

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



Amy Beatrice Prickman VAD Nurse

The York Festival of Ideas 2023 includes the opportunity to research a woman from history, either a member of The Mount School in York or a Red Cross nurse from the first world war, with research support for 2 hours. This is being arranged by The Mount School, The Few Forgotten Women team and The Rowntree Society.

Those choosing a Red Cross nurse can look for a woman based on a place or surname of interest. This is the story of Amy Beatrice Prickman, of Sticklepath near Okehampton, Devon (South West England) who worked for the Red Cross.

We hope people will research their women beyond the 2 hours of the formal meeting and that some may write up the story for the Few Forgotten Women Website. Research is never complete and stories can include suggestions for further research.

As well as individual record cards, which are available for free on the site, there is a lot of general background information. See <https://vad.redcross.org.uk/volunteering-during-the-first-world-war>. Such information, where relevant, can be useful for your story.

My place of interest is Sticklepath <https://sticklepathhistory.family/about/> so I searched by place. I had come across the surname Prickman many times before, though not previously as a resident of Sticklepath. The visiting Coroner, J.D. Prickman held inquests in the Taw River Hotel or Inn in the village. So I set about finding what I could about Amy Beatrice, who seems to have been known as Beatrice.

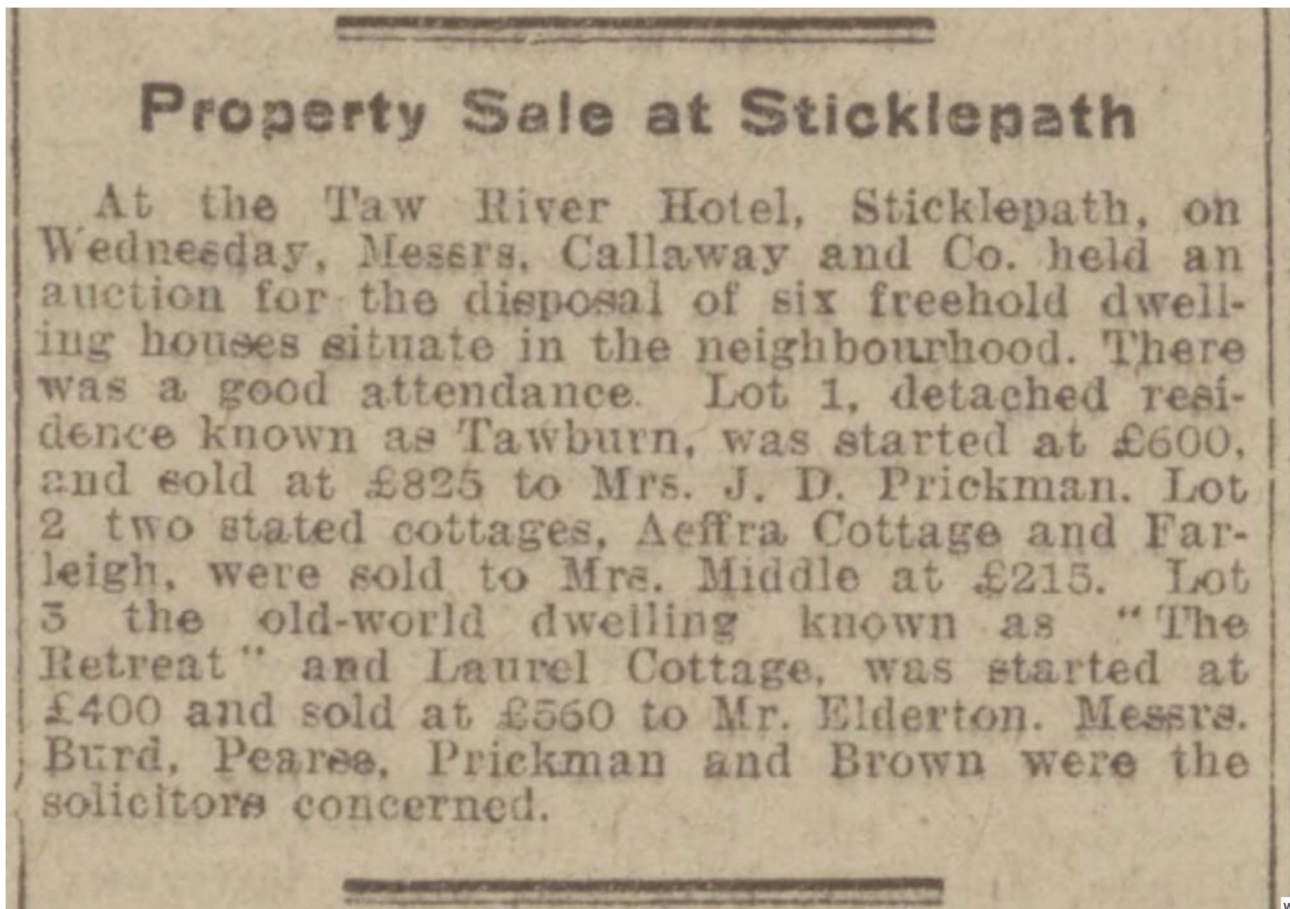
However, if you know little about the place your woman lived you might want to start with some background about the place. genuki.uk can be a good place to start as it also may give information about where to find other records, and which records may be easily available.

