

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

Elizabeth Udey's Story

Elizabeth Udey, sometimes spelt Udy, was born on the 2nd of July 1826 in the Cornish village of Menheniot. She grew up in the north of this rural parish in the hamlet of Merrymeet. She was the youngest of eight children of shoemaker Joseph Udey and his wife Grace Udey née Prower. The West of England Institution for the Education for the Deaf and Dumb usually admitted pupils when they were between the ages of eight and twelve and at nine years old, in January 1836, Elizabeth was sent to Exeter as one of their pupils. Life in a busy city such as Exeter would probably have come as quite a shock to Elizabeth, who was used to a quiet rural parish. It is unclear quite how much contact they would have had with the community beyond the walls of the institution but the pupils were certainly taken to St. Leonard's Church for weekly services.



Menheniot Church

At the end of 1835, the Ladies' Committee put forward a proposal that more girls should be admitted and it may be that Elizabeth's admission was a result of this initiative. To be accepted as a pupil, Elizabeth would need to have been recommended by subscribers to the institution. The vicar would need to write an reference and the local doctor would have to certify that she had no physical problems apart from her deafness.



Menheniot Village

Elizabeth spent five years at the school, during which time Mrs Winsor was in post as Matron and teacher, assisted by her younger sister Euphemia. By 1837, the expense of running the school was causing some concern and the provision of jam, bread and butter was restricted to five days a week. Beer was substituted for cider. By 1841 was back living with her family but this might have been an extended holiday rather than an indication that she had left the school at this point. In 1845, her father died but it is likely that Elizabeth was working by then.

The training that Elizabeth received at the school enable her to obtain at post as a servant in the household of farmer, Samuel Raby, who had two other live-in house servants at Belaytha Farm. Ten years. Later Elizabeth is the only servant for plumber and brazier, Gilbert Symons, who lived in Fore Street, the main thoroughfare in the town of Liskeard. Elizabeth was clearly very capable to overcome her disability and be able to cope with this role.

Elizabeth later went to work at Treboul, in St. Germans and from there she was admitted to the Bodmin lunatic asylum. It is quite likely that this had more to do with her disability than her mental state. She died there on 18th December 1868, of Servus or Servous Apoplexy. This would be a stroke accompanied by fluid on the brain, possibly the result of a head injury.

It has been pleasing to bring Elizabeth back from obscurity. She was my fourth cousin four times removed.

Sources

Local Studies Register of Applications for Admission 1827-1834 for the West of England Institution for the Deaf DHC 7645C by kind permission of Devon Archives and Local Studies.

The Minute Book of the Ladies' Committee of the West of England Institution for the Deaf DHC 7645C by kind permission of Devon Archives and Local Studies.

1841 census for Merrymeet, Menheniot, Cornwall HO107 133/6 folio 124

1851 census for Beloytha, Menheniot, Cornwall HO107 1902 folio 8

1861 census Fore Street, Liskeard, Cornwall RG9 1529 folio 54

Index to Parish records for Menheniot, Cornwall via www.cornwall-opc-database.org

The General Registrar's indexes of birth, marriage and death

Death certificate for Elizabeth Udey pdf from the General Register Office