

This is a Story from 'A Few Forgotten Women'



This story was written, in January 2023, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of girls from Leeds, Girls' Industrial School, Yorkshire.

Emily Strafford 1857-1872

Emily Strafford was admitted to the Industrial School in Leeds on 18 November 1868 at the age of ten years. The details requested in the admission register of a physical description, her offence, her ability in the 3 R's and family and friends are all infuriatingly blank. It is a sad entry in the cemetery records that enables us to learn more about her life.

Emily was born in the last quarter of 1857 in Scarborough, North Yorkshire¹ and baptised there on 13 December at the church of St Mary's with Holy Apostles.² Her parents were Samuel Furness Strafford and Isabel née Zealand. Samuel and Isabel had married in Scarborough in 1853³ at the ages of 18 and 19 respectively. Two years earlier the 1851 census recorded Samuel working as a hairdresser's apprentice living with his master, whilst Isabel was a dressmaker living with her family.⁴

In 1860 at the age of 26, Emily's mother, Isabel, died.⁵ The following year in the census, now a widower, Samuel was boarding with a grocer and baker in Scarborough.⁶ Where was Emily? The only Emily Strafford aged 3 years old I could find was living with a Strafford family in York described as their niece but I have not established a family relationship between them and Samuel. If this was not our Emily then it is still most likely that she was living with another member of her extended family.

In 1862 Samuel married again to 17 year old Hannah Rebecca Bosomworth in Easingwold which is about 14 miles north of York.⁷ Hannah's father was a shoemaker and she had been born in Leeds. It was to this town that they now migrated for Samuel to set up his tobacconist business. Sadly this marriage did not survive for long as Hannah died on 21 January 1864 of small pox and was buried in Leeds Cemetery.⁸ Although vaccination against small pox was available at this time and was compulsory for babies after 1853, Hannah may not have been vaccinated. Samuel wasted no time in marrying for the third time as on October 10th he tied the knot with Julia Ann Birley, the 24 year old daughter of a railway inspector.⁹

Where Samuel's daughter Emily was during this time we do not know but at some point she came to live with her father and his new family. Over the next four years Samuel and Julia produced three babies. Ellen or Helen arrived in 1865 and Henry in 1866. 1868 was a traumatic year for the family. Baby Julia was born on 18th June and died 3 months later of diarrhoea.¹⁰ On 18 November ten year old Emily was admitted to the Leeds Industrial School or Reformatory in Edgar Street and on 1st December Samuel was admitted to the West Yorkshire lunatic asylum in Wakefield.¹²

The Industrial School admission register does not give us any information as to why Emily was admitted. Under the 1857 Reformatory School Act there were four prescribed conditions for admission to the reformatory.¹³ They were any child found begging, any child found wandering without a settled home or visible means of support or in the company of thieves, any unconvicted child under twelve who had committed an offence punishable by prison whom the justices thought should go to industrial school, and any child under fourteen whose parents stated they were unable to control him or her and were prepared to pay the cost of their maintenance. It seems most likely that it was the latter which prompted Emily's admission. The family was clearly undergoing tremendous stress with the death of a baby and Samuel's deteriorating mental health. It would not be surprising, given her own unsettled childhood so far, if Emily's behaviour became too difficult for her step mother Julia to cope with. Her family was not from the more typical classes, the very poor or criminal, whose lives resulted in their children coming to the magistrates' attention. Emily's father was running his own tobacconist business in Woodhouse Lane, in North Leeds. His father had been a painter and gilder and Isabella's father a master shoemaker.

On 24 April 1870 Emily's father Samuel, aged just 35, died in the asylum of "softening of the brain". He was buried in Leeds Cemetery four days later.¹⁴ Emily was now an orphan.

That same year the girls in Edgar Street Industrial School were transferred to separate premises in Windsor Street in the Burmantofts area of Leeds.¹⁵ Emily

was recorded as living here in 1871 when the census was taken, with 48 other girls.¹⁶

Sadly, Emily did not survive. She died of “inflammation” on the 13th October 1872 at the age of 15 and was buried in Leeds cemetery two days later. The cemetery records provided the information needed to research her story. They noted her address was the Ragged school, Windsor House, Windsor Street, that her birthplace was Scarborough and her father, Samuel Furniss Strafford was a tobacconist.¹⁷

And what of Samuel’s widow and his two young children? Within a month of Samuel’s death Julia had taken out letters of administration in order to claim his estate in the absence of a will. Although the probate calendar only offers his effects as being worth the sum of under £200, this was a substantial amount of around £20,000 in today’s purchasing power.¹⁸ Three months after that, on the 1st September, she remarried and started a second family.

Christine Shackell February 2023

Sources

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