Research shows Amy Beatrice was indeed the wife of John Dunning Prickman, Okehampton Solicitor and Coroner of Devon. His second wife in fact, with no children (his first wife Mary Hatton died in childbirth). As a married woman the husband's income, wealth, and status made a great difference to the opportunities offered to a wife or widow. I suspect her social standing enabled her to be appointed to the position of Quartermaster. You may wish to jump to the use of her **Red Cross records** and relevant background information (this is highlighted in red below), rather than read more about Beatrice and her life outside the Red Cross.

Amy Beatrice was a woman of considerable wealth following her husband's death in 1913, demonstrated in her purchase of Tawburn House in Sticklepath, the large house adjacent to the Village Hall.

Advertised on Thursday 5th April 1917 in The Western Times (Exeter) as a Stone-Built Detached residence in the occupation of Mrs Mesney, with "3 reception rooms, 7 bedrooms, bathroom and the usual offices, ample out-buildings and large gardens". We get an update on Friday April 13th 1917:

and when she came to sell her belongings, just 3 years later, it was clearly an amazing auction! It certainly gives us an impression of her life-style.



Advertised widely, including in the **North Devon Journal – Thursday 22 April 1920** (all newspaper reports accessed via the British Newspaper Archive or through FindMyPast). For sale on 'Wednesday next', 28th April:
TAWBURN HOUSE, STICKLEPATH. CALLAWAY and CO. have been favoured with instructions from Mrs. J. D. Prickman to Sell by Auction, the Valuable FURNISHINGS, including Mahogany Music Canterbury, Arm Chair in Morocco Leather, Chesterfield, Couch Crotonne, Oak Table with Brass Drop Handles, Axminster Carpet, Bookcase, Water Colours, Engravings, Old Oil Paintings, Bronze Candlesticks and Horses, 2 Oriental Jugs, Sideboards, Buyer's Tray, Handsome Inlaid Sheraton Drawing-room Chair, Antique Stuart Writing Bureau (dated 1662), Oak Linen Press, Beaten Brass Trays, Oak

Bookcase, Oak Book Trough, 4 Oak Chairs with Rush Seats. 3-tier Inlaid Walnut Whatnot, Rosewood, Walnut, and other Occasional Tables, Walnut Armchair in Silk Tapestry, Oak Card Table, Wicker and other Arm Chairs, Copper Coal Vase, Iron and Brass Ditto, Oak Hall Chairs, Carpets, Rugs, Tables, Bedroom Suites, Curtains, Baskets, Bedroom Ware, Dinner Services, very fine Jug by Martin Bros., Antique Doulton Teapot, Venetian Bowl and Vase, Zolnay Vase, quantity Pattern Dishes, Blue and White Tea Service, Minton Jug, quantity of Cut Glass and other Glass Ware, China, etc quantity old Pewter, including Inkstands, Salvers, Plates, Measures, Mustard Pot, Salt cellars, etc.. Plated Entree Dishes, 5 Pair old Brass Candlesticks, 2 Pair Copper Ditto, Plated Spirit Stand with Cut Glass Bottles, Inkstand, centrepiece, Plated Fruit Stand, Egg and Toast Rack Silver Inkstand, 2 Plated Butter Dishes. 2 Silver Mounted Decanters, Silver Plated Strawberry and Cream Dish with Doulton Ware Dishes, fine collection of Books, songs and Music, quantity of Antique and other China, Quantity of garden Tools and Plants, and several other lots. Catalogues. 6d. each. Sale at 12 noon.

