

This is a Story from 'A Few Forgotten Women'



This story was written, in January 2023, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of girls from Leeds, Girls' Industrial School, Yorkshire.

Jane Newlands' story

Jane was born at the beginning of 1860 in the village of Dalston which lies four miles south of Carlisle in Cumberland.¹ She was baptised on third of February 1860 in the parish church, her parents named as Joseph and Jane Newlands.² The following year the family were recorded in the census as living in John Street, Botchergate, Carlisle with Joseph working as a labourer. Their seven children were named as Ann (known as Nancy) and Mary both aged 12, Francis 10, John 8, Joseph 5, Margaret 3 and Jane one year old. Although Joseph and Jane were both natives of Cumberland they seemed to have travelled for much of their married life as four of their children had been born in either Lancashire or Yorkshire.³

Joseph, along with his father, Francis and his brother William continued moving around the north of England as they were reported at the beginning of November 1863 as being involved in a brawl in a public house in Sheffield having

just arrived from Bradford. The men imbibed several quarts of beer and then proceeded to invite any comer to fight. A brawl ensued and several people including the serving girl were injured. A crowd of two hundred people had gathered before the police arrived. Francis took a swing at the policeman with a fender but fortunately missed his target. The men were charged with wilful damage and Francis, a basket maker and Joseph a pot hawker were sentenced to two months in the House of Correction with William fined 40 shillings or one month incarceration.⁴

Joseph and his father Francis were travelling again in the summer of 1866 when they were fined for camping and lighting a fire by the highway in Middleham in North Yorkshire. They were described by the Richmond and Ripon Chronicle as “travelling gipsies”.⁵

Jane and her siblings seem to be living in Leeds at this time as her older brother, Francis, now aged fifteen, was getting into trouble there with the law. His first offence was cruelty to a horse in February 1866, but then a year later he was apprehended for house breaking and theft. He was sentenced to 2 months in gaol followed by five years in the reformatory and admitted to East Moor Community Home otherwise known as Adel Reformatory in Leeds on 25 April 1867. Their records tell us about his family circumstances. He described his father as a labourer and his mother as a charwoman. The family lived in a cellar on Grape Street, Hunslet, an area in the south of the town. He was employed at Low Moor Coal Pits with his Uncle Thomas Clark, a miner who was married to his father’s sister Jane. The narrative also mentions his grandfather Francis, a glass hawker, who lived opposite a public house on Church Street, Hunslet called the Spotted Dog.⁶ Francis repeatedly absconded from the reformatory and stole

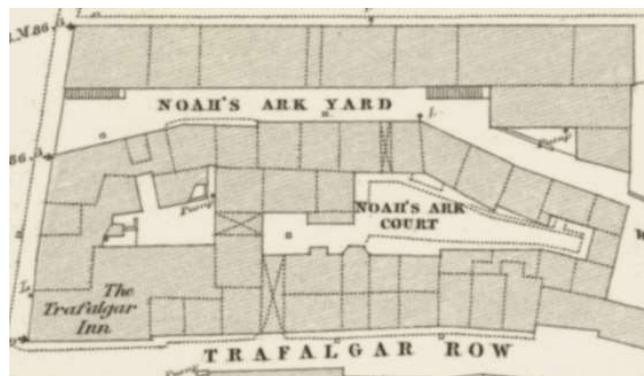
again, for which he received a sentence of a further three months in gaol and return to the reformatory. In May 1868 he was sentenced to a further eighteen months in prison after absconding from the reformatory again and being charged with theft.⁷

Although these newspaper accounts relate to the men in the household it paints a picture of life for Jane, the family probably all living in one room in a cellar, with an absent father who was likely to be prone to violence when drunk and her mother scraping a living from cleaning. Hunslet was then a densely populated area with many back to back houses, cellar dwellings and courts. Sanitation and cleanliness were poor with communal pumps providing a water supply and shared privies which were rarely emptied. Employment was provided by flax and woollen mills, the Leeds pottery in Jack Lane, an Iron and brass foundry, glass works and tannery. All these industrial processes including the local gas works would produce much smell, smoke and dirt.⁸

On 8th November 1868 at Dogs Inn Yard, Hunslet Jane's mother, also named Jane, died at the age of 38 years of peritonitis after giving birth.⁹ Joseph's occupation on the death certificate was licensed hawker but it was a fellow hawker, Ann Lowther who registered the death. Our Jane was only eight years old when her mother died. Her oldest sister Nancy was now nineteen years old and had just married. Brother Francis was in the Reformatory, two other siblings had disappeared from the records, leaving brother John aged 14 and Margaret 11 years old at home.

At the end of the following year Jane was apprehended begging in the streets. She was recorded in the Admissions' Register of the Industrial School as Ann

alias Jane Newland. This little girl, described as being well built with dark brown hair and eyes and dark complexion, stood before the stipendiary magistrate William Bruce and was asked what her occupation was and to give an account of her family. She gave her address as Noah's Ark Yard, Meadow Lane, Hunslet. Perhaps William Bruce remembered reading an account of the sanitary conditions in the city a few weeks earlier in the Leeds Mercury which described Noah's Ark Yard as a "disgusting place".¹⁰ The map illustrates how closely the back to back houses were packed together.



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OS town map of Leeds 1850 showing Noah's Ark Yard and Court Hunslet Leeds.

