

# *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 May, Sarah Jane and John William Barrows' Story**

John Barrows and his wife Sarah Halls had eight children of which 4 were born deaf. The disability came from John's side of the family, as he had 3 cousins who were deaf too. This is the story of three of the deaf children.

John and Sarah both had their roots in the Norfolk fens; although John was born in Stepney, Middlesex, his parents were born in Hilgay, and Denver, two villages just south of Downham Market in West Norfolk. Sarah was born in Wereham, another village in the area. Deafness can be hereditary, and it's possible that John and Sarah were distantly related, but there was no recent link according to the information they gave on the admission forms to the

Margate Asylum. The couple were married in Denver, Norfolk, in 1886, where their first two children were born; Maud in 1887 and Elizabeth May in 1889. Elizabeth May was born deaf and it may be that the family, having knowledge of the deaf education system, decided to move to London at this point, because by the time their third daughter, Sarah Jane, was born deaf in 1891, they were living in Edmonton, in Middlesex.

John Willam was born in Edmonton in 1895 and he too was deaf, then came Edward in 1891 and Ernest, born deaf in 1899. Edith and Cyril were born in 1902 and 1906. Of John and Sarah's eight children, the second, third, fourth and sixth were deaf from birth.

Elizabeth May and Sarah Jane were admitted to the Margate Asylum via assessment in London in 1899 and 1900 respectively, with John William following in 1903.

Elizabeth May, Sarah Jane and John William seem to have made progress in the Asylum although from the records, it seems that Elizabeth was most able of the children – both of the other two had been disadvantaged by being ill. On leaving Margate in 1905 at the age of 16, Elizabeth May was 4'8" in height and weighed 5st 6lb – similar measurements are not available for the other children. The 1911 census shows her at home with her family, working from home as a dressmaker, whilst Sarah Jane was employed as an ironer in a laundry. John William and Ernest were both recorded at the Margate Asylum in the census.

In 1919, just after the First World War, Elizabeth May Barrows married Frederick James Ing in Islington. Frederick was an engraver by trade, born in 1890 in Islington, and deaf from birth. He had served as a driver in the war and had been awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

In 1921, Frederick and Elizabeth lived at 141, Hazelbury Road, Edmonton, as boarders with the Arkle family. Frederick worked for the Amalgamated Press in Southwark as a process engraver, and Elizabeth had no occupation. They can be found on the in Tottenham in the 1939 Register at 42 Mount Pleasant Road. But they must have divorced, because in 1940, Frederick married Vera Miller and continued to live at Mount Pleasant Road until his death at the age of 96 in 1987.

Elizabeth's second marriage was in 1949 in Newbury in Berkshire, her husband was Alfred Ernest Barlow – and in 1901 he had also been an inmate at the Margate Asylum for Deaf and Dumb children for he too was deaf from birth. He was an English Wood Machinist, born in 1887 and had previously been married to Annie. Alfred died in Newbury in 1956 at the age of 69.

Elizabeth continued to live in Newbury until her death at the age of 69 on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1959.

Sarah Jane, John William and Ernest Barrows can be found on the 1921 census living at home with their parents, and younger siblings at 137, Bury Street, Edmonton. Sarah Jane worked at home, John William was an upholsterer and Ernest a tailor.

In 1935, Sarah Jane married Walter Reginald Southwood, who was deaf from birth. They moved to Bedford, and in 1939 were living at 30, Castle Lane.

Walter worked as a furniture porter.

Sarah Jane died in 1961 at the age of 69, and Walter died in 1975 at the age of 80, both in Bedford.

John William Barrows married Ethel Olive Walker in Enfield on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1922.

In 1911, Ethel had been an inmate at the Margate Asylum for Deaf and Dumb children. They had one child, a daughter, born in 1929, in Edmonton.

John died in Edmonton in 1970, at the age of 75, and Ethel died in 1982, aged 83.

### **Sources**

**Records of the Royal Asylum for Deaf and Dumb Children, Margate**

**England BMD Records**

**England census 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921**

**1939 Register of England**

**First World War Medal Cards**