

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written in August 2023 as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who enrolled in the first two cohorts [1908 & 1909] of Trainee Teachers at the Cheshire Country Training College, Crewe [CCTCC]

Florence Marion Gibbon's Story

Florence Marion Gibbon enrolled in the CCTCC on 15 September 1908, thus joining the first cohort of trainee teachers to study there¹. As she began her training as a teacher, Florence was following in the footsteps of her sister, Frances Mary Gibbon, who was already described as a “pupil teacher in a day school”² in the 1901 census. As will be seen, both sisters appear to have continued to teach throughout their working lives. They also lived together for most of their lives. Thus although Frances did not train at the CCTCC, her life is so connected to Florence's, and to teaching, that this story has widened to include Frances' life.

¹ 1908-1929, *Souvenir of the 21st Anniversary, CCTCC, Unpublished data, under the care of the Family History Society of Cheshire, Crewe*

² GIBBON Family, 1901 England Census www.findmypast.co.uk RG13/3321/141/6

Florence was born in Altrincham, Cheshire on 26 November 1890, the second daughter of James Gibbon, and Sarah (nee Buttery)³. Her father James was a plumber, from Altrincham. Her mother Sarah's place of birth was Waters Upton, in Shropshire. In 1891 the family lived at 72 Byrom Street, Altrincham⁴. This is a street of red brick "two-up two-down" terraced houses, still standing today⁵.

James and Sarah had two sons, James Thomas (born 1892)⁶ and James Allan (born 1896)⁷. Sadly both boys died, in 1895 and 1896 respectively^{8 9}. The brothers' deaths must have deeply affected Florence, Frances and their parents.

By 1901, the family were living at 18 Oxford Road, Altrincham (where they were still living when Florence enrolled in the CCTCC). The house is still standing, it is a larger terraced home than the house in Byrom Street, and has bay windows on the ground floor¹⁰.

In 1901 James was still working as a plumber, and the increased information available in this census notes he was an "employer". Evidence for the number of people James may have employed has not been found, and of course he may have applied some exaggeration when completing the census. However, this does suggest that James had his own plumbing business. Indeed, James was

³ Florence GIBBON, *GRO Birth Index*, 1890, DQ, Altrincham, 8A, 170

⁴ 1891 England Census, www.findmypast.co.uk RG12/2822/ 46/ 27

⁵ 72 Byrom Street, Altrincham, www.google.co.uk/maps accessed 12 August 2023

⁶ James Thomas Gibbon *GRO Birth Index* 1892, DQ, Altrincham, 8A, 184

⁷ James Allan Gibbon *GRO Birth Index* 1896, JQ, Altrincham, 8A, 191

⁸ James Thomas Gibbon *GRO Death Index* 1895, DQ, Altrincham, 8A, 155

⁹ James Allan Gibbon *GRO Death Index* 1896, SQ, Altrincham, 8A, 111

¹⁰ 18 Oxford Road, Altrincham, www.google.co.uk/maps accessed 12 August 2023

already described as a “plumber’s apprentice” aged 14¹¹. James remained a plumber for the whole of his working life.

As already noted, Frances, aged 15, was a pupil teacher by 1901. (Pupil teachers were permitted to teach for a certain number of hours per week as well as continuing to study. Effectively it was a way of training to become a teacher “on the job”. The rules and regulations surrounding pupil teachers changed considerably from their inception in 1846, and were tightened up from 1900 onwards, so that pupil teachers gradually disappeared and teachers would follow a more formal teacher training route. Frances was old enough to follow the pupil teacher route into the profession, while Florence followed the new route into the profession by enrolling in the first cohort for the CTCC)¹².

The first step Florence took towards her future career was reported in the Cheshire Daily Echo for Thursday June 9, 1904. Entitled “Chester Scholarships” and “Important Report” the article begins by explaining that the award of Class I scholarships will allow pupils who have succeeded in the appropriate examination to continue their education at a secondary school, and that Class Ia scholarships will allow pupils to become pupil teachers after their secondary education. The article further notes that the numbers of pupils wishing to sit these examinations has increased from previous years, and that the pass rate was set at 60%. Florence Gibbon was one of seven pupils in the Altrincham, Bowden and Hale District to obtain a Class I certificate¹³.

¹¹ James Gibbon, 1861 England Census, www.findmypast.co.uk RG9/2589/22/38

¹² Institute of Historical Research, files on archive website https://archives.history.ac.uk/history-in-education/sites/history-in-education/files/attachments/teacher_training_-_up_to_the_1960s.doc accessed 12 August 2023

¹³ Cheshire Daily Record, Thursday June 9, 1904, p2 www.findmypast.co.uk

We know from Florence's enrolment record at the CCTCC that her secondary education took place at Sale High School.

The CCTCC's records did not contain any further information about Florence, other than noting that she obtained a Preliminary Certificate in order to be admitted to the College, and that she passed the Final Exam in 1910.

After leaving the CCTCC, it seems that Florence successfully found a post as a teacher in an Elementary School, but did not immediately find a post which was close enough to allow her to live at home with her family. By 1911 she is living as a boarder with a married couple, John and Jessie Wilkinson, at 18 Cemetery Road, Crewe. The Jenkinsons had had no children and John was a Deputy Overseer of the Poor. It is likely that Florence's parents were satisfied that their daughter was living in a very respectable household. The census record does not state at which school Florence taught, although her employer is noted as the Borough Council (presumably, that of Crewe)¹⁴.

Meanwhile Frances was living at home in Oxford Road with their parents and by 1911 she was an Elementary School teacher, employed by Cheshire County Council¹⁵. This is the only time when I found Florence and Frances recorded as living at different addresses.