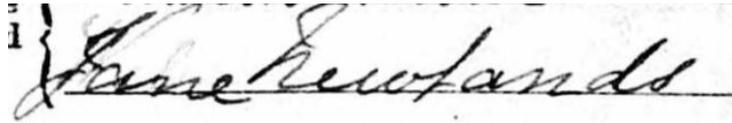


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Noah's Ark Yard undated photograph possibly 1900 as the yard is now clean and paved by kind permission of Leeds Libraries at www.leodis.net

Her father's occupation was gathering rags and iron and she said she was sent out to beg with her brother and sister. Jane gave the names of relatives as follows, Aunt and Uncle Richard and Margaret Newlands (I have not been able to find any record of them), who hawked glasses and lived near the railway bridge in Pottery Fields, a parish in Hunslet, her grandmother Mary in Cumberland, Uncle Dick at Kendal, Uncle and Aunt William and Mary Newland living in a Yard near the church in Meadow Lane and Thomas and Mary Hamer, shop keepers in Lancashire. The conclusion was that she came from a "most wretched and neglected family" and she was sentenced to seven years in the reformatory.⁶ The sentence was of course designed to offer her care away from the neglect and poverty of home until the age of sixteen. We do not know if Jane was relieved to escape her life of poverty or if she regarded her punishment as severe.

She was admitted to the Leeds Industrial School at Edgar Street on November 19 1869 and was transferred, along with the other girls, to Windsor Street Ragged School the following year where she appeared in the 1871 census.¹³ An inspection of the school that year found it in "good order". The girls were being taught not just reading and writing but also basic arithmetic "correctly and intelligently". Domestic skills such as washing, sewing and knitting were also on the curriculum.¹⁴ When Jane was apprehended she could not read, write or do any arithmetic despite having supposedly attended the Hunslet Ragged School and the Wesleyan Sunday School. When she married, Jane was able to sign her name very neatly, unlike all her siblings who could only sign their names with a cross.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jane Newlands", written in dark ink on a light-colored background. The signature is written over a horizontal line. To the left of the signature, there is a small vertical mark that looks like a bracket or a stylized letter 'i'.

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Signature from Jane's marriage certificate

We assume Jane was "released" five years after her admission, on November 19 1876 now aged sixteen. Where did she go? Her father now had a second family having married Margaret Allen in April 1870 soon after Jane's incarceration. The couple appear in the 1871 census as Joseph aged 38, a dealer in iron, wife Margaret 29 years an earthenware hawker with their two children William six and Richard four.¹⁶ The children's ages mean they were born before Joseph's first wife Jane died but their births were registered with the mother's maiden name of Allen which is Margaret's name. Does this mean that Joseph had started this family with Margaret before Jane had died? Joseph and Margaret produced four more children, Sarah in 1875, Johanna on 20 November 1876, James on 6 September 1879 and Frank in 1883.

By the 1881 census Jane was living with her brother John, a peddler and hawker, his wife also Jane, and their young family in 23 New Lane Leeds.¹⁷ Now aged twenty, she was working as a flax spinner, unlike most of her siblings who followed their father's footsteps and become hawkers.

On October 18 1883 Jane married William Winter, a mechanic, at St Jude's church Hunslet. Her address was 7 Banner Street Hunslet. Her father's occupation was horse dealer.¹⁸ The couple had two daughters, Mary Jane arrived on 1st August 1884 and Sarah on 4 April 1886. Sadly neither survived infancy, Mary Jane living for two years and Sarah just 11 months.¹⁹ Although the Medical Officers of Health appointed in the big cities were monitoring and attempting to

reduce the level of infant mortality, diseases such as whooping cough and measles were still major killers of young children at this time and the sanitary conditions in the sort of dwellings that the Newlands families lived in were extremely poor.



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OS town map of Leeds

The baptism of Sarah and burials of the two girls give the family's address as 5 Sunday School Yard off Mill Street. The map shows Mill Street which is off Meadow Lane with the Wesleyan Chapel where Jane was said to have attended Sunday School as a child. Not only are the houses in this yard back to back but the central courtyard is only accessible via a ginnel between the houses. A pump provides the water supply.

Jane suffered a further bereavement two months after the death of her daughter, Sarah, when her father Joseph died in April 1887. An unfortunate series of events unfolded starting in February with the death of Joseph's horse, by which he earned his living. In order to buy another one he attempted what would now be called "crowd funding" the £15 7s 6d he needed to buy a new horse. He made the mistake of knocking on the door of the local magistrate,

William Bruce, the same magistrate who had incarcerated Jane, and showed him a subscription list and letter of recommendation, asking him for a donation. Mr Bruce decided that this was a forgery and deemed the man's approach to be begging for which Joseph was prosecuted and sentenced to one calendar month's imprisonment. Shortly after his release he was admitted to the Workhouse where at the age of about 58 years, he died. Joseph was buried in the Beckett Street Cemetery in Leeds. He left his wife Margaret with their brood of children the youngest of whom was only four years old.

The following year in August 1888 Jane's grandfather, Francis basket maker of Dog Inn Yard, died when he fell from his horse and trap causing fatal injuries. After this date Jane and her husband disappear from any online records despite my tracing most of her and William Winter's extended family. Their extended families continued as hawkers selling mostly earthen ware and iron around Yorkshire and Lancashire. The wives in the family are usually credited with the same occupation. Several of the males in the family spent time in prison for thefts.

Christine Shackell January 2023

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