

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.

Catherine O'Connor 's Story

According to the 1901 census return, at that time, Catherine was a single, 43 year-old, flower seller. The census document states that Catherine was born in Holborn in London. I am somewhat reminded of Eliza Doolittle from My Fair Lady and can imagine Catherine walking the streets and squares of London selling her flowers from a basket. Life must have been difficult for her. This is possibly why, in 1901, she is recorded on the census as living at St Joseph's, an Inebriate Reformatory. Turning to the 'demon' drink may have taken the sting of life away for her, albeit for a short while.

The age given for Catherine on the 1901 census was 43 which suggests that she must have been born in around 1858. There are three civil registration birth

records for a Catherine O'Connor on Find My Past from around this time. The first in Lambeth in 1856; the second in St James', Westminster, in 1857; and the final one in Shoreditch in 1860. If Catherine's age is correct on the 1901 census return, the 1857 record may be the most likely record.

On Find My Past two Catholic baptisms took place in London for a Catherine O'Connor. As they are Catholic baptisms the records are written in Latin. The first was the baptism of Catherina O'Connor which took place on 17 January 1858. This child was born on 22 September 1857 (figure 1).¹ The record states that Catherina's parents were Thomas O'Connor and Marie, or Mary, Gord. The baptism occurred in what was known as the Bavarian Chapel, in Warwick Street, in Soho. It was also known as the church of Our Lady of the Assumption and St Gregory.²

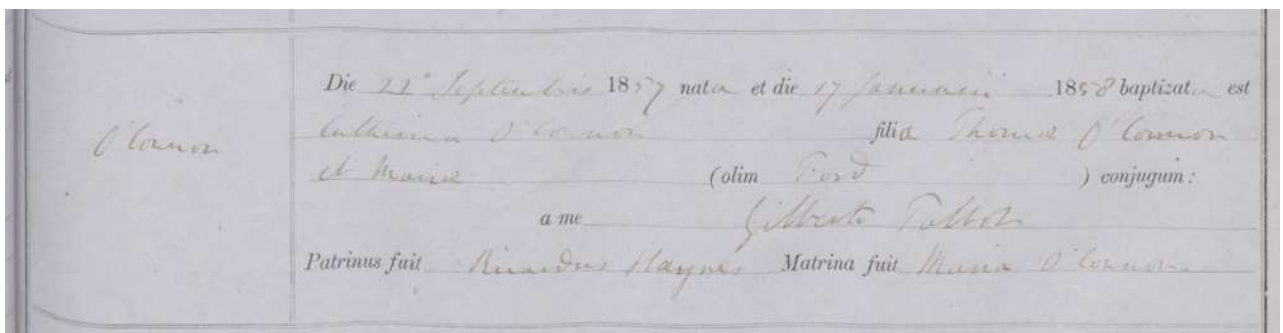


Figure 1

The second possible Roman Catholic baptism for Catherina O'Connor took place on 17 February 1861 at St Bridget's church in Baldwin's Gardens in Holborn

¹ Baptisms (PR). England. Westminster, Middlesex. 17 Jan 1858. O'CONNOR, Catherina. Bavarian Chapel, Westminster, Middlesex, Westminster Archdiocesan Archives, Baptisms 1856-1863, page 73. England Roman Catholic Parish Baptisms.

² Our Lady of the Assumption and St Gregory, Warwick Street, London, History, <http://warwickstreet.org.uk/history/> Accessed 24/03/23.

(figure 2).³ The child was born on 17 April 1860 and was the daughter of Michael O'Connor and his wife, Honora Sweeney. As the baptism took place in Holborn it does seem more likely that this is the correct Catherine O'Connor. If it is, her age may be incorrect on the 1901 census and Catherine may actually have been slightly younger at 41 years-of-age.

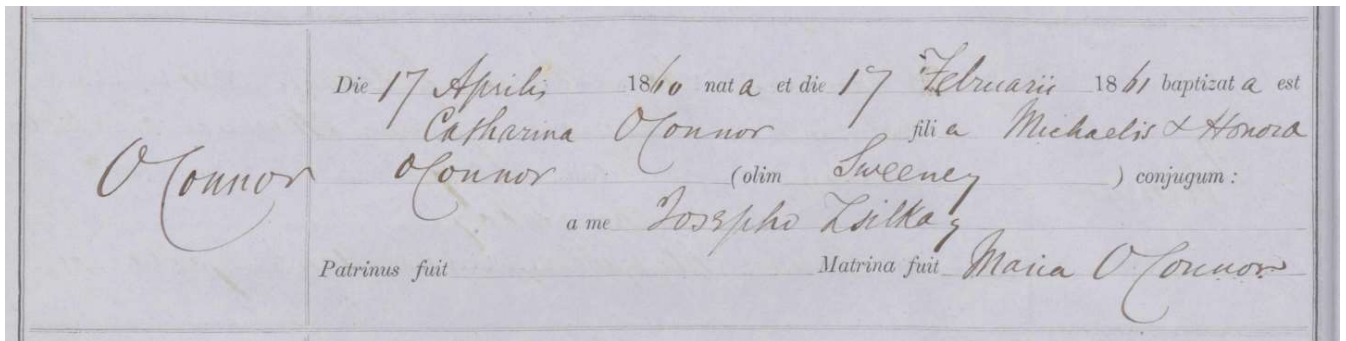




Figure 2

Catherine appears to be rather elusive in official records. There are plenty of Catherine O'Connors listed in census returns between 1861 and 1891 but none of them seem to be quite the right person. Catherine also seems to disappear after the 1901 census. It is possible that she married but there are 30 marriages listed for a Catherine O'Connor between 1901 and 1911, in England, on the FreeBMD website. Although some, particularly the marriages which took place in London, are more likely to be our Catherine O'Connor, more details from the marriage certificates would be needed to confirm this. A search in newspapers also proved fruitless.


³ Baptisms (PR). England. Westminster, Middlesex. 17 Feb 1861. O'CONNOR, Catherina. St Bridget, Holborn, Middlesex, Westminster Archdiocesan Archives, Baptisms 1855-1872, page 58. England Roman Catholic Parish Baptisms.

Sadly, it is possible that Catherine died between 1901 and 1911. FreeBMD lists at least three likely deaths. These are listed below:

Deaths Mar 1902 (>99%)					
O'Connor	Catherine	43	Pancras	1b 24	Info 

Deaths Mar 1908 (>99%)					
O'Connor	Catherine	50	Pancras	1b 65	Info 

The record below may be our Catherine as her age seems to be about right but the location may not be correct.

Deaths Dec 1911 (>99%)					
O'Connor	Catherine	52	Greenwich	1d 1057	Info 

© Wendy Blick March 2023

Sources

St. Joseph's Inebriate Reformatory, Ashford, Middlesex RG13 1171 folios 12-13

Baptisms (PR). England. Westminster, Middlesex. 17 Jan 1858. O'CONNOR, Catherina. Bavarian Chapel, Westminster, Middlesex, Westminster Archdiocesan Archives, Baptisms 1856-1863, page 73. England Roman Catholic Parish Baptisms.

Baptisms (PR). England. Westminster, Middlesex. 17 Feb 1861. O'CONNOR, Catherina. St
Bridget, Holborn, Middlesex, Westminster Archdiocesan Archives, Baptisms 1855-1872, page
58. England Roman Catholic Parish Baptisms.

Death search results from FreeBMD.