

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in July 2025, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who were born in the same year as Queen Victoria, 1819 in the parishes of Wem, Shropshire and Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk.

Charlotte LEECH's Story

Charlotte LEECH was baptised on 17 August 1819 in Wells Next The Sea, Norfolk¹, just a couple of months after the baptism of Victoria. She was the youngest of ten children born to Charles LEECH, a carpenter, and his wife Elizabeth WOODBIND, and was named for an earlier sister Charlotte, born in 1817², who had died.

Charlotte LEECH was still just a small child when her two eldest sisters Susanna and Sarah married Robert GROOM (1822)³ and Thomas GROOM (1823)⁴ respectively in Wells Next The Sea, where they continued to live and raise their families. Charlotte may never have known these siblings well, as her father Charles moved, with the remainder of the family, 35 miles to Lakenham, just south of Norwich, around 1824; Charlotte's next oldest sister Jemima married James HILL in Lakenham in 1825⁵. Times must have been hard for the family

initially, as '*Charles LEECH, late of the hamlet of Lakenham, Carpenter*' appeared in the Norwich Court of Relief for Insolvent Debtors on 6 November 1826⁶. Charles does seem to have turned the his fortunes around, however, as by 1845 he is listed in the County Directory as having both a business premises on Southwell Street and a dwelling on Cherry Street⁷.

The years 1837-1838 were eventful for both Victoria and Charlotte, bringing about significant changes in their lives. For Victoria, the death of her uncle King William IV, on 20 June 1837 resulted in her becoming Queen of England, and her Coronation was held on 28 June 1838 following the traditional period of mourning. Charlotte LEECH would also have been in mourning following the death of her mother, who was buried 19 April 1838 in St John Sepulchre, Norwich⁸. Later that same year there was a happier occasion as Charlotte married Clement HANSELL on 16 September 1838 at St John and All Saints, Lakenham⁹. Her husband Clement was a sawyer, so possibly worked with Charlotte's carpenter father.

Charlotte's father Charles remarried in Lakenham on 14 January 1839 to a widow Mary Ann/Marianne SOWTER¹⁰. It is not known how Charlotte felt about this marriage, but her elder brother Charles does not appear to have taken it well as he was summonsed to court for repeatedly abusing his step-mother. His father paid his fines for him but said that he would no longer continue to employ his son or allow him to set foot on the premises again '*so long as he had breath in his body*'¹¹. This family rift must surely have affected Charlotte.

In the next couple of years, Clement and Charlotte had two daughters, Eliza Elizabeth HANSELL, born 1839¹² and Marianne Leech HANSELL, born 1841¹³. Sadly for Charlotte though, her brother James, the sibling closest to her in age and who had been a witness at her wedding, died aged 25 from dropsy, on the 11 January 1840¹⁴.

In 1841, Clement and Charlotte HANSELL were living in City Road, Lakenham with their two daughters.¹⁵ They were living next door to Clement's parents, Thomas and Mary HANSELL, and Clement's sister Harriet. Living nearby in Cherry Street, Lakenham, were Charlotte's father Charles and his second wife Mary Ann LEECH¹⁶. Sadly for Clement and Charlotte, their second daughter Marianne died 31 July 1842 from whooping cough¹⁷. Unfortunately, losing children in infancy was all too common for people in Victorian times, although Queen Victoria did not share this experience, as all of her children survived to adulthood.

In the next decade, Clement and Charlotte HANSELL went on to have three more daughters — another child named Mary Ann (1844)¹⁸, Charlotte (1846)¹⁹, Susanna (1849)²⁰ and a son James Clementine HANSELL (1848)²¹ who only lived for ~2 months²². In 1851 the family were still living in City Road, Lakenham²³. Charlotte's father Charles and wife Mary Ann LEECH continued to live on Cherry Street; Charles, now aged in his seventies, was still working as a Carpenter with a 14-year-old apprentice, John MILLER in his household²⁴.

Charlotte's father Charles LEECH died on 17 June 1853²⁵ acknowledged with a brief notice published in the newspaper²⁶. He was buried on 24 June 1853 in St John Sepulchre, Norwich²⁷, the same cemetery as his first wife Elizabeth.

Further sadness was to follow for Charlotte as she gave birth to a son William Clement HANSELL towards the end of the same year²⁸, but he was also laid to rest in St John Sepulchre, Norwich on 26 February 1854²⁹.

