

# *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.*

## **Emily Maud Birch's Story**

Emily was born on 29 July 1891 in Chartridge, Chesham in Buckinghamshire and was baptised at Little Missenden six weeks later. Her father, Samuel was a farm labourer and her mother was called Annie. Emily was the youngest of 6 children, and it was the 3 daughters of the family of who were all born deaf and dumb.

Emily attended the local infant school, where she had 'apparent intellect' and it was possibly during this time, she contracted whooping cough and measles. In July 1898, she was elected to attend the Old Kent Road school, her fees being paid by a local Farmer, possibly her father's employer. In September 1898 she was admitted to the school, and her parents were not found to have been related.

On entry in March 1899 to Old Kent Road, they described her as 'rather dull' although she 'had improved somewhat lately' by her next assessment. Emily was transferred to the Margate Asylum in January 1900 and by May of the same year, she had made a 'little progress but is not a bright child'. In the 1901 Census, Emily is shown as being aged 9 and a pupil at the Margate Asylum, along with her sister, Elizabeth Annie.

When she left Margate in July 1907, after being confirmed at Ospringe Church in West Faversham in the May, she was described as having 'fairly good' intellect and described as being 'a willing and industrious girl'.

Emily was shown as living back at home in the 1911 Census. The family was living at Essex Rd, Chesham and her father is still working as a Farm Labourer. The person who completed the census return, listed down all the children, even though some of the boys were not at home on census night as they were in the army. Emily was working as a Laundress, aged 19 years.

On 24 June 1916, she marries a fellow student from the Margate Asylum, who was also deaf and dumb, called George George. There was such interest in the event that it was recorded in the Buckingham Examiner, as the Reverend used an 'Interpreter' to help with the service.

Emily and George had about 3 daughters, and when the eldest of their daughters married in 1939, the other 2 daughters were bridesmaids. In the 1939 Register, George was described as a Builder's Joiner and Emily as doing unpaid domestic duties. Living with them are their 2 youngest daughters, Edna a domestic servant and Mary, who is still at school.

Emily George died in October 1961 in Stamford, Suffolk aged 70 years.

### **Sarah Jane Birch**

Sarah was born in June 1882 in Ballenger, Great Missenden, the eldest of the 3 sisters. She was baptised in April 1889 aged 7 years, possibly just before attending the infant school.

There are not many records relating to Sarah, but in the 1891 Census she was enumerated at home with her parents, described as a scholar and noted as being deaf and dumb. She was elected to the Old Kent Road school in July 1891 and was noted as being aged 10 years and having attended Infant school and that she had had Cowpox and Whooping Cough. She was sponsored by a Farmer, who was possibly her father's employer and was recorded as being of 'Moderate intellect'.

She went to the Margate Asylum in January 1893 and left in July 1898, but she was retained for about 6 months at the Asylum on Domestic Duties. In the 1901 Census, Sarah was recorded as being a Domestic Servant in the house of Daniel Maskell, a PO Letter Sorter and his family. In the 1911 Census, she was living at home but obviously the family called her 'Jenny'. She is enumerated as being 29 years of age and a laundress.

In the 1939 Register, Sarah is living in the Chesham area with Dennis Prowse, widower and a jobbing Gardener, working as his Housekeeper. Sarah never married and a death record for September 1966 in Canterbury has been found.

### **Elizabeth Annie Birch**

Elizabeth was born on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1886 at Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire, the middle of the three sisters. Lizzie was also born deaf and dumb and was also baptised in April 1889 at Little Missenden church when she was aged about 3 years old. She was enumerated on the 1891 Census living with her parents, aged 5 and noted as being deaf and dumb.

She attended the local infant school for about 3 years before being elected to the Old Kent Road school in July 1895, entering the school in the September of the same year. Lizzie has also had childhood illnesses, such as Measles and Whooping Cough and was sponsored to attend the school by a Farmer, possibly her father's employer. She was described as having a 'moderate intellect' and was transferred to the Margate Asylum in June 1897. There are not any records of Lizzie's time at the Asylum, but she was recorded in the 1901 Census aged 15 years and a student at the Asylum.

When she left in January 1902, she again was retained as a domestic at the Asylum for 6 months, but eventually left in December 1904.

In the 1911 Census, Lizzie was living back with the family, aged 25 working as a laundress. In the newspaper article about Emily's wedding, it was also noted that 5 years previously (1911), her deaf and dumb sister (Lizzie) had married in the same church. A marriage for Elizabeth Birch and Henry Buckley was found in the June quarter of 1911 in Amersham, Buckinghamshire and a son, Henry Buckley was born in June 1913 but registered in Toxteth, Lancashire. Could this have been the child christened in the church as reported in the newspaper article? It is not possible to say where Elizabeth was for the 1939 Register, but there was an Elisabeth A Buckley living in Manchester, a widow of the right

age. It is also not possible to say when Elizabeth died as 'Elizabeth Buckley' is a very common name.

## Sources

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