

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in September 2024, in preparation for the November 2024 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who were found residing or working in various homes for Fallen Women in the census returns.

Fallen Women or Vulnerable Girls? The story of Lucy Adderley and her family

Please note that this story includes an account of an infant death in tragic circumstances.

When I first met Lucy, she was sixteen; it was 1891 and she was just one of a long list of inmates of The County Industrial Home in Stafford.¹ Although she was still a girl, she was branded as a fallen woman. A forgotten woman. Little did I know that her story would involve an accusation of murder and four generations of illegitimacy. The home where Lucy found herself, to give it its full title, was the 'The Staffordshire County Industrial Home for Discharged Female Ex-Prisoners and Friendless Women'.

To understand the circumstances surrounding Lucy's life we have to travel back to the late eighteenth century, when young Martha Adderley was growing up in Gnosall, seven miles to the east of Stafford. Gnosall was a rural parish, situated in the Doley Brook valley; a village with a mill, whose inhabitants were largely dependent on agriculture and associated trades. There is more than one possible baptism for Martha but it is most likely that her parents were Richard and Ann and that Martha was born about 1785. In 1813, she presented two daughters, Ann and Mary, for baptism at Gnosall Church. Martha was working as a servant at Gnosall Heath at this time². It does not seem that that these girls were twins, as later records suggest that Ann was born in 1811 or 1812³. Despite Ann's name being first in the baptism register, it is almost certain that Mary was the elder by at least six years.⁴

We know nothing of Martha's life. Was she let down by a young man whom she'd expected to marry? Were her pregnancies the result of more casual and perhaps unwelcome encounters? In either case, in accordance with the attitudes at the time, Martha and her children would have been stigmatised and vilified by society. No further firm evidence has been found for Martha and the story now turns to her daughter, Ann.

At the age of eighteen, Ann gave birth to an illegitimate daughter, in Gnosall, whom she named Sarah. At first, the only record that could be found for Sarah was the 1871 census, when she was living at Gnosall, with her mother, Ann and was working as a domestic servant.⁵ The 1841 census reveals what are almost certainly two more illegitimate children for Ann. John was born about 1834; this 1841 census entry is his only confirmed appearance in the records.⁶ A daughter, Frances, was born four years later. She is probably the Fanny Adderley whose birth was registered in 1838.⁷ When Frances was baptised, in December 1838 at Gnosall, her mother, Ann, was described as a single woman of Gnosall Heath.⁸ In 1841, Ann, John and Frances were living in Gnosall Heath, in the same household as

Charles and Margaret Beardmore and their children; Charles was a shoemaker.⁹

A succession of illegitimate children such as Ann's, does raise some questions about her lifestyle. Was she in a stable relationship with someone who was unwilling or unable to marry her? Was the birth of three children out of wedlock an occupational hazard? We will probably never know. It did however prompt a search in the General Register Office indexes for other illegitimate Adderleys born in the area about this time. This highlighted a Lucy Adderley, born in 1843.¹⁰ The christian name made it seem worth purchasing a birth certificate and sure enough, Lucy had been born at The Hollies in Gnosall, the daughter of Ann.¹¹ The Hollies were a row of cottages within the parish. Being a more unusual Christian name, it was practical to search the census for all Lucy's born about 1843 in Gnosall and find that she had been enumerated in 1851, along with her sister Fanny, as 'Averley'. The sisters were living with their aunt, Mary Birch and Mary's son Joseph 'Averley'.¹² There is no further sign of Fanny but Lucy can be traced further. In 1861 she was a dairymaid on the farm of John Lees in Penkridge.¹³ She married, as Lucy Jane, to Samuel Jenkinson in 1865 in Gnosall.¹⁴ The 1851 census find then led to a search for Mary Birch in 1841. She was living in Eastgate, Stafford. Her son Joseph was with her, this time listed as Birch, along with a Sarah Birch, aged ten, who I believe is almost certainly Ann's eldest daughter.¹⁵ No children have been found for Mary and her husband John Birch; Joseph was born illegitimately eight years before Mary married.¹⁶

Where Sarah was between 1841 and 1871 and what happened to her after 1871, remains a mystery. On the same day that Lucy married Samuel Jenkinson, a John Adderley, who also had no father named, married Amelia Twinner. They can be found in the 1871 census, which suggests that John was born about 1820¹⁷ in Gnosall but he can't be linked to Lucy.¹⁸

We now have four illegitimate children for Ann but this is not all. In 1848¹⁹ she gave birth to a daughter Esther,²⁰ who was living with Ann in 1861, lodging in the home of William Simpson in Gnosall; Ann had no listed occupation.²¹ No amount of creative searching can locate Ann and Esther in 1851 and Ann disappears from the records after 1871; she may have died in 1873.²²

