

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in September 2024, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of pupils at the Royal Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Poor (later The Royal School for the Deaf), Margate, Kent and The West of England Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Exeter, Devon.

Gertrude Frances Lincoln's Story

Gertrude Frances Lincoln was born on 19 December 1885 at Mileham, Norfolk, daughter of George Lincoln, a shepherd, and Mary Ann Lincoln, formerly Stapleton.¹ George Lincoln and Mary Ann Stapleton had married on 15 October 1884 at Tittleshall Parish Church, Norfolk:

Marriages: LINCOLN-STAPLETON - October 15, at the parish church, Tittleshall, George, second son of George Lincoln of Docking, to Mary Ann, eldest daughter of Richard Stapleton of Burnham Thorpe, Norfolk.²

Gertrude was the eldest of eight children born to George and Mary Ann. With the exception of her brother, William Richard Lincoln, who died within the first

¹ General Register Office, 1886 Birth Register (M Quarter) at Mitford, Vol. 4B, Page 302 (mother: Stapleton).

² Marriages, *The Norfolk News*, October 25, 1884, p.7.

month of life in 1888, all her other siblings lived into their adulthood. Gertrude was the only child born with a hearing impairment.³

Gertrude's early years are unknown. Compulsory school age at the time was from end of the sixth year to end of the twelfth to fifteenth year. By 1892 she presumably attended the local village schools where the family resided. We can only imagine how she coped with her hearing and speech difficulties and how she managed to communicate with teachers and fellow pupils.

The family moved often, probably in response to George Lincoln's positions as shepherd on local farms, within a fairly small area east of King's Lynn. Some of their locations include:

- When Gertude was born in 1885, the family were living at Mileham, Norfolk.
- In 1888 the family were living in Great Dunham.
- The 1891 census shows the family living at Harpley, Norfolk.⁴
- On the 1901 census, Gertrude was at Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Children of the Poor, Margate,⁵ while her parents and siblings were living at Dersingham, Norfolk.⁶

The Register of Children for The Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Children of the Poor for Old Kent Road, shows that Gertrude was elected by the General Committee for her admission on 10 February 1897 and admitted on 23 March 1897. The Register provides a record of her attainments during her time at Old Kent Road and Margate following her transfer there on 25 August 1898. The following table is for 1897, the year of her admittance:

³ The Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Children of the Poor: Ch192/R2/1/5, Entry 5383 Register of Children: Old Kent Road [5256-5670] (with transfers to Margate).

⁴ The National Archives of the UK (TNA); Kew, Surrey, England; 1891 Census Returns of England and Wales for Harpley, Freebridge Lynn, Norfolk; Class: RG12; Piece: 1564; Folio: 35; Page: 9; GSU roll: 6096674.

⁵ The National Archives of the UK (TNA); Kew, Surrey, England; 1901 Census Returns of England and Wales for Margate, Kent; Class: RG13; Piece: 824; Folio: 34; Page: 10.

⁶ The National Archives of the UK (TNA); Kew, Surrey, England; 1901 Census Returns of England and Wales for Dersingham, Norfolk; Class: RG13; Piece: 1882; Folio: 36; Page: 4.

REPORTS										
Decr.	Class	No. of children in class	Place in class	Articulation	Lip Reading	Arithmetic	Sewing or drawing	Exams Total	Conduct	
									In School	Out of School
1897	E	10	3	G	VF	G	Sews neatly	141/160	G	G

Table 1: CH192/R2/1/5 Entry 5385 Register of Children: Old Kent Road [5266-5670]

The report was produced nine months after Gertrude was admitted to Asylum, when she was age 12. Coming third in a class of ten appears to indicate that her early years in local Norfolk educational establishments were far better than expected. Family and friends possibly also played a significant part in helping her to achieve these attainments.

Admission to the Asylum was by a majority of votes of subscribers. The time, trouble and expense incurred in canvassing was usually out of the power of a poor parent and, in most cases, children were left to pick up education as best they could. The entry for Gertrude in the Register of Children states she was nominated for admission to the Asylum by H.R.H. The Prince of Wales with sureties from Edward Tingey, farmer, Dersingham, and Alfred Firth, schoolmaster, Dersingham.⁷ The nomination by H.R.H. The Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) seems unusual for a child of a shepherd.

