

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written in August 2023 as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who enrolled in the first two cohorts [1908 & 1909] of Trainee Teachers at the Cheshire County Training College, Crewe [CCTCC]

Helen Kirkham's Story

Helen Kirkham was also one of the first cohort of student teachers at the Cheshire County Training College (CCTCC) in 1908. Helen was born on 7 November 1890 in Liverpool, and baptised at St Cyprian, Edge Hill, on 28 December of that year, the daughter of James and Esther Kirkham.ⁱ Five months later at the time of the 1891 census her parents, James and Esther, both born in Liverpool, were living in the household of James' widowed mother-in-law at 107 Adelaide Road, West Derby, Liverpool, with their two daughters, Evelyn aged 2 and Helen aged 4 months, with James noted as being an ironmonger.ⁱⁱ By the time of the census of 1901, the family had moved to Cheshire and were living at 6 Vicarage Grove, Liscard, with their three daughters: Evelyn aged 12, Helen aged 10 and Esther aged 8.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Kirkham family remained in Liscard where Helen attended Wallasey High School. She passed the Oxford Senior Local examination which qualified her for entry to the Training College in 1908.^{iv} Her success in this exam gave Helen the right to be called an 'Oxford Associate in Arts' and was the precursor to the Higher School Certificate which was introduced in 1918.^v Her enrolment date at CCTCC was 15 September 1908 and Helen's finals were taken in 1910.

Teacher training at CCTCC was a two year course, the aim being to prepare students both theoretically and practically for teaching. The curriculum covered the Theory of Teaching, which included Discipline and Organisation, Child Study with practical exercises, the History of Public Education, General Methods, and Methods of Teaching Individual Subjects, Handwork, Physical Exercise, Music, Hygiene, Drawing, English, History, Geography, Maths, Biology, Field Work, Rural Science and Scripture were among the myriad subjects included in the syllabus. Students were sent out on teaching practice to local schools in their second year.^{vi}

During her years at CCTCC Helen was a member of the hockey team: this photograph shows her in the back row, the second person in from the left and standing next to one of the female lecturers, Miss Emily Ward. As this picture illustrates, the students adhered to hair styles that were fashionable at the time but practical, all wearing their hair swept up neatly.



CCTCC student hockey team 1908-1910^{vii}

After graduation in 1910 Helen appeared on the 1911 census living with her parents and sisters at 7 Seaview Avenue, Wallasey, where she was described as a schoolteacher, at a Borough Council Elementary school but, unfortunately, no details of the specific school.^{viii}

In the December quarter of 1915 Helen married George Hatton Ackerley, a fellow student at CCTCC, in the Birkenhead registration district. This was the first occasion that Helen's name appeared as Hellen, a practice that would continue throughout her life.^{ix}

George was the very first student on the register of CCTCC when it opened in 1908, at which time he was living at 73 Church Street, Runcorn.^x He graduated in 1910 and in 1911 the census recorded him living with his parents and five siblings at that same address in Runcorn, where he was described as an elementary school teacher with Crewe Borough Council.^{xi}

By 1921 the census of that year showed George Hatton Ackerley and Hellen Ackerley living at School House, Pulford, Wrexham, where George was listed as an Elementary School Teacher (Headmaster), and Hellen as 'Home duties'.^{xii} It is probably that the so-called 'marriage bar', which restricted the employment of married women, prevented Hellen from teaching after her marriage in 1915. It was only in 1944 that the 'bar' was removed for all teachers in the UK.^{xiii}

The Historic England archive has a photograph of School House, Pulford, taken in 1999, where George and Hellen lived together for twenty five years.^{xiv}

A daughter, Mary Patricia, was born to the couple on 21 May 1927, their only child. The 1939 Register confirmed their address as School House, Pulford, with George listed as schoolmaster and Hellen with 'unpaid domestic duties', which was the usual term used in this register to describe women without paid employment. Also listed in their household were Hellen's widowed mother, Esther, with 'unpaid domestic duties' too, and Mary P, their daughter, aged 8, who was 'at school'.^{xv}

For many years Hellen's professional life was constrained by the marriage bar that prohibited married women from teaching. It was only a year before George's death that it was removed.