Clement and Charlotte had another daughter, Ruth HANSELL born 1855³⁰, and then sometime between 1855-1857, the family moved to Great Yarmouth. It is possible that if Clement had been working for Charlotte's father, who had now died, he needed to look elsewhere for steady employment. Clement and Charlotte had two more sons, Frederick Clement HANSELL born in 1857³¹ (who presumably died, although no death registration or burial has been found to date) and another son named Frederick in 1859³². There was also cause for celebration for the family with the marriage of Clement and Charlotte's eldest daughter Eliza Elizabeth to Thomas LEECH³³, and the birth of their first grandchild Thomas Frederick LEECH in 1860³⁴.

In the 1861 census, Charlotte was recorded as the head of household, living in Bermondsey Place East, Great Yarmouth with three of her children Susanna (age 11), Ruth (age 6) and Frederick (age 1)³⁵. Similarly, her daughter Eliza Elizabeth was also recorded as the head of house. She was living in Mason's Buildings, Leicester Terrace, Great Yarmouth with her young son Thomas Frederick, and her younger sister Eleanor HANSELL (age 9)³⁶. Their husbands Clement HANSELL and Thomas LEECH were both staying in Norwich on census night, in the home of Clement's sister Harriet and her husband William BASHAM³⁷. Charlotte's daughter Mary Ann had married another carpenter and joiner George HOLMES, and daughter Charlotte (age 15) was in domestic service with the HUDSPETH family.

By 1871, Clement and Charlotte were living in Garden Lane, Great Yarmouth. Their daughter Susanna (age 21) was still living at home, along with their son Frederick (age 11) who was attending school³⁸. Their daughters Charlotte and Ruth were now both married, and Eleanor was in domestic service.

In 1880, Clement and Charlotte's son Frederick HANSELL married Clara Matilda STACEY³⁹, and in 1881 they, with their baby daughter Louisa, were living with Clement and Charlotte at Mariners Road, Great Yarmouth⁴⁰. A few months later, Charlotte lost her husband on 12 July 1882 at their home in Mariners Road⁴¹. His death was registered by his daughter Mary Ann HOLMES and he was buried on 19 July 1882 in Yarmouth New Cemetery. Meanwhile, Charlotte's son Frederick and his family moved to Mutford, Norfolk, where their first son was born, named Clement HANSELL for the grandfather he didn't get to meet.

In 1891, the widowed Charlotte HANSELL was living alone 'on her means' at number 7, Row 111 off South Quay, Great Yarmouth⁴². She died of exhaustion in August 1894 in the workhouse infirmary, with the Matron as informant⁴³. A British Medical Journal report published in the same year described the conditions in the infirmary⁴⁴:

"The women are lodged in the old wards, situated on either side of a lobby and wide staircase, terminating on a roomy stone landing. Off this and between the wards is a room which might be (but is not) a bath room; it contains fixed basins, a wash-up sink, and a coal bunker. There are four long wards in each block, holding from 12 to 15 beds each. The beds are close together, and the wards, serving also as dayrooms, are overcrowded when all the beds are occupied.

The nursing staff consists of an attendant on the female side, assisted by an inmate who is paid; there is no night nurse, trained or untrained. The day staff, which begin work at 6.30 A.M., close the wards as early as possible in the evening, with the result that the helpless patients may be, and often are, from 8.30 P.M. until 6.30 A.M. without anyone to minister to their needs."

Surely a very different experience to the final days of Queen Victoria's life. Charlotte HANSELL was buried on 9 Aug 1894 in Yarmouth New Cemetery, shortly before her 75th birthday⁴⁵.

Typical of the times, both Queen Victoria and Charlotte LEECH had a large family: Victoria had nine children, who all survived to adulthood and 42 grandchildren. Charlotte gave birth to eleven children of whom four died in infancy. Her surviving children gave her at least 50 grandchildren, of whom eight died in infancy. The course of their lives was vastly different, however – Victoria being concerned with affairs of state, while Charlotte would have been preoccupied with the ups and downs of family life, of which there were many. In a sense though, these women were inextricably linked in the Victorian age: As the Empire expanded and prospered, the Victorian era was characterised by vast engineering and building projects, which would not have been possible without the skills and labour of trades such as carpentry carried out by families like the LEECHs and the HANSELLs, and supported by their womenfolk who deserve to not be forgotten.

