

# *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.*

## **Bridget and Mary Toomey's Story**

Bridget Toomey was born at Dawes Road, Fulham in either late 1877 or early 1878 – her birth was registered in the first quarter of 1878. She was the second child in the family, her elder brother, known as Daniel, but whose birth was registered as John, was born in 1874 and her younger sister Mary was born in late 1879, also at Dawes Road, Fulham. Their mother Bridget Haley or Ayley (referred to here as Bridget Haley to avoid confusion) was from Cork and her father was also Irish but we don't know his first name. When he gave the information for the 1881 census he only used initials for his family – father B. Toomey, gardener, mother B. Toomey, laundress, children D, B and M Toomey. On 29<sup>th</sup> May 1884, Daniel, Bridget and Mary Toomey were all enrolled in Ashford School, a residential children's home administered under the Poor

Laws. This might have been after the death or desertion of their father; no man called Toomey died in Fulham between 1881 and 1884, and he is not mentioned again. Bridget was discharged from Ashford School on the 10<sup>th</sup> November 1887 “To mother” and on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1889 Daniel was discharged to the Orphanage, and Mary to Kensington West School.

Bridget (13), Mary (10) and their mother lived at 11, Caroline Place, Fulham in 1891 (Daniel was still in St Mary’s Orphanage at Hendon). The children were described as schoolgirls, and Bridget Haley worked as a washerwoman. Bridget Toomey was described as “afflicted in the eyes” and Mary as “blind since childhood”, but oddly, these conditions are never mentioned in any of the subsequent reporting.

Bridget appears in the newspapers for the first time on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1893 when she was about 15. The London Evening Standard tells us that

*Bridget Toomey, an inmate of Fulham Workhouse was charged with being drunk and refractory...the master said that yesterday the Prisoner was allowed out to attend Mass, but she did not return until night. She was then drunk, and refused to go to bed, behaving violently and using bad language. Such conduct upset the inmates who could not go to sleep...committed her to prison for 14 days.*

Bridget Haley was admitted to Paddington Workhouse three times between 6<sup>th</sup> September and 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1894, by which date she was transferred to Marylebone. Neither of her daughters appears with her on the admission records. Bridget Haley disappears about now, and this may have caused Bridget Toomey to go off the rails. She was clearly a feisty, strong minded woman, and

as the newspaper articles develop, I think they reveal something appealing about her, despite her misdemeanours.

Fulham Chronicle of 16<sup>th</sup> August 1895

*She was a laundress and lived at Notting Dale. With such splendid qualifications as these to back her up, Bridget Toomey, a very determined looking damsel emerged from the regions below apparently virtuously indignant that she should have, even for a few minutes, to endure the ignominy of the dock. PC 202X...stated in his most important manner that he saw Bridget with several choice lads in St Ann's Road; they were shouting and swearing in their most approved style. The PC raised a slight objection to the language used, on the ground that it lacked purity, and exceeded in strength and vividness. The choice lads wisely decided to take the advice of the PC and promptly decamped. Bridget, however, remained to argue the point. She got the worst of the argument, and finally found herself an inmate of a lock-up not far distant. – Mr Lane inquired...the occupation of Bridget...She says she's a laundress – "Ah, that covers a multitude of employments" said Mr Lane knowingly. Bridget was fined 2s, or in default, one days' imprisonment.*

The West London Observer 5<sup>th</sup> March 1897

*FIGHTING IN THE BROADWAY – Two young men, named Robert Hine,... and James Saunders,... were charged with behaving disorderly. Bridget Toomey, a flower seller, of Bangor Street, Notting Hill, was placed in the dock with them for attempting to rescue*

*Saunders from Custody...The female said she did not attempt to rescue Saunders, it was Hine*

Fulham Chronicle 12<sup>th</sup> November 1897

*A VIOLENT CUSTOMER AT NORTH END ROAD – Bridget Toomey, laundress, of 4b Bagley's Lane, Fulham, was charged with being drunk and disorderly and assaulting... the manager of the Crown public house...and PC Mills...The prisoner should have been charged on Monday morning but while on bail she got drunk and was taken into custody...the manager of the "Crown" said the prisoner came into the house and behaved in a very disorderly manner. She was requested to leave but refused and picking up the water jug, threw the contents at him – PC Mills...[was]...called to take the prisoner into custody and added that on the way to the station she twice spat in his face...fined...20s or 14 days' imprisonment.*

