Louisa was living at 229 New Kent Road, a home run by The British Women's Temperance Association; there were six other patients.^{xviii} The following year, Louisa was once again listed in the Habitual Criminals' Register, as a result of a conviction on 15 January at Lambeth court. By now, forty-one and also using the alias Mary Smith, she was described as a milliner of no fixed abode. She was five foot one inch tall, of medium build with a sallow complexion, dark brown hair, grey eyes, a straight nose and a full face. A wart on the left side of her face was also mentioned. By this time, her haunts were said to be Camberwell Green and Coldharbour Lane.

In October 1916, Louisa, described as a needlewoman, of Foreign Street, Camberwell was charged with being drunk and disorderly and using obscene language in King Street. She was accusing soldiers and others in the crowd of being German spies. There was reference to a conviction in 1912 in Lambeth and this was the fourth conviction in 1916; she had already spent a month in prison. Louisa pleaded for another chance and it was noted that, after her previous spell in prison, Louisa's husband had refused to take her back. Louisa's landlady for the past eighteen months provided a character reference. This offence led to another month in prison, with hard labour, for Louisa.^{xix}

In August 1918 Louisa was charged before Mr W H Leycester with being drunk and disorderly at Coldharbour Lane. The police officer alleged that Louisa was amusing 'herself by standing in the road and stopping motor buses by standing on the footpath and throwing her arms around the necks of men and by entering a public house and drinking up other people's drink. Finally she had to be wheeled off to the station on an ambulance.' The assistant goaler referred to a number of previous convictions and stated that she had previously been sentenced on 1 July. The magistrate referred to her as 'a public nuisance'.^{xx}

Shortly after this, Louisa's eldest son died.^{xxi} In 1921, her husband, two surviving children and a housekeeper were living at 31 Speenham Road, Stockwell, Surrey but Louisa cannot be found.^{xxii} Her death was registered in Wandsworth district in 1934.^{xxiii} Her husband died 1941,^{xxiv} he cannot be located in the 1939 register.

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