The electors' registers says she lived at Burnside not Tawburn but I suspect she perhaps called it by the different name. I am not aware of another house in Sticklepath called Burnside. Unfortunately she only lived in Sticklepath between census recordings. I think it is unlikely she was still there in 1921 though she may have lived in the village prior to her purchase of Tawburn. (I have not yet accessed the 1921 census, those with an appropriate subscription can access it on FindMyPast).

Whilst the Few Forgotten Women Project does not encourage purchasing records, there are options for FreeBMD or [GRO.GOV](https://www.gro.gov.uk) online index records to provide some information. Census. Records, the 1939 register, Parish records and indexes to civil birth, marriage and death registers as well as other death records can be accessed through FamilySearch, sometimes

information is on Wikitree, or through subscription sites. Even a general search using your favourite search engine is worthwhile.

Amy Beatrice was one of the daughters of Rev William Mutrie Shepherd (born in 1832 in Abingdon) and Caroline Anne Strange (born in 1840 in Liverpool). The [GRO.GOV](https://www.gro.gov.uk) birth index confirms her mother's maiden name. (Free access to search the index, you need to sign up for a free account). The Newton Arlosh Parish Register, Cumberland, shows she was baptised 16 Jun 1872. Records including 1939 register confirm her date of birth was 22 May 1872.

As the daughter of a vicar she moved quite a bit. His appointments can be found in clerical registers. Census records and where available school records can be used to follow a girl. Aged 8 (1881) she was living in St Cuthbert without Harraby, Cumberland, where her father was the vicar of St John's, Carlisle. She had brothers Cresswell N Shepherd aged 4 and Ernest E Shepherd aged 3 years.

In 1886 she was a student at Carlisle and County High School for girls. By 1891 she was living with her uncle John Taylor, clergyman in Holy Orders and Schoolmaster Christchurch Parish, Tunbridge Wells, Kent along with Rev Taylor's wife, 6 daughters, 2 sons and 9 male boarders/scholars. In 1901 she is a 'Governess' living at St Barnabas Bexhill, Battle, Sussex, aged 28. In 1908 26 November, she was married, to John Dunning Prickman at Croydon St John, apparently by her own father, the assistant curate. I wonder how they met? She was 17 years younger than him. In 1911 they are living at 21 Fore Street, Okehampton, with a cook and female servant from local villages. She was widowed on 13 March 1913.

So we come to the **Red Cross records**, a record set I had not used before. The work of the Red Cross during World War One included running Auxiliary Hospitals for convalescent soldiers and Military hospitals.

Auxiliary hospitals usually had a commandant, who was in charge of the hospital except for the medical and nursing services, a matron, who directed the local VADs (Voluntary Aid Detachment volunteers), who were trained in first aid and home nursing, a visiting GP, and a quartermaster, who was responsible for the receipt, custody and issue of articles in the provision store. Mrs A. Beatrice Prickman was volunteer quartermaster for the Okehampton VA Hospital from 31st December 1914 to 1st June 1915 on a full time basis. This was based in Dartmoor House Belstone, and then at the V.A.Military Hospital in Okehampton.

Images of her record cards can be seen at:

<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/record?rowKey=243332>. (Scroll down)

An announcement of the new Military hospital was made in The Western

Voluntary Aid Military Hospital Okehampton.