In 1949, Gertrude's father, George Lincoln, then 93 years old, was interviewed by a local newspaper. The lengthy article (which included a nearly illegible photograph of George) adds much context to the family and their ancestors:

93-YEAR-OLD SHEPHERD IS RELATED TO A U.S. PRESIDENT

BEARDED 93-year-old George Lincoln, of Docking, claims to be a direct descendant of the grandfather of Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the United States. But he is more at home talking about sheep than about his illustrious ancestors.

"I have been associated with sheep for more than 60 years," he said. "Both my father and my grand-father were shepherds before me, and possibly their

⁷ Ch192/R2/1/5 Entry 5383 Register of children: Old Kent Road [5256-5670] (with transfers to Margate).

fathers before them. I should think that the occupation has been in my family for at least 200 years.

“I started working with sheep at the age of six. When I was 18, I was able to look after a flock by myself – quite an accomplishment at that age.

“I first started work as a shepherd for the princely wage of 18d., which entailed working seven days a week, and working sometimes 17 hours a day.”

Good eyesight

Notwithstanding these non-union hours – Mr Lincoln is quite convinced that an Englishman of to-day could not endure such trials – he has weathered his ordeals remarkably.

He still retains the active use of all his faculties, and is able to read without the assistance of glasses. He signs his pension-book each week unaided, and likes to look after his small garden.

“There just don’t seem to be any sheep in Norfolk any more,” contemplated Mr Lincoln, giving his beard a practised twirl. “In my day there were flocks of up to 500 everywhere.

“A shepherd’s lot is a hard and responsible one. You have to be out in the open for hours at a stretch, and if anything happens to the sheep, you are always to blame.

“You have to be the master of your job to succeed, and there are so many different things that threaten the safety of sheep; I was always the master.”

Counting by crook

With the aid of his crook alone, he could tell to a sheep how many there were in a flock, and conversely, whether one was missing. His accuracy was often questioned, but he was never found to be wrong.

“Once, during a heavy snowfall, a flock of about 300 were moved from a field to a pen,” recalled Mr Lincoln. “I was counting them with my crook and found that there were two missing. Nobody believed me, but nine days later the two sheep were found buried beneath a snow drift. They were still alive.

“Each sheep requires almost individual attention at least once a day, and when you have about 400 sheep in a flock, with two dogs to help you, that means you have some work to do. During the lambing season a flock may never be left unwatched. In one season I got 644 lambs from 380 ewes.

Baffled doctors

Mr Lincoln, who went to Docking from Dersingham in 1924, retired from life’s toll at the age of 72. He was married in 1872 and has been a widower since about 1929. He has seven children, four boys and three girls, all living, 12 grandchildren and “several” great-grandchildren.

He lives with his daughter, Mrs Eva Philpott and her husband. When he was 84, Mr Lincoln had a serious illness, and doctors told Mrs Philpott to expect the worse. This amazing old man, however, baffled doctors and is to-day remarkably fit.

Tale of a beard

Mr Lincoln’s beard has a story, and a moral, all its own. When he was about 34, he suffered severely with neuralgia and decided to let his beard grow. From that day to this, the neuralgia had disappeared, and from that day he has refused to shave.

While shepherding around Sandringham, Mr Lincoln recalls many meetings with King Edward VII, then Prince of Wales, and the Duke of Clarence.

Looking around the room for the symbol of his vocation, I inquired where his crook was. Mr Lincoln laughed and replied that everyone asked about that. “I gave it away to a young shepherd some years ago,” he added.

Framed on the wall is a group of “Lynn News and Advertiser” pictures recording the King’s investiture of his grand-daughter, Sgt. Phylis Joyce Crosbie, B.E.M., at Wolferton towards the end of the war.

