

# *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.*

## **Sarah Jameson 's Story**

*Warning, this account contains incidents of violence.*

Sarah Jameson or Jamieson was the third daughter of Hugh Jameson and Edwell James. Hugh and Edwell were married at St Paul's in Newport, Monmouthshire on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 1877.<sup>1</sup> Hugh was 21 year old and Edwell, who was already pregnant with her first child, was just 18 years old.

Their first daughter Mary Ellen was born later that summer and baptised on the 12<sup>th</sup> September.<sup>2</sup> A second daughter, Theresa, was born two years later in 1879. This small family were recorded on the 1881 census living at 19 Trosnant

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<sup>1</sup> Monmouthshire Marriages & Banns – page 208 (Findmypast)

<sup>2</sup> Monmouthshire Baptisms, Marriages and Burials - 1813-1919 (ancestry)

Street, Trevethin, which is around 10 miles from Newport.<sup>3</sup> Hugh was a Tin Worker and would have made a living out of making articles from tin, such as kettles, pans and pails.

Sarah was born a few months after the 1881 census was taken. She was baptised at St John's church in Newport on the 7<sup>th</sup> December. Her parents given address was 4 Cross Street which was the house of Sarah's maternal grandparents, Henry and Ellen James.<sup>4</sup> Henry like his son-in-law was a tin worker.<sup>5</sup> Sarah was followed by her first brother, John, who was born in 1886 but who died in infancy. The family moved to Brynmawr, Breconshire at some point after 1886 where their next child Harry was born in 1888. Harry was baptised in the church at Brynmawr on the 21<sup>st</sup> August that year.<sup>6</sup>

When the 1891 census was taken the family had returned to Newport and were living at 9 Caerleon Village.<sup>7</sup> Edwell had given birth to another son at the end of the previous year, but he also died in infancy later in 1891. The family had moved to a house in Fothergill Street, Newport where Hugh Jameson Jr. was born towards the end of 1892.<sup>8</sup> Baby Hugh was baptised on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November,<sup>9</sup> but died a few weeks later.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 1881 Census RG11/5250; Folio: 24; Page: 41;

<sup>4</sup> GRO Birth Indexes Sarah Jameson, Q4 1881 Newport, Monmouthshire, Wales, Vol 11a Page 180

<sup>5</sup> 1881 census: James Family; St Woollos, Class: RG11; Piece: 5263; Folio: 72; Page: 1;

<sup>6</sup> GRO Birth Indexes Henry Jamieson, Q3 1888, Crickhowell, Breconshire, Wales, Vol 11b Page 111

<sup>7</sup> 1891 Census RG12/4370 Christchurch, Monmouthshire

<sup>8</sup> GRO Birth Indexes Hugh Jameson Q4 1892, Newport, Monmouthshire, Wales, Vol 11a Page 198

<sup>9</sup> Monmouthshire, Wales, Anglican Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1892 – Hugh Jamieson

<sup>10</sup> GRO Death Indexes Hugh Jameson, Q4 1892 Newport, Monmouthshire, Vol 11a Page 124

Their last child Edwin, was born in early summer of 1894<sup>11</sup> and baptised on the 1<sup>st</sup> August.<sup>12</sup> The next two years saw the death of Hugh, Edwell and baby Edwin. In the winter of 1895 Hugh Jameson died at the Newport Union Workhouse of Cirrhosis of the liver; he was 39 years old.<sup>13</sup> Edwin, who didn't quite make it to his second birthday, died on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1896.<sup>14</sup> His mother died a few months later.<sup>15</sup>

By the age of 15, Sarah was orphaned and homeless.

On the face of it the Jameson family appeared to be much like many other poor, working class families, trying to get by. However, there was much more to their story.

Sarah grew up in a household where drunkenness and violence were normal. The local newspapers provided an insight into the family.

It starts with a story in *The Star of Gwent* when Hugh Jameson was fined 10 shillings for being drunk and riotous in Pontypool on the 25<sup>th</sup> June 1881.<sup>16</sup> The next mention of the Jameson family was not with Hugh but with Edwell. The *Monmouthshire Merlin* of the 10<sup>th</sup> March 1882 reported that Edwell Jameson attended court, with a baby in her arms, to hear a charge of assault on Catherine Davies of the Foaming Tankard beerhouse in Cross Street. Edwell

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<sup>11</sup> GRO Birth Indexes Edward Jameson; Q3 1894 Newport, Monmouthshire, Wales, Vol 11a Page 188

<sup>12</sup> Monmouthshire Baptisms, Marriages and Burials 1813-1919 – Edwin Jameson

<sup>13</sup> GRO Death Index; Newport, Monmouthshire, Q4 1895 Vol 11a Page 121

<sup>14</sup> GRO Death Index; Q2 1896, Monmouthshire, Vol 11a Page 111

<sup>15</sup> GRO Death Index – Edwell Jameson, Q4 1896, Monmouthshire Vol 11a Page 125

<sup>16</sup> Star of Gwent 08 July 1881

was referred to as “being a bad character.” She was fined 10s 6d. The baby in her arms would likely have been Sarah.