By 1911, Florence and Frances were both qualified teachers, employed in their chosen profession, and taking their first steps in their careers. No specific information has been found about the sisters or the schools they taught in

¹⁴ 1911 England Census www.findmypast.co.uk RG14/21784 Sch 9

¹⁵ 1911 England Census www.findmypast.co.uk RG14/21528 Sch 339

during the next few years. However, it is likely that they faced various challenges. For example, when researching my grandfather's school in Rushden, Northamptonshire, its logbooks revealed school closures due to outbreaks of measles, or low attendance because of sickness amongst pupils. The school was so cold in the winter that children were sometimes asked to march around classrooms to keep warm! The flu pandemic of 1918 to 1919 also affected the school, as of course did the First World war¹⁶. Similar problems would have been common to all schools across the country, and teachers like Florence and Frances would have to have managed in the best way they could.

The First World War of 1914-1918 resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of young British soldiers. This left young women with reduced possibilities for marriage. As we will see, neither Florence nor Frances married. They may have each made a choice to forego marriage in order to continue teaching (in those days women were expected to give up work as teachers when they married), or they may simply never have met anyone they wished to marry.

By 1921, Florence and Frances were both living at 18 Oxford Street, and, whatever the challenges of the previous 10 years, they both continued to teach. Florence was employed by Stretford Education Authority, teaching at St Galrid's School, Old Trafford. Florence was employed by Cheshire County Council and taught at Cedar Road School.

Unfortunately, no information has been found about St Galrid's School, where Florence taught.

¹⁶ Newton Road Junior School, Rushden, Northamptonshire. Logbooks accessed via www.rushdenheritage.co.uk in 2020. The relevant pages are no longer available in August 2023

There is still a primary school on Cedar Road, Altrincham (now called Stamford Park Primary School). The school is obviously proud of its heritage – its website informs us the school dates from 1906 and that it is of great architectural interest, having been built by Henry Lord, who specialised in school buildings. It was Grade II listed by English Heritage in 2020¹⁷. Further information about the school’s history is included in the listing statement, including excerpts from a newspaper report of the time which described the facilities as “almost palatial” and stated “almost perfect facilities have now been furnished for elementary schooling in the district”¹⁸. Frances may well already have been teaching at Cedar Road school in 1911 (and it is even possible that she was amongst the first staff members when the school opened in 1906). The school would have been only 10 to 15 minutes’ walk from home in Oxford Street.

Although the 1921 census showed Florence and Frances back in the family home, it also revealed a significant change in the family. Their father, James, was not enumerated with his wife and daughters. In fact James died in 1915, aged 67¹⁹. The sale of the tools of his trade was advertised by David Morrison & Son, Auctioneers, of Altrincham. Items included a smoke testing machine, spring balance for weights up to 100lb, pipe wrenches, iron downspouts, etc²⁰. It isn’t clear whether James had retired some time before his death. The size of James’ business also remains unknown. No probate record has been found and

¹⁷ Stamford Park Primary School website <https://www.spprimary.org.uk/page/?title=History+of+our+School&pid=15> accessed 12 August 2023

¹⁸ Stamford Park School, English Heritage website <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1467906?section=official-list-entry> accessed 12 August 2023

¹⁹ James Gibbon *GRO Death Index* 1915 SQ, Bucklow, 8A, 194

²⁰ The Guardian, Friday October 15, 1915, page 10 accessed on 12 August 2023, www.findmypast.co.uk

thus it is difficult to judge the value of his estate inherited by his wife and daughters.

The only source of information found concerning the family for the next few years are electoral roll entries. The first of these is from 1924, and shows the family had moved to 170 Hale Road, Hale²¹. All three women were to live at this address for the rest of each of their lives. This house is also still standing, and is a semi-detached home with front and back gardens, which appears likely to date from the early 1920s. It appears larger than the Oxford Road property and has gardens to the front and rear²². It is possible that money from James' estate allowed his family to purchase this house, although there is no evidence to back up this suggestion. At any rate the family appear to have gradually occupied larger houses, perhaps a reasonable indication that they were relatively financially secure.

Sarah Gibbon died towards the end of 1930 aged 73²³. Again, no will or probate entry has been found for her, but it follows that her daughters would have inherited everything, including the house, if the family did indeed own it.

When the 1939 Register was taken, Florence and Frances were still living at 170 Hale Rd, and were both still teachers. A 4-year-old boy, RM Gibb, was living with them. His relationship, if any, to the sisters is unclear, although he may have been a relative's child²⁴.

²¹ England & Wales Electoral Registers, 1910-1932, Polling District of Altrincham (H), Central Ward, page 394 www.findmypast.co.uk

²² 170 Hale Road, Hale www.google.co.uk/maps accessed 12 August 2023

²³ Sarah Gibbon *GRO death index*, 1930, DQ, Bucklow, 8A, 200

²⁴ Florence Gibbon 1939 Register Reference RG101/40161/019/24 www.findmypast.co.uk

No further information has been found about Florence or Frances until their deaths in 1965. Florence died on 8 January at Chester General Hospital, leaving £2,295 to her sister²⁵. Frances died on 4 August at The Grange Hospital, Weaverham. She left £9,818. The address for both sisters at death remained 170 Hale Road. No doubt it made sound financial sense for the sisters to live together for almost the whole of their lives. However, they must have been devoted to each other after so many years together.

Although there is no information about the sisters' occupations after 1939, it seems likely that they continued to teach until retirement. Between them they must have devoted around 80 years to teaching the children of Cheshire – an impressive record of public service, which appears to have been quietly carried out, and without obvious public recognition. It is surely a record of which they could both be proud, and which we may now celebrate thanks to “A Few Forgotten Women”.

Narrative by Alison Ferneyhough

²⁵ Florence Gibbon England & Wales Government Probate Death Index 1858-2019, 1965, page 104
www.findmypast.co.uk