

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in November 2023, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who studied at The Grange School of Housewifery in Street, Somerset.

Caroline Body's Story

Caroline Body was born on September 24th, 1886 in Biddisham, Somerset to Henry and Grace Elizabeth (nee Millard) Body.¹ She was baptised on October 17, 1886 in the parish of Biddisham.² Her father Henry Body was recorded on his daughter's baptism record as being a labourer. A note was made in the baptism record that her mother commonly went by the name Elizabeth.

In the 1891 Census, Caroline was four years old and living with her parents and siblings in Biddisham. Her father Henry was then recorded as a farm labourer. Caroline had two brothers George E. Body who was 10 years old and Arthur E. Body who was eight years old.³

¹ England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837-1915 Vol. 5c Pg. 512; 1939 Register RG101/7057c; Somerset, England, Marriage Registers, Bonds and Allegations, 1754-1914

² Somerset, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1813-1914

³ 1891 Census of England RG12; Piece 1917; Folio 145

By the time the 1901 Census was taken in March of that year, Caroline was enrolled as a pupil at the Grange School of Housewifery working in cookery.⁴ Her attendance at a school where young women learned domestic skills to prepare them to be better prospective wives or servants⁵ would not have been odd. Caroline's mother Grace Millard was recorded in the 1861 Census working as a servant at the farm house of Francis Rich in Badgworth, Somerset.⁶ At the time of her marriage in 1865 to Caroline's father Henry Body, Grace's profession was recorded as servant.⁷

Caroline put her cookery skills learned at the Grange School of Housewifery to use. In the 1911 Census, Caroline was in the employ of Dr. William John Henson and his wife Minnie as a domestic cook at their home Elmsett Hall in Wedmore, Somerset. The home also employed a housemaid.⁸ Elmsett Hall with nineteen rooms would have been a grand home to work in with an impressive central staircase, high ceilings, fireplaces and extensive grounds.⁹

In the Parish of Biddisham on February 12th, 1912 at the age of twenty-five, Caroline married farmer William Banwell of Wedmore, Somerset who was three years her senior. There is nothing recorded on the marriage certificate for her

⁴ 1901 Census of England RG13; Piece: 2319; Folio: 59; Page: 19

⁵ Somerset Heritage Centre; C/E/1/146, Somerset School of Cookery and Housewifery – Minutes, 1897-1916

⁶ 1861 Census of England RG9; Piece 1669; Folio 94; Page 8

⁷ Somerset, England, Marriage Registers, Bonds and Allegations, 1754-1914

⁸ 1911 Census of England. Dr. Henson was absent from Elmsett Hall in the 1911 Census of England but is recorded as being the head of the home in the 1901 Census with his wife Minnie.

⁹ 1911 Census of England RG14; Piece 14553; <https://www.theisleofwedmore.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Elmsett-Hall-Brochure-1950-s.pdf>

profession.¹⁰ It's likely she had left her employment at Elmsett Hall prior to her marriage.

Later in the same year as her marriage, Caroline's father Henry Body died at about age seventy-seven during July of 1912. He was buried in Biddisham, Somerset.¹¹ Four years later in 1916, her mother Grace died at the approximate age of seventy-four.¹²

In the 1921 Census of England, thirty-four year old Caroline was living with her husband William Banwell in the Parish of Biddisham and Badgworth at Kingsway, Tarnock in Somerset. Sharing their four room home was Caroline's seventy-five year old uncle and retired farmer Maurice Body along with a fourteen year old boy named Ivor Hobbs. William was working as a farmer on his own account while Caroline was responsible for home duties. There were no children recorded from her marriage to William.¹³

Caroline was widowed with the death of her husband William aged forty-four on March 18th, 1928. The cause of death on his death certificate was from epilepsy and cardiac syncope. Caroline was present at William's death.¹⁴ In 1930, she married Ernest Phillips.¹⁵ They appear in the 1939 Register living alone at Kings Road, Tarnock in Somerset. Ernest is ten years older than Caroline who had just turned fifty-three. Ernest's occupation was as a carter and Caroline's a

¹⁰ Somerset, England, Marriage Registers, Bonds and Allegations, 1754-1914; England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837-1915, Volume 5c, Page 715

¹¹ Somerset, England, Church of England Burials, 1813-1914

¹² England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916-2007, Volume 5c, Page 619

¹³ 1921 Census of England, RG15; Piece 11400; Schedule 23

¹⁴ England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916-2007, Volume 5c, Page 558; Death Certificate GRO

¹⁵ England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1916-2005, Volume 5c, Page 997

housewife.¹⁶ Ernest Phillips had been previously married in 1919 to Alice Emily Vowles.¹⁷ Ernest appeared in the 1921 Census of England at Tarnock, Somerset with his wife and a two and a half year old son John Phillips. Ernest's occupation was a carter on a farm.¹⁸ Ernest's wife Alice Emily died in 1928.¹⁹ This would have left him widowed with a young child in his care. With his marriage to Caroline in 1930, it is very probable that she became the step-mother to John Phillips who was then about eleven years old.

Caroline Body Banwell Phillips died on December 6th, 1944 at the age of fifty-eight.²⁰ She was buried December 12, 1944 at St. Congar Church, Badgworth, Somerset.²¹ Caroline's Will was probated in September of 1945. The probate record states she was of Kingsway, Tarnock, Badgworth, Somerset and the wife of Ernest John Phillips. She left £554 15s. 2d. to farmer Frank Cox. Caroline's place of death was The Public Assistance Institution in Axbridge, Somerset.²² This Institution was likely the former Axbridge Union Workhouse. Workhouses were renamed as Public Assistance Institutions after the abolishment of the Poor Law Unions in 1930.²³

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¹⁶ 1939 Register RG101/7057c

¹⁷ England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1916-2005, Volume 5c, Page 1000

¹⁸ 1921 Census of England, RG15; Piece 11400; Schedule 1

¹⁹ England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916-2007, Volume 5c, Page 554

²⁰ England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916-2007, Volume 5c, Page 445; England & Wales Government Probate Death Index 1858-2019

²¹ National Burial Index for England and Wales

²² England & Wales Government Probate Death Index 1858-2019

²³ <https://www.workhouses.org.uk/intro/>