Fulham Chronicle 9<sup>th</sup> December 1897

*A MIDNIGHT FIGHT IN NORTH END ROAD – Robert Stevens, 21, a labourer of 18 Dimsdale Road Fulham and Bridget Toomey, 19, a laundress of 43 Bagley's Lane, Fulham were charged with assaulting Elizabeth Hancock and Alice Hancock...[who]were returning home from their stalls in the North End Road on Saturday last. Elizabeth... [said that] her husband was carrying a can filled with beer, when...Stevens threw a stone at the can and all the beer was spilt in the road. Her husband asked the prisoner what he meant by spilling the beer and the prisoner said "I'll fight you for every quid you've got" Her husband refused to fight, and the two prisoners rushed at them.*

*Toomey struck [Alice] her sister-in-law in the eye and attacked her most brutally. The other prisoner also assaulted them...fined each of the prisoners 40s or, in default fourteen days imprisonment with hard labour.*

Fulham Chronicle 27<sup>th</sup> May 1898

*DISGRACEFUL CONDUCT AT NORTH END ROAD – Bridget Toomey, living at Bagley's Lane, Fulham was charged with being drunk and disorderly and further with assaulting PC Thompson...[who] stated that on Monday night he saw the prisoner and several other women drunk in North End Road. They were behaving in a very disorderly manner, and pushing people into the roadway. He requested them to go away and they proceeded a hundred yards up the street. The prisoner then threw off her hat and commenced fighting with a man. As she refused to go away...[she was taken] into custody. On the way to the station she frequently spat in his face...sentence...one month's imprisonment*

Kensington News and West London Times 21<sup>st</sup> January 1899

*THE NEW VAGRANT ACT – A young man, named William Smith, who was described as a wood chopper, living in Dimsdale Road, Fulham, was charged with assaulting Bridget Toomey, with whom he had been living. He was further charged under the new Vagrant Act...which had recently been passed. The prisoner had knocked the young woman about because she did not earn enough money to keep him in idleness. The prisoner was sentenced to three month's imprisonment with hard labour.*

The Vagrancy Act of 1898 was a piece of legislation which criminalised men who lived off the earnings of prostitution and who solicited in public places. William Smith can be found on the electoral roll in Dimsdale Road in 1899 and 1900, and there is a William Smith, woodcutter, born in Ireland in 1849 and described as married, but without his wife at 36, Pownall Road, Fulham in 1901. Is this the same 'young' man referred to above? Or did this one have a son?

Fulham Chronicle 14<sup>th</sup> July 1899

*NOISY WOMEN AT HAMMERSMITH ROAD – Elizabeth Rostall...and Bridget Toomey, 20, a laundress, of 18, Langford Road, Fulham, were charged with being drunk and behaving in a disorderly manner at Hammersmith Road...The prisoners, who have previously been convicted, pleaded guilty – Mr Bennett sentenced them to one month's imprisonment – Toomey, on leaving the dock, shouted out, "Thank you; we're alright to the 12<sup>th</sup> August*

Fulham Chronicle of 14<sup>th</sup> September 1900:

*BANGOR STREET WOMAN SENTENCED FOR ASSAULT – Rebecca Smith, 20, a laundress, and Bridget Toomey, 22, a laundress, of 18 Bangor Street, Notting Dale, were charged with being drunk, disorderly and using obscene language at Bramley Road: Toomey was further charged with assaulting Agnes Smith at the Bramley Arms – PC 453X said that...Toomey came to him saying she had been assaulted. As there was no apparent injury he told her to go away but she refused. He then took her into custody. [Rebecca] Smith said that*

*if Toomey was taken into custody she was going with her...the prisoners were drinking in the Bramley Arms...[Agnes Smith said] Toomey leaned across the counter striking her a blow on the forehead – the prisoners both stated they were drunk...Toomey had already suffered five months' and three weeks' imprisonment this year...sentenced to 21 days imprisonment.*

And so we come to the 1901 census, where we find both Bridget and her sister Mary at St Joseph's Inebriate Reformatory. Mary has not yet been mentioned in the press – so we don't know why she was also sent to the institution with her sister – perhaps it was considered to be a preventative measure. Evidently Bridget was expelled from the Reformatory as the Fulham Chronicle of 13<sup>th</sup> September 1901 picks up the narrative:

