

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.

Margaret & Mary Lillie

Ann Lilley was a single parent to two daughters. Margaret was born on 2 June 1855 at Turners Court in Leeds:

Second June 1855 Turner's Court	Margaret	girl		Ann Lilley		X The mark of Ann Lilley Mother Turner's Court Leeds
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Mary was born on 17 February 1859 at 11 Harper Yard, Leeds:

Seventeenth February 1859 11 Harper Yard	Mary	girl		Ann Lilley		X The mark of Ann Lilley Mother 11 Harper Yard Leeds
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The 1861 census shows an Ann Lilley (a widow, aged 28) and her two daughters Mary Ann (5) and Mary (2) living at 22 Corn Hill, Leeds,

Yorkshire. As the surname Lilley and variants is not that common, the details on all the certificates I have found fit, and the two daughters are the right age, I believe this to be Margaret & Mary living with their mother.

Ann was determined to provide for herself and her daughters, and took work as a charwoman. Although published much later (1921) this description of a charwoman's work was probably still the same as it had been in Ann's time: "a daily non-resident domestic worker who renders casual assistance in a household, offices or elsewhere (scrubbing, cleaning, etc.)."

By 1868, the family had moved to Middle Fold, a steep narrow lane with *"both the street and the houses are in a deplorable state. The latter, which occupy one side of the fold, are old and wretched, and in many cases the windows are almost devoid of glass – a dirty ragged 'clout' or a sheet of paper being used as a handy but by no means serviceable substitute... Ashes and refuse cover every inch of it, and down the open gutter which wends its uncertain way in the centre of the street trickles a filthy offensive stream... And so things go on; the filthy open privies – in the proportion of one to every eight or nine families – becoming more abominable week by week; and, by means of the horrible stench they emit, slowly spreading a malarious poison, which must at intervals, in the future as in the past, result in serious outbreaks of fever. Middle-fold is, beyond all question, one of the most wretched, comfortless spots in our borough."* (Leeds Mercury - Tuesday 9 February 1869)

It was in this miserable street that Ann succumbed to dropsy aged just 35. Dropsy would today be known as oedema – swelling of the tissues caused

by an accumulation of fluid. Ann's dropsy may have been caused by another illness, such as cardiac failure, lung problems, malnutrition, liver disease or pancreatitis.

Seventeenth April 1868 Middle Fold	Ann Lilly	Female	35 years	Charwoman	Dropsy Certified	x The Mark of Ellen Knall In attendance 20 Middle Fold Leeds
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We will never know who cared for Margaret and Mary in the six months following their mother's death; perhaps they were taken in by a friend or relative. But whatever solution had been found was not sustainable long-term, as on 8th October 1868, Margaret was admitted to the Leeds Industrial School aged 13, and was joined three months later on 12 January 1869 by her sister Mary aged 10.

The Leeds Industrial School register was printed with various heading such as physical description, schools attended, whether they could read or write, parents names and occupations, details of their offence and sentence, previous character, and character when discharged. Frustratingly, the only details given for Margaret and Mary were their names, ages, and places of birth. Perhaps they were admitted to the Leeds Industrial School because they were orphans and not because they had committed an offence.

There is a servant called Margaret Lilley who seems certain to be Margaret in the 1871 census, living at 21 Potter Newton Lane, Potter Newton, Leeds, Yorkshire. Margaret was a servant to Mary Gent (a 55 year old widow) and her 32 year old daughter Margaret, a schoolmistress.

Mary Lillie was still in the Leeds Industrial School at the time of the 1871 census.

And there the trail goes cold. Despite extensive searching (see negative searches below), sadly I have been unable to find any further information on Margaret and Mary. There were some entries in the General Register Marriage Index which may well have been Margaret and Mary but they were not in Leeds registration district, so buying these certificates might be the next logical step for anyone wishing to take this story further.

Margaret and Mary's lives were rooted in tragedy and poverty; I hope their later years were more comfortable and stable than their early lives.

Liz Craig January 2023

Negative search results

Can't find Margaret Lill* born 1855 +/- 2 years born in Yorkshire in the 1881, 1891, 1901 or 1911 censuses

Can't find Mary Lill* born 1859 +/- 2 years born in Yorkshire in the 1881, 1891, 1901 or 1911 censuses

British Newspaper Archive:

"turners court " AND leeds -manchester – no relevant results

"turners court, leeds" -manchester – no results

"harpers yard, leeds" – no results

"harpers yard" AND leeds 1860-1869 – no results which would add any context

"ann lilley" AND leeds – no relevant results

"corn hill, leeds" – no relevant results

"corn hill" AND leeds – 2126 results

"22 corn hill" AND leeds -london – no results

[Accessed 15 March 2023]

Can't find Margaret Lilley (exact, sounds like & soundex) born 1855 +/- 2 years in Ancestry's All England & Wales, Criminal Registers, 1791-1892

Can't find Mary Lilley (exact, sounds like & soundex) born 1859 +/- 2 years in Ancestry's All England & Wales, Criminal Registers, 1791-1892

There are 6 results for Margaret Lill* born 1855 +/- 5 years in the 'England & Wales, Crime, Prisons & Punishment, 1770-1935' collection on Findmypast but one was in Derby, another in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and the others in London so it is not possible to connect these to this Mary Lilley.

There were no results for Mary Lill* born 1859 +/- 5 years in the 'England & Wales, Crime, Prisons & Punishment, 1770-1935' collection on Findmypast

Marriage:

GRO Index: can't find a marriage 1871 onwards for a Margaret Lill* in Leeds RD, but there are several candidates in West Riding of Yorkshire RD

I checked Ancestry's 'All West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1813-1935' collection for Margaret Lilley and the entries are either too early or too late

GRO Index: can't find a marriage 1871 onwards for a Mary Lill* in Leeds RD, but there are several candidates in West Riding of Yorkshire RD.

I checked Ancestry's 'All West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1813-1935' collection for Mary Lilley born 1859 +/- 2 years. There were 6 potentially relevant results, none in Leeds, and all had father's names on the certificate. Although Mary could have given a fictitious father's name, without any other corroborating evidence, it's difficult to say whether any of these entries could be Mary.

Death/Burial:

I can't find a death 1871 onwards for a Margaret or Mary Lill* in Leeds RD, and no candidates in West Riding of Yorkshire RD but they may well have married and therefore her death would be registered under a different name.

YorkshireBMD checked for Lillie, Lilley, Lilly and Lily

<http://www.yorkshirebmd.org.uk/bmdsearch.php>

Sources

All West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1813-1935 accessible on www.ancestry.co.uk

1861 census RG09 Piece number 3381 Folio 64 Page 7

1871 census RG10 Piece 4576 Folio 77 Page 34

Birth certificate of Margaret Lilley

Birth certificate of Mary Lilley

Death certificate of Ann Lilley

A Dictionary of Occupational Terms Based on the Classification of Occupations used in the Census of Population, 1921

<http://doot.spub.co.uk/code.php?value=922>

[Accessed 15 March 2023]

Leeds Mercury - Tuesday 9 February 1869

University of Leeds website: Dropsy

<https://library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections/collection/2156>

[Accessed 15 March 2023]

West Yorkshire Reformatory School Records 1856-1922, originals at West Yorkshire Archives Service WRT/1/72-77, 81-84 accessible on

www.ancestry.co.uk