

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in March 2023, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who appear in the 1901 census for St. Joseph's Inebriate Reformatory, Ashford, Middlesex and Farmfield Reformatory for Inebriate Women, Horley, Surrey.

Norah Sullivan's Story

According to the 1901 Census for St Joseph's Inebriate Reformatory in Ashford, Middlesex, Norah Sullivan was born in Drury Lane, London, and was aged 30. Before arriving at St Joseph's, Norah was a flower seller, and was single.

The London Evening Standard, of 11 July 1892, (viewed on indmypast.co.uk) carried a rather dramatic report on the front page which may well refer to Norah, as follows:

“Scene at a King's-Cross Public-House

At Clerkenwell Police-court to-day Norah Sullivan, 24, a flower-seller; Mary Roach, 25; John Waters, 22, a labourer; Michael Roach, 24, a news-vendor; and Charles Roach, 19, a hawker, were charged with causing a riot

and damaging partitions at the Victoria public-house, and with assaulting four police-constables. –The Prisoners entered the bar of the house on Saturday night, and were served with drink. Their conduct was disgusting, and Norah Sullivan commenced to sing. They were told to leave the house, but refused. The manager, Mr Trott, entered the bar with the object of ejecting Norah Sullivan, when the other Prisoners set upon him, punching him about the body and kicking him about the legs. During the struggle a partition was broken down and several glasses were smashed. Charles Roach threw a pot at Mr. Trott, but it missed him and struck a police-officer in the face. -John Tupper, doorkeeper at the Victoria, said Mary Roach rushed at him with an open knife and scratched his face, while Charles Roach struck him in the mouth and kicked him about the legs. -Police-constable Baker, 104 G, said he and other officers were called to the Victoria to take the Prisoners into custody. Just as he arrived at the house he saw Waters and Charles Roach pull down the partition. Witness took Sullivan and Roach into custody, and the latter bit him on the right hand. Police-constable 120 E said the pint pot thrown by Charles Roach struck him in the mouth. Police-constable Robinson, 70 G, said he took Waters into custody. The Prisoner struggled violently, and struck him a heavy blow in the face with his clenched fist. Mary Roach flew at him and hung on to his trousers with her teeth. -Police-constable 240 E said he took Charles Roach to the station. The Prisoner struggled, kicked him and bit him on the arm. -Charles Grimsey said he assisted to take Charles Roach to the station, and on the way the Prisoner kicked him. - Mr. Horace Smith sent Norah Sullivan to gaol for one month. Mary Roach for three months, Waters for four months, Charles Roach for four months, and bound Michael Roach over to keep the peace.”

Unfortunately Norah Sullivan again features in a report of proceedings in the West London Police Court, in the Westminster & Pimlico News, on August 9 1895:

“A TROUBLESOME CUSTOMER. – Norah Sullivan, of 34 St. Catherine’s-road, Notting Dale, was charged with being drunk and disorderly, assaulting Albert William Morris, of Cobden public-house, St. Clement’s road, and further with damaging a plate-glass window to the extent of £2. -Mr. Haynes prosecuted. -The evidence of the prosecutor was that on Monday evening the prisoner entered his house and asked for drink which was refused as she was drunk. He requested her to leave and she did but returned again, and struck him several times in the face. Prosecutor threatened to lock her up. She replied that she would be locked up for something, and on going out of the house, took up a quart pot and threw it at one of the plate glass windows, breaking it. -Prisoner said that the prosecutor had thrown her on the ground nearly breaking her arm. This was denied by the prosecutor. It was also stated that when arrested the prisoner struck the officer in the face. -Mr. Newton fined the prisoner 40s., 40s. the damage, or in default one month’s imprisonment.”

If this report does refer to the correct Norah Sullivan, we know that she continued to drink because she was in St Joseph’s in 1901. It is not known how long Norah remained at St Joseph’s, but a Norah Sullivan is listed in the habitual criminal register in 1905, (viewed on indmypast.co.uk) as follows:

“Name and alias -Norah Sullivan

Residence – Burne-street, Edgware-road.

Place of business or where employed – none.

Age-30

Height-5ft. 1.1/2 in.

Build-slight

Complexion-dark

Hair-black.

Eyes-hazel.

Shape of nose-pug.

Shape of face-long.

Peculiarities or marks-nil.

Profession or occupation-flower-seller.

Date and nature of conviction-7th August 1905. Committed to a certified inebriate reformatory for 3 years.

Court at which convicted-Marlborough Street

Remarks-frequents Soho district”

A photograph of Norah is included with the report.

Unfortunately it looks as if the time Norah spent in St Joseph’s around 1901 did not help her to stop drinking, and she may have been returned to St Joseph’s in 1905.

No further records which seemed likely to be the correct Norah Sullivan were found after the 1905 register of habitual criminals.

Searches for Norah in the census resulted in a possible match in 1891. Norah Sullivan, aged 16, was living with her parents Jeremiah and Julia Sullivan, and 4 siblings. Jeremiah and Julia were from Kelly in Ireland, but it seems that all the children were born in London. Norah’s occupation was described as “artificial

flowerist” – which would have involved hand-making artificial flowers for women’s hats.

The same family can be traced back in each census to 1861. If this is the correct family, the child who is around the right age to be Norah is shown as “Hannah” in the 1881 census. The family was not found in the 1901 census or after. Norah’s parents may have died, and her siblings are likely to have left home.

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Sources

St. Joseph’s Inebriate Reformatory, Ashford, Middlesex RG13 1171 folios 12-13

British Newspaper Archive accessed via findmypast.co.uk

Norah Sullivan, 1891 census RG12 221 18 29

<https://search.findmypast.co.uk/record/browse?id=gbc%2f1891%2f0221%2f0035>