*'TWOULD BE HARD TO SAY which has the poorer opinion of the other – Bridget Toomey of the police, or the police of Bridget Toomey. She comes up once more, in company of Susan Lee, her fellow lodger at 86 Estcourt Road, Fulham, the allegation being threefold, as usual; firstly, drunk; secondly, disorderly; thirdly obscene – PC Hardie...took charge of these two undesirables in North End Road where he found them in a "scrap-up" with another lady...Lee has no questions to put to witness, and when asked if she would like to interrogate him Bridget shows the depth of her contempt for men in blue. "Me ask him a question," she reiterates scornfully "Not me. What's the good. If I had a solicitor it might be alright."...Sergeant Chase...informs the Court that Susan has been here a number of times, but doesn't remember the time of the last conviction. Bridget left prison only yesterday morning after passing a month in retirement. Some time*

*ago she was sent to an inebriates' home, but was expelled for misconduct. "She is" adds he "one of the worst women in Fulham"...Mr Lane...says You are incorrigible. You must find one surety of £7 to be of good behaviour for six months, or go to prison for two months"*

Almost exactly two months later on 15<sup>th</sup> November, the following appeared in the Fulham Chronicle:

*A WELL KNOWN and violent character is Bridget Toomey, 27, a laundress who has no fixed abode. At Archel Road on Monday night PC 372T had occasion to remonstrate with prisoner owing to her disorderly conduct, which was made more objectionable by her use of obscene expressions. She was taken to the station and charged with the offences. On Tuesday morning when the "carriage" with "E.R." on the sides called for her she became violent and was carried out of the station and placed in it. Whilst she was being thus removed she took advantage of the opportunity to spit in a constable's face – the prisoner was sent to an inebriate's home but she was discharged – Mr Lane after consideration decided to fine the prisoner 20s or in default 14 days. – The decision caused prisoner to burst out laughing and she called out "God bless you" as she was leaving the court.*

Until now, Bridget's misdemeanours had been drink related, but the next month, she appeared again in the Fulham Chronicle 20<sup>th</sup> December 1901, for stealing:

*ALLEGED STEALING – Bridget Toomey, 27, a laundress, with no fixed abode, was charged with stealing from Pete Majur, a coloured lad,*



*of 50 Kensington Hall Gardens, North End Road, 16s and a metal watch, value 2s – ...On Saturday night at Talgarth Road, the prisoner accosted him, put her hand in his pocket and took the money and watch from it. She ran off when he asked for the money and watch, but he gave chase and held her until the arrival of a constable. Just before the officer came she returned the watch.- Prisoner, who denied the allegations, was remanded for enquiries.*

27<sup>th</sup> December 1901

*SHE WAS INNOCENT- Bridget Toomey, 27, a laundress with no fixed abode was charged on remand, with stealing from Pete Majur, a man of colour...the sum of 16s and a metal watch, value together 18s. When the hearing was resumed...a grocer...spoke as to seeing prisoner detained by prosecutor, who received a watch from her. He also asked for the return of the money – Prisoner denied having the money – She said there were other women about. She wanted to go for trial...On leaving the dock prisoner said “May you enjoy your Christmas dinner – the lot of you” (Laughter)*

The UK Calendar of Prisoners tells us that Bridget Toomey, who had served a sentence of 3 calendar months in May 1900 for larceny, was sentenced to 9 months hard labour at Wormwood Scrubs for the offences reported above. Sentence to commence 1<sup>st</sup> January 1902.

The next time we find Bridget in the papers (but not the next time she offended, apparently) was 15<sup>th</sup> May 1903:

*A NEW NAME! – Bridget Toomey, thinking to hide her identity and throw the record keeper off the scent, went in for a change of name when charged at Notting Dale police station, with being drunk, disorderly and obscene in Latimer Road. She told the station-sergeant that her title was Mary Ann Gotten, and her address 22 Bangor Street. She reckoned without her [PC] Govas, however for she was very promptly recognised on being brought under the assistant-gaoler's sharp eye. PC 565X had arrested her because she was fighting with a man and making use of the most filthy language – Prisoner: I was very drunk. The man struck me and I hit him back in self defence. PC Govas revealed prisoner's identity, and said there were a number of previous convictions, the last less than a month ago- fined 20s or 14 days*

The Police Register of Habitual Criminals has two entries for Bridget, in 1904 and 1905. There are photographs and she is described as being 5ft 1" of slight build, a fresh complexion, with brown hair, blue eyes, a small straight nose and a round face. There is no mention of any problems with her eyes. There is no similar sheet for Mary.