TAILPIECE: Asked if he would be a shepherd again if he had a chance to re-live his life, Mr Lincoln exclaimed: “Definitely not. I might be a farm steward or a gamekeeper, but never a shepherd. The work is too hard.” – F.S.⁸

George Lincoln may have taken the opportunity of one of his meetings with H.R.H. The Prince of Wales to canvas for his support to nominate Gertrude for her admission to the Asylum, or a third party on the Sandringham estate acted on George’s behalf.

It is unfortunate the author of the newspaper article did not question George further concerning his ancestry. Within the timescale of this project, it was not possible to undertake extensive research needed to positively confirm the link to Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), 16th President of the United States, however a book, *Abraham Lincoln – A History*, identifies his 4 x great-grandfather as Samuel Lincoln of Norwich, England, who went to Higham, Massachusetts, in 1638, so a link between the two families may be possible.⁹

Gertrude left the Asylum on 17 December 1901, two days before her sixteenth birthday. The Register of Children leaving school provides another report on her attainments:

Subject	Number of Marks in Examination	Point of Progress Reached
Religious Knowledge	75%	Grade III N.J. (all) C.J. 30 F&D (all)
Articulation	85%	Very Intelligible
Lip-Reading	80%	Conversation & Dictation
Language	59%	To Lesson 130 in Course
Vocabulary	88%	Common Things

⁸ 93-Year-Old Shepherd is Related to a U.S. President, *Lynn News & Advertiser*, Friday, October 21, 1949, p.5.

⁹ J. G. Nicolay and J. Hay, *Abraham Lincoln – A History* (New York, 1917), pp. 1-27.

Subject	Number of Marks in Examination	Point of Progress Reached
Geography	65%	The British Isles
Arithmetic	52%	Money Sums
Writing	80%	Gertrude Frances Lincoln [written in very neat handwriting]
Needlework	84%	Standard VI
Conduct		Good
Signature of Teacher of Class: N. Stevens Date: Dec. 16th 1901 Head Master _____		

Table 2: Ch192/R8/1/2 Entry 489 Leavers Records: Registers of Children Leaving School (1877-1901)

On leaving the Asylum, Gertrude returned home to Norfolk to live with her parents and younger siblings. On the 1911 census, the family are living at Bircham Newton and Gertrude is included in the household but no occupation is given for her. Under the last column, entitled “Infirmity” “Deaf Dumb” has been added.¹⁰ Bertie Lincoln, one of Gertrude’s brothers was also living at home but, a few years later, in 1914, he emigrated to Australia.¹¹

On the 1921 census, Gertrude is living with her parents at Pea Barn Cottages, Ingoldisthorpe, Snettisham. George is listed as working for a farmer in Snettisham. Gertrude’s occupation is given as “Home Duties” and her place of work is “At Home”. Living with them is Gertrude’s married sister, Eva, and her husband Stanley Mervyn Philpott.¹²

By 1939, the Register for England and Wales lists Gertrude and her father now living in the household of Eva and Stanley at Burntstalk Cottages, Docking. Gertrude’s occupation is given as “Domestic Duties Paid”. Whether the domestic duties related to helping out within the household or as a paid domestic position is not stated. Her father is listed as a widower and his

¹⁰ The National Archives of the UK (TNA); Kew, Surrey, England; 1911 Census Returns of England and Wales for Bircham Newton, Norfolk, District 234; ED 09; Piece 11601.

¹¹ News from Australia, *Lynn News & Advertiser*, Tuesday, March 16, 1954, p.9.

¹² The National Archives, London, England, 1921 Census for England for Snettisham, Norfolk, District 234; Sub-District 2; ED 13; Schedule 180.

occupation is given as retired shepherd.¹³ George Lincoln died in 1950 at King's Lynn, Norfolk, age 94.

For all the wrong reasons, the next time Gertrude's name appears is in local newspapers in June 1957 while living at Summerfield Cottage near Docking:

DOCKING HOUSE-BREAKING CHARGE

HUNSTANTON magistrates on Monday adjourned the hearing of a case for three weeks during which time the police would make arrangements to procure a deaf and dumb interpreter.

