

# *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.*

## **Selina Melville's Story**

Selina was born in Dunkirk, Nord, France in December 1869<sup>i</sup>. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find her birth/baptism record nor her parents. However, several children were born 1862-1870 to Melenie Therese Speybrouck and Louis Jacques Milleville, a mason, living in Dunkirk, Nord, France at the time and their daughter, 'Celina' was baptised there in December 1865<sup>ii</sup>. How Selina came to be living in Scotland in 1880, is a mystery, but as Dunkirk was undergoing many changes and becoming a major port<sup>iii</sup>, the construction of the new quays of the commercial docks and the wet docks would have required many masons, not just from France, but from Scotland as well. Is it possible that Selina was the object of an unofficial adoption between fellow masons?

Selina was in Scotland by 1880, as aged 10 (or 14 years if the birth record above is her!) as she is confirmed on the 21 September<sup>iv</sup> at St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in Dalbeth. She is with about 48 other school children, with ages ranging from 10-14 years and 13 Penitents, one of whom was confirmed prior to her death earlier in the month. Selina took additional names at her confirmation of Maria Agnes, and her sponsor was Maria Garden.

The use of the term 'Penitents' made me read the 1881 Census<sup>v</sup> very carefully and this confirmed that Selina was living in a school, which was run by the Order of the Good Shepherd in Shettleston, Dalbeth, Glasgow.

The Order of the Good Shepherd was a religious order founded in Angers, France in 1835<sup>vi</sup> and dedicated to the promotion of the welfare of women and girls. There were many convents in France (perhaps this was how Selina came to Scotland?); the convent in Dalbeth, Glasgow was founded in 1851. The Convents looked after problem children, delinquent girls, persons serving civil sentences and alcoholics. The school in Dalbeth was an approved school until 1891, when it became an industrial school. The children were given education, shelter and food and their education comprised of some lessons (taught internally), needlecraft, kitchen skills and how to work in the laundry. The girls were not supposed to be sent to work in the laundry until they were over 16 years, but the reality was very different. The enquiry<sup>vii</sup> into the Irish branch of the Convent, found that in the 1960's girls had their names changed on admission, there was mental and physical abuse metered out by the Sisters; and the girls were subjected to forced labour in the laundries as they were not paid. The enquiry noted that the forced emigration of children had now ceased, but noted that the Irish convents in Belfast, Derry and Newry and the Scottish Convents had sent children to Australia in the 'Home Children' migrant scheme. They were also part of the Magdalene Institutions where unmarried mothers forcibly had their children adopted.

It is not clear what Selina had done to be sent to the convent at Dalbeth, she might have just been abandoned by her parents, or been the victim of neglect following the death of one or other parent. It is clear that her time at the convent was not a happy one. In the enquiry<sup>vii</sup> report, the girls who gave statements recalled food being insufficient for growing girls and that corporal punishment was metered out for the smallest transgression. The doors were also locked, and you were not allowed outside, your family were encouraged to let you 'settle in' and not to visit.

I have not been able to find Selina in the 1891 census. She must have left Dalbeth, otherwise she would have been enumerated there. There is a Celina Melville<sup>viii</sup>, a general servant born in Kemback, Fife living in Forgan, Fife aged 26 years. This might be her, as servants were

notoriously wrongly enumerated and the man that probably wrote out the form was aged over 70 years. She appeared to be living in the buildings associated with the school. The Newport School was based in Newport-on-Tay and seemed to cater for day pupils and boarders, with pupils and teachers living in the area. It is not clear if 'Celina' was a private servant or if she also worked at the school.

In the 1901 census<sup>i</sup>, Selina is in St Joseph's Inebriate Reformatory in Ashford, Middlesex. She is described as an inmate, single aged 31 years and born in Dunkirk, France but was a British Subject. The treatment that she received by the hands of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, must have meant that she had resorted to drink to be able to cope with daily living. The home was another Catholic home and a few of the women came from Ireland, as well as Scotland and England. The home<sup>ix</sup>, when it originally opened in 1899 catered for the 'low class prostitutes' who had syphilis and gonorrhoea, although there is nothing to suggest that Selina was one of them. The home had a laundry, but some of the women were too ill to work in it, causing problems for the home that relied on this as a source of income. In 1907, the home diversified and had private voluntary patients who did not work, and some who did some work. It is likely that Selina was working in the laundry, as this was the 'punishment' that was imposed for being drunk and disorderly. I have not been able to find any newspaper or court records relating to her, so it may be that her parish paid for her to attend and that she was a general servant/cook in the home.

In the 1911 census<sup>x</sup>, we find Selina living in as a domestic servant at Corby Castle in Carlisle. She is aged 35 years (41 possibly!) single, a laundry maid who was born in France, who sees herself as 'Scotch' (Scottish). Corby Castle at this time was the depot of the Boarder Regiment and had been the home of the Howard family for over 300 years. Philip Howard, the Head of the household was a relation of the Fitzalan-Howards, the Dukes of Norfolk and prominent Catholics who still live at Arundel Castle in Sussex.<sup>xi</sup> His wife and guest had Selina and 6 additional servants to look after them.

This is nearly the end of Selina's story as I have not been able to find her on the 1921 census. However, she does appear on the 1939 Register<sup>xii</sup> with a birth date of 27 December 1869 that is changed in 1943 to 22 September. She is listed as a cook, living at 90 Fitzharris

Avenue in Bournemouth in the house of Lucy Shrigley, who has a housekeeper and two visitors, who are ladies living on private means.

The final siting of Selina is in 1952 when she dies in Carlisle, Cumberland (Cumbria) in the January quarter of 1952 aged 82 years<sup>xiii</sup>. It is not known where she was living at the time, but it would be nice to think that the Howard family looked after her in her old age.

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## Sources

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