Esther's life took a similar turn to that of her mother and grandmother. In 1868, she gave birth to an illegitimate son, William. Her address was given as The Hollies, in Gnosall.²³ Two years later, Esther's daughter, Sarah, was born. William and Sarah were in the 1871 with their grandmother Ann and aunt Sarah and it would be easy to jump to the conclusion that these children were Sarah's however baptism records make it clear that they were Esther's children.²⁴ Sarah was baptised as Mary Ann but I believe these are the same person. Enumerated as 'Ann', Sarah/Mary Ann was with her mother and siblings in 1881.²⁵ In 1890, she married Herbert Keble In Gnosall.²⁶

Three more children followed for Esther, Lucy in 1874, John in 1879 and Fanny in 1882.²⁷ In 1881, Esther and her four younger children were living at the Hollies in Gnosall and Esther was working as a domestic servant;²⁸ her eldest son, William, was an errand boy nearby.²⁹ William later became a coal miner in Audley, Staffordshire. He used Addley as his surname, married Emily Bossons in 1892 and had several children.³⁰ His family cannot be traced after 1907. Esther had John and Fanny baptised together in Gnosall on 4 February 1883.³¹ John died in Mesopotamia in 1916 and is buried in Amara Cemetery, in modern day Iraq.³² In 1891, Esther and Fanny were living together in two rooms in Turnpike Road, Gnosall and Esther was working as a charwoman.³³ Fanny went on to marry Alfred Shaw in 1904³⁴ but she cannot be located in the 1901 census.

This then is the family that Lucy grew up in but what of Lucy herself? Unlike her siblings, there is no record of a baptism for Lucy, not does her birth seem to have been registered. We know that Esther gave birth to her in about 1874 in Gnosall and that she was with her mother at the Hollies in 1881.³⁵ By the age of sixteen, Lucy was considered to be a fallen woman and was in the Staffordshire County Industrial Home for Discharged Female Ex-Prisoners and Friendless Women.³⁶ Was this because of Lucy's own shortcomings or because a place of safety was thought necessary because she was in moral danger? Was Lucy's incarceration because of Esther's behaviour, which with five illegitimate children to her name, might have been the case? If so, surely Fanny would not have been allowed to remain with her mother. It seems that we need to look more closely at Lucy's own behaviour.

There is nothing in the newspapers to suggest that Lucy had committed a criminal offence prior to 1891, so perhaps she was not one of the Home's inmates who was sent there following discharge from Stafford Prison. If her time in the home was meant to rehabilitate Lucy, it failed. It didn't take long after leaving the home for Lucy to step outside the strict moral codes of the time. In February 1896 she gave birth to a daughter Frances Hannah, or Fanny. The child was baptised twice. Firstly at a few weeks old in Newport, Shropshire, where Lucy 'of Gnosall' was an inmate of the workhouse,³⁷ then she was baptised again at the end of the year in Gnosall.³⁸ Two more children followed in quick succession, Ernest Albert in 1898 and Frank on 12 July 1899. At the time of Frank's baptism, on 20 August, Lucy's address was given as Stone Union Workhouse and it is almost certain that that was where Frank was born.³⁹ Stone was about thirteen miles from Gnosall. In October 1900, Lucy 'of Brook Lane' enrolled Fanny in the school at Ranton.⁴⁰ Young Fanny was to play an important role in the tragic events that followed. The following year Lucy was living with her mother and the three children in Brook Lane, Ranton. No occupation was listed for Lucy but Esther was a charwoman.⁴¹

Matters did not improve for Lucy over the following few years. In 1902, she gave birth to short-lived twin girls, Myra and Lucy,⁴² followed by another son, Harry, in December 1903. Harry had been born in the workhouse in Newport, Shropshire, which was only six miles from Gnosall, albeit in a different county.⁴³ If six illegitimate children in eight years were not enough, matters were to get decidedly worse for Lucy. In the summer of 1905, Lucy began living with Charles Frederick Blythe, a labourer who had already had dealings with the courts for the theft of a shirt.⁴⁴ By the spring of 1906 Lucy was pregnant with a child that was acknowledged to be Charles'.⁴⁵ What happened next was widely reported in the press across the country.

Charles and the heavily pregnant Lucy were living in Newport, in the home of a Mrs Lily Locke at Marsh Lane. It seems likely that Lucy's surviving children were living with their grandmother. The prospect of a seventh grandchild led to Esther falling out with Lucy. Nonetheless, presumably feeling that the birth was imminent, despite it being a month earlier than expected, Charles and Lucy travelled the four miles to Ranton, where Esther, was living and working as a launderess. A few days later, on 31 December, Lucy gave birth to a son. In the next room lay her eldest daughter, seven year old Fanny. A minute or two after the birth, Esther brought Lucy a cup of tea and took the baby into another room. Fanny saw her grandmother, Esther, put the child in a box. This box was initially placed in the pit reserved for ashes from the fire. At some point after that, the box was retrieved and buried in a lane about half a miles away. As a consequence, following an inquest, Esther, Lucy and Charles Blythe were put on trial for murder.