The case is against Leonard Gerald Pike, aged 19, an unemployed agricultural worker, of 7 Burntstalk, Docking, who faces a charge alleging house-breaking with intent to commit a felony at "Summerfield", Docking, the home of a deaf mute. Miss Gertrude Frances Lincoln, aged 71, and stealing money to the value of £30.

He was remanded on bail on his own surety and his father's of £10 each.

'OUT OF FRONT DOOR'

Det.-cons. G. F. Nourse, of Hunstanton, said that at 4 p.m. on Saturday as the result of information received, he went to "Summerfield" near Docking, where he saw Pike come out of the front door of a house in the occupation of a Miss Lincoln.

Det.-cons. Nourse said he went over to the house and tried the front door, which was locked. Pike then appeared from the back. He asked him what he was doing, and Pike replied, "I am waiting for her to come home."

Det.-cons. Nourse said he told Pike he had reasons to believe he had stolen money from the bungalow. Pike allegedly replied, "I have just been in there. I looked for some money, but I could not find any this time."

¹³ The National Archives; Kew, London, England; 1939 Register for Docking, Norfolk; Reference: RG 101/6544D.

Det.-cons. Nourse and Pike said he had gone through the door by a key which he had hidden in his sock. When asked where he had obtained the key he was alleged to have replied that it was his back door key. Pike was taken to Docking police station, where he made a statement.¹⁴

A second article appeared three weeks later at the end of June:

YOUTH IS ACCUSED OF STEALING FROM DEAF AND DUMB WOMAN

An interpreter for a deaf and partially mute woman was called at Docking Magistrates' Court on Monday to interpret evidence in a hearing that resulted in Leonard Gerald Pike, aged 19, of 7 Burntstalk, Docking, being committed for trial to the Adjourned Norfolk Quarter Sessions at Lynn on July 10.

Pike is charged with breaking and entering the Summerfield cottage of Miss Gertrude Frances Lincoln, a 71-year-old deaf-mute, and stealing about £30 between February 1 and May 31 this year. He is also charged with breaking and entering with intent to steal on June 1.

Miss Lincoln told the court through Mr C. H. Collins, a welfare officer with Deaf and Dumb Norfolk and Norwich Welfare Association, that she never gave the youth permission to enter her home while she was absent, although she had previously paid him for some work he did inside the bungalow. She had never showed him any money which was contained in a tin box in a cupboard.

QUESTIONED

Det.-cons. C. F. Nourse, of Hunstanton, told the court that as a result of information received, he and P.C. F. Beales, of Docking, went to the woman's home on June 1. While approaching the house, they saw a youth move from the front to the rear of the bungalow. They tried the front door and found it locked, and then Pike came around from the side of the house.

Det.-cons. Nourse said he asked the youth what he was doing, and he said he was waiting for Miss Lincoln to return home. The youth strongly denied having

¹⁴ Docking house-breaking charge, *Lynn News and Advertiser*, Friday, June 7, 1957, p.12.

any knowledge of thefts, but later, the policeman alleged, admitted entering the house with a key he had hidden in his sock and taking money.

STATEMENTS

The youth was alleged also to have said, in a statement later produced to the court, that he entered the house that day looking for money but was unable to find any.

P.C. Beales alleged that Pike signed a statement in which he admitted breaking into the home about six times and taking money totalling about £30.

Pike was represented by Mr F. J. A. Smith (Messrs Metcalfe, Copeman, and Pettefar, Lynn).

Magistrates who committed Pike for trial were: Sir Stephen Green (chairman), Mrs M. Hare and Mr S. A. Rall.¹⁵

A third sentencing article appeared in mid-July:

YOUTH BROKE INTO HOME OF DOCKING DEAF-MUTE

LEONARD Gerald Pike, aged 19, of 7 Burntstalk, Docking, was placed on probation for two years at the Adjourned Norfolk Quarter Sessions held at Lynn on Wednesday after he pleaded guilty to breaking and entering the home of a deaf-mute and stealing.

Pike admitted breaking and entering the home of Miss Gertrude Frances Lincoln, a 71-year-old deaf-mute, at Docking, and stealing a £1 note between February 1 and February 28; breaking and entering the same house and stealing £5 in notes between March 1 and May 31, and breaking and entering with intent to steal on June 1.

