

# *This is A Few Forgotten Women Story*



*This story was written in August 2023 as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who enrolled in the first two cohorts [1908 & 1909] of Trainee Teachers at the Cheshire Country Training College, Crewe [CCTCC]*

## **Edith Ackerley's Story**

Edith originally enrolled as a part of the second cohort of students in September 1909, her details in the register were that she was born on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1892, her home address was 18 Tipping Street, Altrincham, there was no guardian entered, she attended Sale Grammar school and passed the Preliminary Certificate in 1909 to enable her to register at CCTCC as a student. There is a subsidiary jotting alongside her name to the effect that Edith had left college and was readmitted in 1910, when she graduated in 1912, she did so with a distinction in English.<sup>1</sup> I wondered why that might have been and so set about researching her story to perhaps find out.

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<sup>1</sup> CCTCC Student Registers [1908-1935]: CCTCC Archives, Unpublished data, under the care of the Family History Society of Cheshire, Crewe

Edith's father, Richard had died in 1901 in tragic circumstances. A window cleaner by trade, employed by the Altrincham Window Cleaning Company, Richard was on 4<sup>th</sup> August cleaning the windows of the Unicorn Hotel in the town, he was witnessed falling to the ground after stepping on a stone ledge that in fact was not stone but plaster and lathe. Richard was rushed to hospital, but his skull was fractured and his case quite hopeless according to Dr McLaren who attended him. The coroner passed a verdict of accidental death, and the newspaper report ends by saying that the deceased left a widow and four children.<sup>2</sup> The four children were Lizzie, who died aged 22 in 1905, Ernest, Percy and Edith, also known as Edie.<sup>3</sup> Her mother died in 1919 and her brothers were both still alive in 1939.<sup>4</sup> Why then Edith delays her studies for a year is not that clear.

During the years 1904-1909 Edith regularly writes essays and enters competitions for the 'The Children's Salon' section of Gentlewoman magazine. The Children's Salon was open to girls between the age of 15 and 20 from

*.. whatever part of the United Kingdom or abroad they reside, may join the Salon and compete for prizes every week in drawing, painting, writing, music, needlework and making things<sup>5</sup>.*

Under the patronage of Princess Christian among others the Salon was advertised as '*The Children of the Rich who work for the Children of the Poor*'. Members of the club were encouraged to make items that could be sold in order

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<sup>2</sup> Manchester Evening News, Saturday 6 July 1901, page 3

<sup>3</sup> 1911 England Census, RG12, Bucklow, Cheshire, Piece 3321; Runcorn Guardian, Wednesday 18 January 1905, page 4

<sup>4</sup> GRO Death Indexes: January Quarter, 1919, Bucklow Cheshire, Vol 8a Page 336; 1939 National Register, Percy Ackerley, Borough Runcorn, District 446/1; 1939 National Register, Ernest Ackerley. Borough Altrincham, District 445/2 both accessed via [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk);

<sup>5</sup> Gentlewoman, Saturday 25 November 1905, page 51

to raise funds for causes such as Great Ormond Street, which Edith regularly did. One reply to Edith in particular caught my eye, the author of *Levena's Letter Box*, sympathised over the illness of her sister but is slightly scathing in the criticism of the essay that Edith had submitted,

*Edith Ackerley: Yes, I was wondering at your silence. I am so sorry to hear your sister has been ill; I am afraid you have had a dreary time. I am much interested in your essay, which is well thought out and pleasantly composed, although a little bit spoilt by vain repetition; you have said the same thing too often.*<sup>6</sup>

Edith was a student at CCTCC in 1911 and boarding with a Mr and Mrs Roylance at 175 Ruskin Road, close to the town centre and the Mechanics Institute where the students were still undertaking their lectures.<sup>7</sup> The 1921 census finds Edith enumerated as a school mistress at Tosside School, Gisburn, on the Lancashire/Yorkshire border. How long she has been in post is not clear but perhaps the fact she was boarding at the Temperance Hotel, may possibly indicate that she had not been at the school long enough to find a permanent address.<sup>8</sup> Tosside school permanently closed in 2000, but it's claim to fame is that it had the longest official name in the county, Gisburn Forest (Tosside) Parochial Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School!<sup>9</sup> The school subsequently converted into a private house.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Gentlewoman, Saturday 25 November 1905, page 52

