

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in April 2024, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women staff and female patients associated with the Fleming Memorial Children's Hospital, Jesmond, Northumberland.

Frances Ludlam's Story

Frances was one of nine nurses listed on the 1891 census for Fleming Memorial Hospital for Sick Children, North Road, Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne. Other members of the medical staff included the Matron, a Doctor and two Head Nurses. The hospital had opened a few years earlier in September 1888. Mr John Fleming, a solicitor, had financed the building of the hospital in memory of his wife. At that time, nurses were unmarried women who were expected to devote their lives to nursing and this appears to have been true of Frances, although there was a time when she wasn't a nurse.

Frances's name is recorded in several different ways in the records but her birth year and birth place as stated on the 1891 census – 1871 in Walton on the Hill, Surrey – make it possible to piece together her life story.

Frances was born on 23 November 1870 in Walton on the Hill, a village between Reigate and Epsom in Surrey. It is on high ground at the top of chalk hills and looks down across the downs towards Epsom race course. Frances's birth registration gives her the full name Frances Emma. She was the daughter of William Jeffery Ludlam (although all other records have his forenames the other way round), a wharfinger (owner or keeper of a wharf), and his wife Emma Mary née Reade who registered the birth¹. Jeffrey and Emma had married in April 1869 in Cheltenham. When Frances was almost two months old, on 18 January 1871, she was baptised at St Peter's Church, Walton on the Hill. On this occasion, she was given the names Emma Frances Anna but her parents' names and her father's occupation confirm that this is the right entry for Frances.

The 1871 census on 2 April that year provides more information about Frances's family and background. They lived at "Lovelands" in Walton on the Hill. According to an advertisement for an auction of the property in the *Epsom Times* of 28 May 1878 when the family left the area, "Lovelands" was "in one of the most picturesque and healthy parts of the neighbourhood within easy reach of 5 packs of hounds and in the midst of good society." It was reportedly a modern family residence, approached by a carriage drive with superior stabling and standing in beautiful grounds. This description gives an indication as to the lifestyle enjoyed by the young Frances and her family. On the 1871 census record, the full names of the male members of the household are given but only initials are given for the females. There is an E F A Ludlam which corresponds with Frances's names on her baptism record and she had an elder sister with the initials L M (for Lila Mary). Frances's father was born in London but her mother was born in Macao, China (while her father was serving overseas). The domestic

¹ Digital image of birth registration December quarter of 1870 Reigate Union Vol 02A Page 149.

staff listed on the census comprises two nurses, a cook, a parlourmaid and a coachman.

Frances's father left his wharf business in 1876 when he had £26,000 capital (over £3m today) and in 1878 he entered a partnership in a brickmaking business in Devon. The family moved to "Stokelake", in Hennock, near Newton Abbot. When an earlier resident put "Stokelake" up for auction in 1827, the property was described in the local press as a stone mansion house with a conservatory, three reception rooms, nine bedrooms, kitchen, servants' hall, two coach houses and stabling for six horses, all set in an acre of pleasure ground with an acre of garden, an orchard and 27 acres of grassland. The Ludlam family's increased prosperity and social standing are also evident in the size of their household. Ten staff are listed on the 1881 census: a governess, a nurse, four maids, a cook, a coachman, a groom and an "odd boy". The family had also expanded to include two more sisters and a brother for Frances - Beatrice, Lily and Jeffrey. Frances's father's occupation had changed to brick and pipe manufacturer.

Just before Christmas in 1888, when Frances was eighteen years old, the family's fortunes changed. Frances's mother died after being ill for about three weeks. The cause of death was asthenia, a general debility brought about by a wasting disease such as anaemia or cancer². In May 1889, her father's business went into receivership according to a report in the *Commercial Gazette of London* and matters in this regard were not resolved until 1891. Frances's father's health was probably also beginning to fade. All of this must have been a tremendous shock for Frances and her siblings. Her father seems to have returned to London

² England and Wales Death registration Digital Image 1888 December quarter Newton Abbot Vol 05B Page 81

to live with his mother (he was certainly there at the time of the 1891 census) while Frances and the others went their separate ways to make their own way in the world. Some went to live with relatives while others, like Frances, sought work. It is not possible to discover how Frances found out about the Fleming Memorial Hospital nor how she started her nursing career although there is a possibility that she would have read the reports of the death of the benefactor John Fleming which appeared in newspapers all over the country in 1890.

Frances's father died the day after Frances's birthday in 1892. The cause of death was phthisis, another name for tuberculosis, which he had had for several years, maybe even since before the death of his wife. At the time of his death, he was staying on the Isle of Wight, perhaps in the hope that the sea air would help his condition³.

The next record available for Frances is the 1901 census. This entry is a bit of a puzzle given what she was doing ten years previously. Frances Ludlam is listed as the head of the household in a cottage in Chingford, Essex where she was a poultry breeder working on her account at home. The date and place of birth match Frances's details and further confirmation of her identity is that her brother Jeffrey is resident at the same address with his correct date and place of birth.

When another ten years had elapsed, Frances had moved again to Shrubbs Hill, Sunningdale, Surrey. This time she has used her full name from her birth registration, Frances Emma, and she is living alone in a four roomed cottage.

³ England and Wales Death Registration Digital Image 1892 December Quarter Isle of Wight Vol 02B Page 396

She gave Hospital Nurse as her occupation. Frances's neighbours included another nurse as well as several estate workers.

In the autumn of 1911, the *Hendon and Finchley Times* reported that Miss Francis (sic) Ludlam had been appointed as a school nurse in connection with the medical inspection of children at a salary of £75 per annum, together with travelling expenses and £5 yearly for uniform.

On 5 April 1916, at 3 Beaumont Street, Marylebone, Frances died at the age of 45 of broncho pneumonia following an operation for breast cancer. Surgery was the only treatment available for cancer at that time and, because there was no possibility of screening, the cancer was often too far advanced for surgery to be an effective solution. It was therefore often soon followed by the death of the patient as was the case for Frances. Her address at the time of her death was 131 Hartswood Road, Shepherd's Bush. This was also the address given by her sister, Beatrice, who was the informant on the death registration (although Beatrice was at the time employed as an assistant mistress teaching German at Manchester High School for Girls). Frances's occupation at the time of her death was School Nurse employed by the Middlesex Education Committee which matches the information in the newspaper report mentioned above⁴.

Frances's remains were buried in Holy Trinity Churchyard in Sunningdale, probably the church she attended when she was living in the area around 1911. The spot is marked by a large stone cross on which is inscribed: "She served in France and the Dardanelles, 1914-15. Died aged 45 years. A life nobly lived and nobly ended." Hers is the only name on the grave.

⁴ England and Wales Death Registration Digital Image 1916 June Quarter St Marylebone Vol 01A Page 602

A search for records relating to Frances's war service produced just one reference. Frances Ludlam disembarked in June 1915 having returned from the Egyptian theatre of war and she was awarded the 1914-15 Star.

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Research by Jennifer Grice