Poor little Fanny had to face the trauma of giving evidence in court. The newspapers reported that she 'wept bitterly' throughout the proceedings but she testified that she had seen her mother on the floor and had heard

the child crying before her grandmother put it in a box. Esther said that, after the child was born, she heard Lucy cry out "Lord take me" a few times and on entering the bedroom, she saw the baby on the floor and exclaimed, "Lawks Lucy it's dead".

Charles had tried to get a death certificate from the registrar, saying that the child was stillborn but the registrar refused to issue a certificate as Charles had been in the kitchen and not in the room at the time of the birth. Charles, accompanied by little Fanny, had gone to the sexton at Ranton church to ask if he could bury the child but in the absence of a certificate, the sexton refused.

It is unclear who summoned the police but Blythe was arrested by P.C. Smith. He claimed that he was in Newport when the child was put in the ash pit but admitted to retrieving it and reburying it. Esther, when questioned, tried to shift the blame on to Charles and the midden was searched. Charles then directed the police to where he had buried the child's body. On 2 February, the body was found, wrapped in brown paper and an old apron and a post mortem was carried out. The Doctor, Charles Reid, ruled that the child had not been stillborn and stated that there was a brain injury commensurate with an act of violence. At the inquest, Lucy broke down in tears but was able to give evidence; she claimed the injury was the result of the child falling out of bed on to 'a utensil'.

Initially Esther, Lucy and Charles were indicted for murder, to which they all pled not guilty. After a discussion between the legal representatives, it was decided to proceed with the charge of wilful murder against Esther but Charles and Lucy were to face the lesser charge of concealment of a birth. When this was announced, Lucy collapsed in court and the trial had to be halted whilst she recovered. The charge against Esther was then also reduced, largely because the evidence relied on the testimony of a seven year old. After the evidence was heard, the case against Lucy and Charles

was withdrawn, as Charles had approached the registrar and the sexton, so was clearly not trying to conceal the birth. The Judge said that despite the 'suspicion of something else' he felt the jury should return a not guilty verdict, which they did.⁴⁶ The little boy's death certificate, issued after the inquest but before the trial reads, "Found dead buried in a hedge bank and that the cause of death was haemorrhage from the brain caused by a blow. [wilful murder against Charles Blythe, Esher Adderley and Lucy Adderley]".⁴⁷ The newspaper accounts of the inquest and trial leave many unanswered questions but the official verdict remains that of not guilty.

Such a tragic and traumatic experience would have impacted on the whole family and the story clearly does not end here. Lucy's background no doubt influenced her path in life, so how did her children fare after the trial? The 1911 census provides us with a snapshot of where they were four years after these events. Esther was living alone in Ranton, no longer burdened by looking after her own, or Lucy's, children.⁴⁸ She was to die in 1919.⁴⁹ Lucy and Charles Blythe remained together, marrying in 1909 and having a further four children together, two of whom died in infancy.⁵⁰ In 1911, Lucy and Charles were lodging at 3 Salter's Lane in Newport; the three roomed house also contained a family of five and a single man. None of Lucy's older children were with her.⁵¹ By 1921, Charles, Lucy and two sons who had been born after their marriage, were living in a four-roomed lodging house in Marsh Road, Newport, with five single men and two single women.⁵² Lucy died the following year and Charles in 1931.⁵³ No marriages or descendants have been found for the two sons who were with Charles and Lucy in 1921; the elder probably died in Birmingham.⁵⁴

How did Lucy's Adderley children fare? In the 1911 census, at the age of sixteen, Fanny Hannah was in Peckham High Street, London in the Maria Rye Home for Destitute Girls.⁵⁵ A month later, Fanny was one of many children who was sent out on the *Victorian*, sailing from Liverpool to Quebec, Canada before going on to Niagara on the Lake, under the auspices

of the Church of England Children's Society.⁵⁶ She thus became one of 100,000 Home Children, sent from England in the century following 1869. Fanny married and had a family in Canada; let's hope that she was able to put the ordeal she suffered as a child behind her.

The eldest of Lucy's sons, Ernest Albert was put on board HMS Southampton, which was run as an Industrial School Training Ship. When the family was split up, Frank was sent to the National Children's Home and Orphanage, Bournier Road, Bethnal Green in East London.⁵⁷ Frank later settled in Lincolnshire, where he had a family. The 1911 census finds seven year old Harry in an institution too, in his case in the Hereford Working Boys Industrial School.⁵⁸ Scattered across the country as they were, it seems very unlikely that the siblings had any further contact with each other.

Janet Few

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¹⁷ Other records suggest that this John may have been born c.1810. By 1881 Amelia was living with Thomas Higgins, as if she was his wife. She married Higgins in 1883, John having died the previous year,

¹⁸ 1871 for Newport Road, Gnosall, Staffordshire RG10 2813 folio 33.

¹⁹ Esther's age is not consistent in the records but c.1848 seems the most likely. No birth registration or baptism has been found.

²⁰ Enumerated as Hester.

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