Fulham Chronicle 11<sup>th</sup> November 1904

*TWO OLD HANDS are Mary A. Hearn...and Bridget Toomey, 24, a laundress, of 4B Bagley's Lane, Fulham. PC 237T observed them fighting together at North End Road on Saturday night, and that they were in earnest was proved by the marks on their faces. Hearn had a lovely black eye, and Toomey's face was scratched all over – Each accused the other of molesting her, and from their attitudes it*

*seemed as though they were desirous of resuming the combat in the dock. Hearn was fined 7s or seven days as she had not been to the court for a long time, while Toomey, who had only left gaol a day or two ago, was ordered to pay 40s, or a month. – Toomey: Thank you sir, you're an old toff.*

Fulham Chronicle 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1905

*IT WAS NOT THE FIRST TIME- Bridget Toomey, 25, a laundress of 54 Estcourt Road Fulham, has been an inmate of an inebriates home. For some time past she has given the police in this district a great deal of trouble on account of her habits, and on the occasion of her last arrest she was remanded for another "home". Assistant gaoler Govas now proved several convictions against the prisoner and stated that she was discharged from "home" after being detained for seven months, on account of her violence. Prisoner now said that she would not be made any better by being sent to a home to which she did not want to go. Mr Garrett now ordered her to be conveyed to the Southern Counties Home and detained for three years. Prisoner: I shall be worse than I was before, now.*

Fulham Chronicle 30<sup>th</sup> July 1909

*THE MORALS OF A BAGLEY'S LANE WOMAN – Bridget Toomey, 29, describing herself as a laundress, of 14B Bagley's Lane, Fulham, was charged with soliciting men at North End Road, Fulham – She was ordered to pay a fine of 12s or eight days – "That's more than a week, isn't it?" she impudently remarked: "a day more than a week"*

In 1911, Bridget is not to be found on the census, and indeed, is absent from the press (for now), but we do find Mary Toomey at Nazareth House Convent, described as an inmate of the institution, occupation domestic servant. And it is Mary who makes it to the press on the next couple of occasions:

Middlesex County Times 1<sup>st</sup> February 1913

*At the Mortlake Police Court on Wednesday, Mary Toomey (32), laundress, 46, Palmerston Road, South Acton, was fined 7s 6d for having been drunk and disorderly in Castelnau, Barnes, on Sunday...on taking her into custody she became very violent, and the ambulance had to be obtained to take her to the police station*

West London Observer 19<sup>th</sup> June 1914

#### *BITING A POLICEMAN*

*Mary Toomey, 34, laundress, of 24, Sirdar Road, Notting Dale, was charged with being drunk and disorderly and assaulting PC Elliott...The officer stated that he went to the assistance of PC Jones...who was taking the prisoner to the station, when she deliberately bit him on the right hand. He had to smack her in the face to make her let go of his hand.- The prisoner denied that she bit the constable, and said that he struck her in the face. - It was stated that the woman had been previously convicted of drunkenness and assaults on the police, and the magistrate sentenced her to two months' hard labour.*

The Police Gazette 20<sup>th</sup> March 1917 tells us that Bridget, meanwhile, was continuing in her ways.

*Re-convictions – BRIDGET TOOMEY alias Bridget Smith...was sentenced at West London Police Court 15.3.17 to 6 months imprisonment for assault on police. Previous conviction of larceny in Metropolitan Police district.*

Interesting that Bridget is using an alias again, and on the 1921 census there is a Bridget Smith of exactly the right age (43 years and 6 months), born in Fulham, and in Tufnell Park Jail. This Bridget's occupation is a laundress ironer, who also describes herself as married – although there is no record of our Bridget formally marrying anyone. Did she choose the name Smith at random, as a name to make her blend into the crowd – or was she still associating with William Smith who was charged with assaulting her in 1899?

A few years pass without any sign of Mary or Bridget in any civil records or newspapers...then in the Fulham Chronicle 18<sup>th</sup> March 1927:

*DRUNK AT BREAKFAST TIME – Found in a helpless condition at Ryleston Road, Fulham, just before 8 o'clock on Saturday morning, Bridget Toomey (59) a charwoman, living at the women's lodging house, 1 Shorrolds Road, was taken into custody by PC Will...She pleaded guilty to the charge of being drunk and incapable and was ordered to pay a fine of 5s.*

There is a record of a Mary Toomey of the right age, who died in Kensington in 1929. The death of Bridget Toomey was recorded in 1943 in Westminster, she was 64.

## **Sources**

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