

# *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.*

## **Mary Parbery's Story**

Mary, according to the 1901 Census was aged 40 years, so was born in about 1859/60, in the Strand, London. Although the first sighting of 'Mary Parbery' that has been found was in the 1891 Census aged 28 years, living with a Piano Tuner and his wife who is described as a barmaid – the same occupation as Mary.

So, was Mary born 'Parbery', or did she marry and become Parbery? In the 1901 Census, while an inmate at St Joseph's home for Inebriate Women in Middlesex, she was described as married – but this could have been an error on the Enumerator's part or on the part of the person who completed the schedule – although if they took the information from the Home's register, this could have been a misdirection on Mary's part on her arrival at the home.

Mary, if she did marry, must have done this before the 1891 Census and there are only 3 marriages to Parbery men in the years 1877-82, by women called Mary. The most likely is Mary Edwards, who married Arthur Parbery in Kensington in 1882, but without the certificate, we cannot know if this is the correct marriage.

Mary Edwards, however, is more traceable and in the 1861 Census, was living with her parents, Joseph Edwards an Irish Labourer, his wife Ellen and 2 children, Joseph aged 5 and Mary aged 2 living in a tenement building, Baldwin's Court at number 55 with a few other families. This area comes under St Andrew's, Holborn matching the information given on the later 1901 census (Strand, London).

Mary Edwards was baptised in February 1860 at St Andrew's Holborn, daughter of James and Ellen Edwards. It is interesting that this Irish Catholic family chose to baptise their child in the local Anglican Church, but there was a lot of stigma around being a catholic at this time and it may have been that the local Catholic Church did not offer baptisms or did not have a priest available. Also, Mary's parents only married in the previous August, and Mary was born 3 months prior to this event, so maybe the local catholic church refused to do the baptism?

By the 1871 Census, Mary Edwards was still living with her parents in Bell Court, still in St Andrews parish. However, she is described as being 15 and a domestic servant ... she was actually only 12!

In the 1881 Census, Mary is a domestic servant living in the house of John Croie, a gentleman and his Aunt, Sarah Sach in Kensington. This would tie in with the marriage place of Mary Edwards and Arthur Parbery in 1882.

So, Mary becomes Parbery, certainly by the 1891 Census she is using this name, but as mentioned before, this is speculation as I do not have access to the Marriage Certificate. I am also not sure what happened to her husband after the marriage, as in 1891 Mary is living in Grosvenor Street, age 28 (should be 32 years!) with the piano tuner and his wife, a fellow barmaid. Certainly, there is no record of a Mary Parbery, of the right age, born Strand, London prior to this.

If this is Mary, is this where she was introduced to alcohol? It is in the next few years that her fortunes change. Did her husband leave her or throw her out? Was her drinking an embarrassment? She may have stopped being a barmaid due to her liking for a drink – possibly losing her job as a barmaid. From the mid 1890's she begins to turn up in the Workhouse records, described as a book folder.

In 1896, she is admitted to the City Road workhouse, Holborn for the months of January and February. In 1897, aged 38 years, she was admitted again for the month of December '97 and January '98. This pattern continued and in 1898 she was again admitted to the workhouse – this time in an intoxicated state. Possibly it was about this time that she was arrested for being drunk and disorderly and sentenced to a couple of years in St Joseph's Home for Inebriate Women, in Ashford Middlesex. I can find no record of her being sent to Ashford, nor how long her sentence was, but it was generally a couple of years

to try and ensure that the women were alcohol free on their release. Certainly, Mary was there on Census night in 1901, possibly just before she was released. Her drinking possibly continued, as the newspaper report for August 1901, details: Mary had been arrested for being 'disorderly' and while in the Police cells, attempted to commit suicide. Her 'crime' was punished by 6 months hard labour in Wormwood Scrubs and her charge sheet detailed 3 other crimes of being drunk and damage for which she had received sentences for.

In 1902, the evening standard reported that she had been caught breaking the windows of the Police Court, as a reprisal for being sentenced to two months for assaulting a police officer – a charge that she denied – which had cost her her job – it does not say which job she had at the time.

After that, the trail goes cold as she does not appear in any more newspaper reports of criminal records. Did she reform or did she commit suicide and this time was successful? The only death of a Mary Parbery is in Banbury, Oxfordshire in the March q of 1921 where 61 year old Mary Parbery dies – but was this our Mary?

***Janice Brinley Codd (August 2024)***

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