Three months later Hugh Jameson was arrested for assaulting his wife. His attendance in court was reported by *The Star of Gwent* on the 9<sup>th</sup> June 1882. The court was told that Jameson had arrived home on the evening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> June under the influence of drink. He had hit Edwell because she had no food for him. He struck her, and as she tried to escape the beating, he struck her a second time. Jameson was unrepentant and said his wife had “deserved it.” He was bound over to keep the peace.

By October 1882, Jameson was again up before the Magistrates. This time he was charged with assaulting his neighbour Mary Ann Burke.<sup>17</sup> Mary Ann told the magistrates that Hugh had been beating his wife and when she had intervened, Jameson hit her on the head with a China pot, causing a two inch cut which bled profusely. The magistrate said this was the third time Jameson had been in front of him for assaulting his wife. Jameson had the option of a 40s fine or a month’s imprisonment.

In 1883 both Hugh and Edwell were in court together.<sup>18</sup> They were charged with stealing tins and money from Edwell’s father, Henry James. James had left Hugh and Edwell at his work premises while he was away in Cardiff. When he returned the following day James realised that 31 small cake tins, a pot and a washing-up tin were missing, along with 4s and 9d. When James questioned

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<sup>17</sup> the Star of Gwent 6<sup>th</sup> October 1882

<sup>18</sup> The Star of Gwent 20th July 1883 (findmypast)

Hugh and Edwell, they said they had kept the money as wages for minding his premises but denied stealing the cake tins. The case was dismissed.

In 1884 Hugh and Edwell were charged with being drunk and disorderly.<sup>19</sup> Hugh was similarly mentioned in other newspapers up to 1891.

The deaths of Hugh and Edwell appeared to make things worse as the three girls were now homeless and had gained a reputation to rival that of their parent's.

Eldest daughter Mary Ellen was brought before the courts in August 1896 for being drunk and disorderly and assaulting three policemen. She was imprisoned for 2 months.<sup>20</sup>

Theresa Jameson, referred to as a Tinware Hawker, was imprisoned in 1898 for assault and drunkenness.<sup>21</sup> She had stabbed the hand and struck the head of barmaid Ellen Buckley at the Hope & Anchor public house in Cross Street.<sup>22</sup> When imprisoned the following year, again for being drunk and disorderly, Theresa was referred to by the Court as "one of three sisters well known to the Newport Police."<sup>23</sup>

Sarah was first mentioned by name when she was 15 years old, when she and Mary Ellen Dixon were arrested for fighting in Dock Street. Shortly after, Sarah

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<sup>19</sup> The Star of Gwent 25<sup>th</sup> July 1884 (findmypast)

<sup>20</sup> The Star of Gwent 14<sup>th</sup> August 1896 (findmypast)

<sup>21</sup> HO 140 Home Office: Calendar of Prisoners; Reference: HO 140/187 - Counties: Merionethshire-Rutland

<sup>22</sup> Monmouthshire Beacon 21 October 1898

<sup>23</sup> Western Mail 09 March 1899

and her sister Theresa were imprisoned for seven days for being drunk and for fighting in the street.<sup>24</sup>

Much was written about the three Jameson girls. But what of Henry, Hugh and Edwell's only surviving son?

Henry was only 8 years old when his mother died. A decision was made by the authorities to send him to the Caerleon Industrial School, no doubt to keep him from falling into the same ways as the rest of his family. The school would have given him some discipline, consistency and training for a trade. Sadly, Henry did not get that opportunity as he died at the school in 1899 when he was just 11 years old.<sup>25</sup>

Incidents of drunken behaviour and brushes with the law continued for Sarah until the summer of 1899 when several reports in the press highlighted Sarah's dreadful situation.

A report in the South Wales news of the 6<sup>th</sup> June 1899 was headed "A Newport Girl-Drinker" – it stated – "Sarah Jameson, one of Newport's girl drinkers who, though but 18 years of age, has been before the Uskside borough magistrates on 16 occasions, appeared in the prisoners' dock at the Police Court on Monday. The girl is a homeless and friendless outcast, whose parents are both dead, and she wanders about the streets at night, being moved on from doorway to doorway by the police. She was found in the early hours of Sunday

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<sup>24</sup> Western Mail in 1897

<sup>25</sup> GRO Death Indexes; Henry Jamieson Q4 1899; Newport, Monmouthshire, Vol 11a Page 129 – reported in the Star of Gwent 29<sup>th</sup> September 1899

morning lying helplessly drunk in Fothergill-street, and assistance had to be obtained in order to get the girl to the police station. The poor unfortunate, who first appeared before the Court when she was but 12 years of age, was fined 10s or seven days imprisonment.”

