

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in November 2024, as one of a series resulting from the '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.

ROSE/ROSA WATERS

Ann Waters gave birth to **Rose/Rosa Waters** on the 16th June 1872 in Thompson Falls, Norfolk, where Ann lived. Thompson falls in the sub district of Watton. Thompson is a very ancient village whose name suggests Danish and Saxon origins and is mentioned in the Domesday Book.

Rose's birth certificate gives no hint of the name of her father. As often happened in these days, Ann may have been employed in the home of local gentry and fallen pregnant by one of the household or the father may have been married.

Rose was four years old when she was baptised on 12th November 1876 at St. Martin's Parish Church in Thompson, Norfolk. Ann Waters was recorded as her mother, so Ann had not married the father by this time. The reason for the baptism, may have been Rosa starting at school as she is shown on the Admission register for Thompson National school in 1876¹.

In the 1881 Census², Rose is enumerated as Rosa aged 8 years, a scholar and living with her mother, Ann, who is still unmarried, a housekeeper in the house of George Baldry, a widowed

¹ School Admission Registers. England and Wales. Thompson, Norfolk. 1876. Rosa Waters. Available on <https://fmp.co.uk> accessed 11 December 2024.

² Census Record. England and Wales. 3 April 1881. George Baldry (Head). RG11/1972 FS 75 p.25. Collection: Census and Electoral Rolls. Available on <https://ancestry.co.uk> accessed 11 December 2024

Journeyman blacksmith in School Lane. The family were enumerated in East Harling some 9 miles from Thompson, where she and her siblings were all born. Enumerated with her are her two brothers, William (12) an agricultural labourer and Robert (2) as well as George's 3 children, aged 12, 10 and 8 years.

We find Rose again in 1891. She was living at the ***Edgbaston Refuge for Fallen and Destitute Women***, 14 Noel Road, Edgbaston, Warwickshire. It has not been possible to find information about this Refuge. I have, therefore, with thanks, taken information from the '***Forgotten Women***' website to give an idea of the times.

'In the second half of the nineteenth century, these homes, or 'refuges' were set up across Britain. As well as government founded refuges, there were also charitable bodies who established institutions with the aim of rehabilitating 'fallen women', some of whom were as young as twelve. These 'Refuges' were far from being a place of safety. Conditions were harsh and inmates were unlikely to be there voluntarily.

Susan Mumm's article, 'Not worse than other Girls': 'The Convent-based Rehabilitation of Fallen Women in Victorian Britain', begins with the words –

'The Victorians were both fascinated by deviance and obsessed with its control, and this sums up the attitude to those whose behaviour was regarded as being at odds with the social mores of the times. Women were also potentially mothers, with an influence over the moral well-being of subsequent generations, so the attitudes towards women who transgressed against the legal or moral codes were very different to those towards male wrongdoers.

The purpose of the refuge was rehabilitation and reform; transforming the fallen into respectable women who could play a meaningful part in society. Thus, only women who were regarded as capable of redemption were accepted, leaving those who were labelled as the most dissolute and depraved without refuge.

Victims of rape and incest, those with learning difficulties and girls whose home life might put them in moral danger, were institutionalised alongside the criminals and prostitutes.

The term 'fallen women' is often seen as a euphemism for prostitute and a number of the women in the homes may have engaged in prostitution on an occasional or more regular basis. This is not to imply that all the inmates had been prostitutes. 'Prostitute' may have been used to encompass a woman who had had an illegitimate child or was living with a man as if she were his wife, without the benefits of a marriage ceremony'.

Berry Chevasco summarises the Victorian attitude to The Great Social Evil as Victorian prostitution was termed.

'Prostitutes came to symbolize the whole spectrum of social ills which to middle class Victorian minds threatened the fabric of society: sexual immorality of course, but also destitution, drunkenness, disintegration of the family, disease, ignorance, and so on.

The article goes on to point out that the Victorians often classified women as prostitutes in ways which we would now no longer accept. Thus, women co-habiting with men but not married to them were deemed to be prostitutes, as were destitute women without evidence of other support such as parents or other family and thus potentially vagrant. Indeed, vagrancy was one of the charges used to arrest women thought to be prostitutes',

According to the 1891 Census, Rose Waters was living at the Edgbaston Refuge as an inmate. She was nineteen years old. George Davies (Head) was the Town Missionary Preacher. His wife Jane F. Davies was the Matron. Living with them was their granddaughter Jessie L. J. Clark employed as Assistant Matron.

Other than Rose, there were nine other young women living at the refuge ranging from seventeen to twenty-five years old. Mary E. Coldstream did the cooking and Edith Measham did the laundry assisted by her seven companions.

There is no information available as to why Rose was at the Refuge. Possibly her mother Ann had died, and she was destitute, or it was the fact that her mother had several children out of wedlock that she was deemed to be vulnerable? I hope she wasn't pregnant. If she was, her baby would have been taken away from her. Whatever the reason, she was regarded by those in charge of the Refuge as being *capable of redemption* and accepted into the Refuge.

It has not been possible to find a marriage or death for Rose with any certainty. However, a Rosa Waters was eligible to vote and is recorded in the electoral registers³ for 1911-1915 for Little Cressingham, approximately 5 miles from Thompson, Norfolk.

I hope you had a happy life Rose Waters.

Shirley Sanderson November 2024

Edited Janice Brinley Codd December 2024

³ National Archives Great Britain. Norfolk Electoral Register. Rosa Waters. Little Cressingham, Norfolk. Available on: <https://fmp.co.uk> accessed: 11 December 2024.