He had been committed for trial by Docking magistrates on June 24.

¹⁵ Youth is accused of stealing from deaf and dumb woman, *Lynn News and Advertiser*, June 28, 1957, p.9.

Mr L. Boreham (instructed by Messrs. Sadler, Lemmon and Gethin, Lynn), for the prosecution, said Miss Lincoln and Pike apparently still were friends.

KEY FITTED

He had helped her at times and knew she kept certain sums of money in her house. Pike also knew, Mr Boreham said, that Miss Lincoln generally left her house on Saturday and Sunday to go visiting.

After Pike discovered that the back door key to his own home would allow him to enter Miss Lincoln's house, he began to steal money, and later admitted to police he had done this "at least six times" and stolen about £30. Mr Boreham said that while Pike was previously of good character, he was mentally retarded.

Det.-cons. C. F. Nourse, of Hunstanton, told the court that Pike was a native of Docking, the youngest of three boys. After leaving school he was employed as a farm labourer but was discharged for irregular attendance.

REJECTION

Mr A. B. Richards, probation officer, said Pike came from a good home. He had been rejected from National Service because of his retarded condition.

Mr Richards said the fact that Pike had always worked with superior people had perhaps made him resentful. Miss Lincoln and Pike were good friends, and "he was inclined to visit Miss Lincoln's house more often than he was his own," Mr Richards said.

Mr D. Macrae (instructed by Messrs. Metcalfe, Copeman and Pettefar, Lynn), for Pike, said Pike's father was prepared to make full restitution to Miss Lincoln.

Dr J. Hamilton, assistant County Medical Officer, told the court that in 1952, when he examined Pike, he found him mentally retarded.

RESTITUTION

Mr G. S. Pike, the boy's father, suggested that the possible reason for the boy's resentment and consequent acts was disappointment at being unable to do his National Service. He was very proud of an older brother who had served, Mr Pike said.

Mr Pike said he was willing to stand by his son and look after him.

In placing Pike on probation, the chairman of the court, Mr R. North, said: "We have considered your case carefully. I do hope you realise what a wicked, stupid thing you did."

It was a condition of the probation order that £30 should be paid to Miss Lincoln in restitution.¹⁶

The Pike family had been living next door to Lincoln-Philpott family at Docking on the 1939 Register for England and Wales.

In 1966 a notice appears in local newspapers advising of the death of Gertrude:

DEATHS: LINCOLN – *On September 17, 1966, at King's Lynn General Hospital, Gertrude Frances Lincoln, aged 80 years. Funeral service Docking Church tomorrow, Wednesday, September 21 at 2 pm. Flowers to the church please.¹⁷*

At the time of her death, her home address is given as Sunnyside Close, Heacham, Norfolk.¹⁸

Gertrude remained a spinster and appears to have spent her life helping the family. The only period away from home and the local area may have been her time in the Asylum.

All too often a spinster or bachelor within the family is forgotten about as they usually do not have children to take the line forward and record it. Gertrude is

¹⁶ Youth Broke into Home of Docking Deaf-Mute, *Lynn News & Advertiser*, Friday, July 12, 1957, p.1.

¹⁷ Deaths – Lincoln, *Lynn News & Advertiser*, Tuesday, September 20, 1966, p.2.

¹⁸ England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1995 for Norwich, dated 14 Nov. 1966.

briefly recorded in several online genealogical trees but they may not appreciate the lifetime of challenges she experienced.

On a personal note, my initial thought on receiving the name of my allocated girl for the Project, was that her name sounded interesting and unusual for the time. I was not disappointed. Researching her life was certainly interesting and her ancestry potentially unusual.

Where once Gertrude's fingers would have expressed her dialogue, now fingers on a keyboard and a website are telling her story – a Forgotten Woman no more.

*Researched by: Alison Kennedy
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Website Sources:

Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/>

British Newspaper Archive: <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>

FindMyPast: www.findmypast.co.uk

FreeBMD: <https://www.freebmd.org.uk>

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Open Library: www.openlibrary.org