Following this, there was a report in the South Wales Daily News a couple of weeks later under the title “Newport’s Outcast Girl.” It stated that after her last court appearance Sarah had returned to sleeping on the streets. A commitment was finally made to remand Sarah to the workhouse until a place could be found for her in an Inebriates’ Home.<sup>26</sup>

Sarah was next in Court to discuss the arrangements to send her to an Inebriates Home. The Court confirmed that contact had been made with the Sister Superior of St. Joseph’s, a Catholic Inebriates Home in Ashford, Middlesex. The Home was willing to take her, under the condition she was a Catholic. Sarah had previously told members of the Court she was a Catholic, but on this occasion she said she wasn’t. After finally saying she was a Catholic, arrangements were made for her to be admitted to the home. Sarah must have been one of the first inmates to be admitted to St Joseph's as it opened on the 8<sup>th</sup> April 1899. The home admitted Roman Catholic women from any county in England and Wales. There were 50 beds and the cost of their keep was 7 shillings (35p) a which was paid for by the sending local authority. By the end of the year there were 42 women in the home, all of who were expected to remain for at least a year.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> South Wales Daily News 1<sup>st</sup> July 1899 – National Library of Wales

<sup>27</sup> Lost Hospitals of London; <https://ezitis.myzen.co.uk/index.html>

Sarah committed to stay at the home for 3 years and she was still there when the census was taken on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1901.<sup>28</sup> Sarah was one of the youngest inmates; only Mary Stack from Notting Hill was younger than Sarah by 2 years. It appears that Sarah stayed for the whole 3 year period. She wasn't heard of again until 1905 when she was back in Wales and was in the newspapers for all the wrong reasons. On the 7<sup>th</sup> July 1905, Sarah Jameson, along with two men and another woman were charged with stealing two flannel shirts, two mufflers, and other articles from a tramping labourer named George Biddulph. Sarah Jameson and the other woman, Margaret Sullivan, both described as prostitutes were found guilty of theft and imprisoned for four weeks.<sup>29</sup>

Later that same year she made the newspapers again. Sarah Jameson, a young woman "of repute", was charged with being drunk and disorderly and assaulting P.C.'s Jenkins and Vatcher. According to the evidence of Jenkins, Sarah fought "like a wild cat." She also used disgusting language, kicked Jenkins in the stomach and had to be conveyed to the Police Station in the ambulance. Sarah strenuously denied the assault and said that the "police had got it in for her." She said she had been "off the booze for several months," but added, "I own I had a drop on Christmas Eve." This appearance in Court was her 24<sup>th</sup>. This time she was fined 42s in all, or a month in prison.<sup>30</sup>

This pattern of behaviour continued. Three years later in July 1908 Sarah, who was visiting Usk, was charged with vagrancy. Complaints had been received about the behaviour of her and two male companions. The Police found the

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<sup>28</sup> St. Joseph's Inebriate Reformatory, Ashford, Middlesex RG13 1171 folios 12-13

<sup>29</sup> Pontypool Free Press 7<sup>th</sup> July 1905 (findmypast)

<sup>30</sup> South Wales Weekly Argus and Monmouthshire Advertiser 30 December 1905 (findmypast)



trio asleep under a hayrick at Llanllowell Sarah was sentenced to 10 days hard labour.<sup>31</sup>

Then suddenly the news stories stopped and nothing further was to be found. Had she finally managed to give up drinking or had she died? A search of death records returned no results at all.

There was a small glimmer of hope when a record of a marriage was found between Sarah Jameson and William Woods.<sup>32</sup> It was her. She and William Woods, a coal miner, married at the Register Office in Pontypool on the 24<sup>th</sup> June 1909. Two years later they were recorded on the 1911 census running a . Boarding House.<sup>33</sup> Hopefully, at age 30 this was the start of a happier life for Sarah.

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<sup>31</sup> Pontypool Free Press 17<sup>th</sup> July 1905 (findmypast)

<sup>32</sup> GRO Marriage Index Jameson/Woods Q2 1909, Pontypool, Vol 11a Page 351

<sup>33</sup> 1911 census; Class RG14; Piece: 31898; Enumeration District: 03 – Pontypool, Monmouthshire