<sup>7</sup> 1911 England Census, RG 14, Crewe, Cheshire, piece 21797

<sup>8</sup> 1921 England Census, RG15, Clitheroe, Lancashire, piece 20315

<sup>9</sup> See - <https://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/8053819.fond-farewell-to-village-school>

<sup>10</sup> See sales brochure -

[http://www.mswhewetsons.co.uk/cmsfiles/Image/property/477/M110\\_01773\\_F005a\\_LAM\\_30.pdf](http://www.mswhewetsons.co.uk/cmsfiles/Image/property/477/M110_01773_F005a_LAM_30.pdf)



*The former Tosside School Building Courtesy of MSW Hewetsons*

At some point between 1921 and 1933 Edith is appointed as headmistress of Wigglesworth School, Clitheroe, but save for one small newspaper article I cannot find any more information about her time there.<sup>11</sup> From Wigglesworth Edith then became headmistress of Long Preston Endowed School in 1937, a few miles away from her previous post. She took over from Mr Ralph Lowe who retired after having been headmaster since September 1919, and began her duties on November 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>12</sup> As the Great War approached and the 1939 National Register was compiled Edith was listed as a Headmistress, living at Moorfield on Main Street in Long Preston.<sup>13</sup>

The school log recorded that on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1939, a radio arrived in the school and that the school would close for one week, or until further notice, but that the buildings were to remain open to receive 255 evacuees who were expected

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<sup>11</sup> Clitheroe Advertiser and Times, Friday 12 April 1933, page 7

<sup>12</sup> Long Preston Heritage See <https://www.longprestonheritage.org.uk/>

<sup>13</sup> 1939 National Register, Edith Ackerley, Borough Settle, District 484/3

to arrive that day. The school reopened on 11<sup>th</sup> September with numbers on roll having increased to 113 with ten local new starters and 49 evacuees from Barkerend School in Bradford. Edith, who was teaching the 10–14-year-olds, had 25 pupils in her class.<sup>14</sup>

In January 1940 severe weather hit the area with snow and frost affecting school life between 18<sup>th</sup> of the month and 13<sup>th</sup> February; during which time the school was without water, the toilets were frozen and with no trains or buses running there were no teachers to open the school on some days. In October Edith noted in the logbook that the Blitz had started following the Battle of Britain and that the school had admitted five evacuees from London. In April 1942 Edith took the top two classes to see a Whitley Bomber aircraft which had crash landed at Arnford, about a mile from the school. She reported that the children were out of school for almost an hour and that the aircraft had come down at around 7:15am, the pilot had managed to miss the 3,000 volt power line and ‘belly landed’ in Spindlebers Field, it was on a homeward flight from Germany after a leaflet dropping run. The next two years saw Edith, the staff, and pupils taking part in a variety of war time fund raising events, including *Wings for Victory Week* in 1943 and *Salute the Solider Week* the following year, with a great deal of financial success.<sup>15</sup>

The school logbook makes for interesting reading with WWI affecting life on almost a daily basis even in deepest Yorkshire. Entries include Edith attending a consultation day on fire watching for schools, along with other headteachers from the area. A stirrup pump arriving in school and arrangements being made

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<sup>14</sup> Long Preston Heritage See <https://www.longprestonheritage.org.uk/>

<sup>15</sup> Long Preston Heritage See <https://www.longprestonheritage.org.uk/>

for the building to be patrolled in case of incendiary bombs falling outside of school hours. PC Whiteley inspected the children's gas masks on a regular basis and in August 1942 school was instructed to be closed for two weeks for harvesting operations, referred to as *Harvest Holiday*.<sup>16</sup>

Edith left Long Preston after five years and in July 1943 a presentation was made to her ahead of her moving to a similar appointment at Church Stretton in Shropshire.<sup>17</sup> From 1943 Edith is lost to me until her death in 1970 at the age of 79 in the Wharfedale district of Yorkshire, suggesting that she returned to Yorkshire after a spell of teaching in Shropshire.<sup>18</sup> Edith was among the first women to train as a teacher at CCTCC and subsequently numbered among the first headmistresses who had trained after the passing of the 1904 Education Act. If CCTCC measured its effectiveness in training teachers in the number of former students who went on to lead a school of their own, then Edith would certainly be counted among its successes.

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<sup>16</sup> Long Preston Heritage See <https://www.longprestonheritage.org.uk/>

<sup>17</sup> Bradford Observer, Friday 9 July 1954, page 2

<sup>18</sup> GRO Death Indexes, October Quarter 1970, Wharfedale, West Riding District, Vol 2d, page 1613