

This is a Story from 'A Few Forgotten Women'



Georgina's Story

Warning, this story contains mention of suicide.

In the East Extension Burial Ground at St Andrew's Church in the Somerset village of Compton Dundon there is a gravestone inscribed:

Georgina Wyche

Daughter of Cyril and Antoinette Wyche of London

Died 8 Jan 1901

At the Vicarage aged 26.ⁱ

When I first read this, I thought that perhaps Georgina was a relative of the vicar, Percy Dundas Moreton or his wife. A newspaper articleⁱⁱ showed that this was not the case and told the sad story of a young woman who had fallen on hard times.

The birth of Nanny Georgina Wyche was registered in Islington, London in the second quarter of 1875ⁱⁱⁱ. She was baptised at St Paul's Church, Canonbury on 7th July of that year^{iv}, the daughter of Cyril Wyche, a Merchant and his Dutch wife Antoinette. She was their sixth daughter and seventh child, having followed Adelheid, Cyril, Ann (known as Annie), Nanny Antoinette (who sadly died before her first birthday), Antoinette and Alice.

At the time of her baptism the family were living at 16 Petherton Road, Highbury in North London. A look at Google Street View^v shows large Victorian terraced houses with a treelined grassy area in the middle of the road. A lovely place to live compared to many parts of the city at that time. By the time of the 1881 Census^{vi}, (where her name is given as Nannie G.), the family were still living at Petherton Road and two more sisters Maud and Marguerite had been born. The family also employed two servants, the cook, Harriet Stewart aged 23 and Eliza Harrington aged 19 a nurse, presumably for the children. Although produced a couple of decades later, Charles Booth's London Poverty Maps^{vii} show that Petherton Road^{viii} was home to Middle Class well to do families. The road to the west, Highbury New Park (which runs parallel to Petherton Road) is occupied by the "Upper-middle and upper classes. Wealthy" according to the map legend.

By the time of the baptism of the tenth child Egbert in November 1884 the family had moved to 2 Chaseville Park, Winchmore Hill^{ix}. This has proved more difficult to find as Google Street View shows houses which seem later than the 1880s and I have been unable to find the road on a contemporary map; The road is now known as Chaseville Park Road. This may have been a relatively short-lived home though as by the time of the 1891 Census^x the family were living at 190 Willesdon Lane, Willesdon^{xi} and Georgina is listed under her given first name of Nanny. There are some large properties along this road but some are more modern. Willesdon Lane itself lies just off the Booth Maps but the nearest roads show an affluent area. Cyril and Antoinette are still living there at the time of the 1901 Census^{xii} and have Antoinette aged 30 who is a Governess, Alice 28 and Marguerite 21 with no given occupations living with them which might be significant to Georgina's story. Just one servant is listed this time; Maria Coles who is their Cook so perhaps they have a "Daily" who comes in to clean for them.

So, what was Georgina doing in a little village on the edge of the Somerset Levels? And how did she die?

The Central Somerset Gazette of January 19 1901^{xiii} reports an inquest into the death of Georgina Wyche, held in Compton Dundon by the District Coroner, Edward Q Louch. At the time, Georgina was working as a cook at the Vicarage for the Reverend and Mrs Moreton. Reverend Moreton gave evidence that Georgina who was said to be a native of Brondesbury (which is in North London), had of late been “strange in her manner” and added that Mrs Moreton had noticed that she was looking unwell the previous week and had helped her to bed describing her as being in a “sleepy condition”. Reverend Moreton described being told that Georgina had taken carbolic acid and when he attended her room, he found that she had been given large amounts of castor oil. He admitted that Carbolic acid was kept in the house but added that Georgina had no right to use it. Strangely, the report states that “no vessel, bottle or glass” was found from which she could have drunk the acid from and Georgina did not say from what she had drunk it. Doctors were summoned from both Somerton and Street but Georgina was already dead. Dr McVicker made a post mortem examination upon which he found carbolic acid in the stomach, his findings were corroborated by Dr Ingle.

The article goes on to say that Georgina and her sisters had run a Tea Room in Southsea but the business had failed. This failure had been the cause of Georgina going into service and had been “preying on her mind”. It is not hard to imagine how Georgina, a woman raised in a house with servants, would have felt at becoming a servant herself. Did this lead to either depression or some other kind of mental anguish causing her to take her

own life? After listening to the evidence the Jury's verdict was "Suicide while temporarily insane".

I have not yet been able to connect any of the sisters except Georgina to Southsea but hope that further research will uncover more information. I propose starting with Alice and Marguerite since they are living with their parents and have no occupation in the 1901 Census. None of the articles written about the inquest state how long Georgina had been in the Moreton's employ and so it is difficult to know when the business failed.

The Burial Register^{xiv} for Compton Dundon shows that Georgina Wyche, living at Compton Dundon was buried on the 11th January 1901 aged 26. The officiating minister was her employer, the Reverend Percy Dundas Moreton. Her age at death seems to be wrong as her birth was registered in the April-May-June Quarter of 1875 which would have made her 25 in January 1901.

Of Georgina's six living sisters, it is clear from probate records^{xv} that Adelheid, Antoinette, Alice and Maud did not marry so there may be some more stories to tell about the Wyche sisters.

Wendy Durston January 2023

ⁱ <https://www.butleigh.org/> Compton Dundon St Andrews Church Monumental Inscriptions freely available on the website for this One Place Study of the neighbouring parish of Butleigh. Accessed December 2022

ⁱⁱ Central Somerset Gazette, January 19 1901, Accessed via Find My Past, December 2022

ⁱⁱⁱ General Register Office Online Indexes

^{iv} London, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1813-1923. St Paul, Canonbury, Islington, England. All ten siblings appear in this Register. Accessed via Ancestry, December 2022

^v Google Street View for 16 Petherton Road, Highbury, London. Accessed 4 January 2023

^{vi} 1881 Census. Accessed via Ancestry, December 2022

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- vii <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/about>
- viii <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/map/16/-0.0939/51.5529/100/0?marker=532248,185497>
Petherton Road, Highbury. Accessed 4 January 2023
- ix Google Street View for 2 Chaseville Park Road, London. Accessed 4 January 2023
- x 1891 Census. Accessed via Ancestry, December 2022
- xi <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/map/17/-0.1950/51.5392/100/0?marker=532273,182187>
Willesdon Lane. Accessed 4 January 2023
- xii 1901 Census. Accessed via Ancestry, December 2022
- xiii Central Somerset Gazette, January 19 1901. Accessed via Find My Past, December 2022
- xiv Somerset, England, Church of England Burials, 1813 – 1914. Compton Dundon, Somerset, England. Accessed via Ancestry, December 2022
- xv England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1995. For Adelheid Elizabeth Hermina Wyche 16 August 1954, Antoinette Holmes Wyche 5 July 1946, Alice Mary Singleton Wyche 7 April 1965 and Maud Henricke Wyche 6 December 1960. All accessed via Ancestry, December 2022

The research into Georgina's family is my own work, done using the above sources. Maps held by the National Library of Scotland and freely available online from <https://maps.nls.uk/> have also been used for reference when looking for roads on the Booth Maps.