By the enterprise of the Red Cross Society, a military hospital has been established in Okehampton for the troops billeted there, and is entirely managed and carried on by them. The hospital is situated in a fine healthy position on the Station-road, and contains four wards accommodating 16 beds, with nurses' room, bath, and orderlies' rooms, with an isolation ward for suspected cases. Dr. E. H. Young, Commandant of the Okehampton Men's Voluntary Aid Detachment, assisted by Dr N. C. Gwynne (Commandant of the Ladies' V.A. Detachment), is in chief medical charge; Mrs. Prickman is the quartermaster; Mrs. Gwynne nursing superintendent; and Miss Brown resident sister in charge. The cooking requirements are most efficiently executed by the Misses Heale. The Hospital was started with a grant of £10 from the Red Cross Headquarters at Exeter, which has been supplemented by local subscriptions to the amount of £70 more. As far as funds have permitted, the equipment has been simply, but effectively made, but several things are still required, and to purchase these subscriptions will be thankfully received by Mrs. Prickman, West Hill House; or by Drs. Gwynne and Young, at the Hospital. Already 23 patients from the 10th North Stafford Regiment, now quartered at Okehampton have been admitted and treated. All the members of the V.A. Okehampton Detachment, whether ladies or gentlemen, are taking part in the work of the various departments of the Hospital. The Okehampton Voluntary Aid Hospital stands forth as a bright example of what well-directed public benevolence can accomplish, and is deserving of increased and continuous support.

Times Wednesday 3rd February 1915

After 5 months working full-time in the quartermaster role she resigned and we find her later as an emergency nurse in the Military Hospital in Okehampton. In addition to the opening of the new military hospital there were other national developments that might explain her changing role. In February 1915 the War Office had proposed that volunteers could help at Military Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) hospitals. These had previously been staffed exclusively by army nurses and orderlies from the RAMC.

As the war went on, duties increased and regulations relaxed as the demand for personnel grew. In February 1915 the War Office proposed that:

'In view of the fact that a largely increased supply of fully trained Nurses will be required for the necessary expansion of Military Hospitals at home and abroad, it is suggested that Members of recognised VADs might advantageously be employed, and so enable us to release a number of fully trained nurses for duty in new hospitals'.

These changes may have excited our Beatrice who perhaps wanted to be more 'hands on' in a nursing role. A new system of "special service" was introduced to supply nursing members to Military Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) hospitals. These had been staffed exclusively by army nurses and orderlies from the RAMC.

Conditions of employment for VADs stated that they must be trained in first aid and home nursing, they were required to work under fully trained nurses, and they had to be between 23 and 38 years of age. These VADs were to be paid for their service (suggested at £20 a year). The first request for VADs from military hospitals in England came early in 1915 and from France in May of the same year, quickly followed by demands from Malta and Egypt. And then many more. Beatrice would not have been eligible for that due to her age. However, local arrangements for known, tried and tested volunteers might have been made. New regulations were introduced for nursing members of naval and military hospitals, which would include the military hospital in Okehampton.

The Okehampton Military Hospital volunteers needed several weeks training and to pass exams, as well as practical experience. Mrs A. Beatrice Prickman became an Emergency Nurse at Okehampton Military hospital in April 1916 completing 920 hours as a volunteer in this capacity up to November that year. It seems likely that a significant amount of the time between her two roles was spent in nurse training, as well as fund raising for the hospital.

Changes in regulations, and local needs, likely facilitated her move into nursing. The box below shows the published criteria for Military Hospital nurses.

- Must be members of or attached to a Voluntary Aided Detachment
- Members with hospital experience and First Aid Home Nursing Certificates will be given preference in appointment
- 21 to 46 years of age
- Must be inoculated against enteric fever
- Join for one months' probation, and then sign a contract for six months
- Come directly under the Admiralty of War Office from date of appointment
- £20 per annum pay (initial)
- Required to live in nurses' quarters, and to be 'absolutely' under the control of the matron
- £5 per annum allowances (quarters, food, washing, travelling paid)
- Seven days' leave in first six months, 14 days' leave in second six months.

Perhaps she was appointed under these regulations? She was just within the age limit. If so, it would have been quite an experience for a wealthy lady! Perhaps the title 'Emergency Nurse' suggests she was appointed to fill the post in a crisis rather than she was working in an emergency department? Whatever the arrangements for her employment, she volunteered to work part time and completed 920 hours as a nurse.

In 1939 we find her living in a boarding house in Royal Tunbridge Wells, 'Private means incapacitated'. We lose track of her then until her death 14 September 1964 and probate 17 November 1964 when her address is given

as Rockmount Hotel Ephraim Road, Tunbridge Wells. The value of her estate, with so many years of incapacity, and perhaps also her generosity to charitable causes, had dwindled to £374.00.

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