George Ackerley died on 5 June 1945 at the age of fifty-four. An obituary appeared in the Runcorn Guardian on 15 June:

'A member of a well-known Runcorn family, Mr Ackerley attended the Runcorn Parish and Runcorn Grammar Schools, and Crewe Training College. He served in the last war and at the time of his death was head master of the Pulford School.

Mr Ackerley took a keen interest in social work. He was the first secretary of the Village Hall, secretary of Pulford Conservative Unionist Association, secretary of the Forces' Gift Fund and local representative for the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmens' Families Association. A sidesman at Chester Cathedral, he took a keen interest in music and in natural science.'

The funeral took place at Pulford Church and was conducted by the Archdeacon of Chester and the rector of Pulford. A list of the chief mourners was published, beginning with Mrs H Ackerley, also listed were the seventy wreaths sent by family and friends.^{xvi}

It seems likely that Hellen Ackerley took over George's role as head teacher at Pulford School after his death, because she was described as Headmistress of Pulford CE School, Wrexham, in the CCTCC Old Students Magazine of 1947.^{xvii}

In a publication from 1962 it was reported that Mrs Ackerley 'was in hospital for a long period after breaking her thigh' which may have been the catalyst for her move to Sandiway Manor, a residential home providing care for the elderly.^{xviii}



Photo of Sandiway Manor^{xix}

Hellen's death occurred on 11 July 1969 and the obituary published in the Chester Chronicle on 19 July stated:

'The funeral took place on Tuesday last week of Mrs Hellen Ackerley, of Sandiway Manor, Norley-road, Sandiway at Sandiway Parish Church followed by cremation at Blacon. Aged 78, she was the widow of Mr George Ackerley of Pulford.'

A list of mourners followed which included members of the Ackerley family and also friends, representatives from Sandiway Manor Management Committee and Sandiway Manor domestic staff.^{xx}

Hellen Ackerley's will to the value of £2594 was proved in Chester on 17 October 1968. No executors were named.^{xxi}

Narrative by Julie Jakeway

- i Baptisms Liverpool Edge Hill St Cyprians 1813-1906 (Accessed via Ancestry)
- ii RG12; Piece:2990; Folio:117; Page:21 (Accessed via Ancestry)
- iii RG13; Piece:3404; Folio:12; Page:16 (Accessed via Ancestry)
- iv *CCTCC Student Registers [1908-1935]: CCTCC Archives,, Unpublished data, under the care of the Family History Society of Cheshire, Crewe*
- v <https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/bodreader/documents/media/local-examinations:delegacy-le.pdf> (Accessed August 2023)
- vi *Cheshire County Training College, Crewe, Prospectus 1908-1914*
- vii *CCTCC student hockey team 1908-1910, CCTCC Archives, Under the care of the Family History Society of Cheshire, Crewe*
- viii RG14; Piece:22071 (Accessed via Ancestry)
- ix <https://www.freebmd.org.uk> (Accessed August 2023)
- x *1908-1929, Souvenir of the 21st Anniversary, CCTCC, Unpublished data, under the care of the Family History Society of Cheshire, Crewe*
- xi RG14; Piece:21626 (Accessed via Ancestry)
- xii RG15; Folio:17084 (Accessed via Ancestry)
- xiii <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriage> bar (Accessed August 2023)
- xiv <https://historicengland.org.yj/listing/the-list/list-entry/1138389>
- xv The National Archives, Kew, London, England; 1939 Register; Rg) 101/4080f
- xvi British Newspaper Archives, *Runcorn Guardian*, 15 June 1945, page 3)
- xvii *'Wheatsheaves': CCTCC Old Students Magazine, 1947 Edition, Unpublished data, under the care of the Family History Society of Cheshire, Crewe*
- xviii *'The Torch': CCTCC Old Students Magazine, 1962 Edition, Unpublished data, under the care of the Family History Society of Cheshire*
- xix Use of photo approved by Manager of Sandiway Manor 17 August 2023
- xx *Chester Chronicle*, Friday 19 July 1968
- xxi England and Wales National Probate Register (Accessed August 2023)