Michelle Wells

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- ¹ "Norfolk Baptisms", database with images, *FindMyPast* (www.findmypast.com.au : accessed 12 July 2025), Charlotte LEECH, daughter of Charles and Elizabeth, baptised 17 August 1819, Wells Next The Sea; citing Norfolk Record Office, Parish Registers, 1813-1827, Ref: PD 679/8.
- ² "Norfolk, England, Bishop's Transcripts, 1579-1935", Ancestry (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed 12 July 2025), Charlotte LEACH, daughter of Charles and Elizabeth, baptised 24 June 1817, Wells Next The Sea. Original source not specified.
- ³ "Norfolk Banns and Marriages", database with images, *FindMyPast* (www.findmypast.com.au : accessed July 2025), marriage of Robert GROOM and Susannah LEECH, 28 July 1822, Wells Next The Sea; citing Norfolk Record Office, Parish Registers, 1813-1837, Ref: PD 679/16
- ⁴ "Norfolk Banns and Marriages", database with images, *FindMyPast* (www.findmypast.com.au : accessed July 2025), marriage of Thomas GROOM and Sarah LEECH, 1 January 1823, Wells Next The Sea; citing Norfolk Record Office, Parish Registers, 1813-1837, Ref: PD 679/16
- ⁵ "Norfolk, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1938", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed July 2025), marriage of James HILL and Jemima LEECH, 12 June 1825, Lakenham St John and All Saints; citing Norfolk Record Office, Parish Registers Ref: PD 104/11
- ⁶ "British Newspapers", digital images, *FindMyPast* (www.findmypast.com.au : accessed August 2025); citing *Norfolk Chronicle*, 14 October 1826, page 4, column 5, The Court for Relief of Insolvent Debtors.
- ⁷ UK, City and County Directories, 1766 – 1946, database with images, Ancestry (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed August 2025), entry for Charles Leech; citing History, Gazetteer and Directory of Norfolk and the City and County of the City of Norwich, published William White, 1845, 2nd Edition., page 197, Joiners and Builders.
- ⁸ "Norfolk, England, Church of England Deaths and Burials, 1813-1995", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed July 2025), burial of Elizabeth LEECH of Lakenham, 19 April 1838, Norwich, St John de Sepulchre; citing Norfolk Record Office, Parish Registers Ref: PD 90/18
- ⁹ "Norfolk, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1938", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed July 2025), marriage of Clement HANSELL and Charlotte LEECH, 16 September 1838, Lakenham St John and All Saints; citing Norfolk Record Office, Parish Registers Ref: PD 104/14
- ¹⁰ "Norfolk, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1938", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed July 2025), marriage of Charles LEECH and Marianne SOWTER, 14 January 1839, Lakenham St John and All Saints; citing Norfolk Record Office, Parish Registers Ref: PD 104/14
- ¹¹ "British Newspapers", digital images, *FindMyPast* (www.findmypast.com.au : accessed August 2025); citing *Norfolk Chronicle*, 8 May 1841, page 2, column 8, Mary Ann Leech of Lakenham.
- ¹² "Norfolk, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1922", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed July 2025), Eliza Elizabeth HANSELL, daughter of Clement and Charlotte, baptised 3 Mar 1839, Lakenham St John and All Saints; citing Norfolk Record Office, Parish Registers Ref: PD 104/6.
- ¹³ "Norfolk, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1922", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed July 2025), Marianne Leech HANSELL, daughter of Clementine and Charlotte, baptised 14 Mar 1841, Lakenham St John and All Saints; citing Norfolk Record Office, Parish Registers Ref: PD 104/6.

¹⁴ "England and Wales, Register of Deaths", General Register Office, Southport, England, registration of death (digital image) for James LEECH, died 11 January 1840; Registered: 1840, Quarter: Mar, Registration District: Norwich, Vol: 13, p.190.

¹⁵ "1841 England Census", database with images, *FindMyPast* (www.findmypast.com.au : accessed 13 July 2025), entry for the household of Clement HANSELL, Lakenham, Norfolk; citing The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England, Class: HO107, Piece: 787, BookL 9, Folio: 12, Page: 17; Registration District: Norwich, Sub-district: Mancroft, Enumeration District: 1, Schedule: 1860.

¹⁶ "1841 England Census", database with images, *FindMyPast* (www.findmypast.com.au : accessed 13 July 2025), entry for the household of Charles LEECH, Lakenham, Norfolk; citing The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England, Class: HO107, Piece: 787, Book 10, Folio: 35, Page: 22; Registration District: Norwich, Sub-district: Mancroft, Enumeration District: 1, Schedule: 2405.

¹⁷ "England and Wales, Register of Deaths", General Register Office, Southport, England, registration of death (digital image) for Marianne Liest [sic] HANSELL, died 31 July 1842; Registered: 1842, Quarter: Sep, Registration District: Norwich, Vol: 13, p.166.

¹⁸ "Norfolk, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1922", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed July 2025), Marianne HANSELL, daughter of Clementine and Charlotte, baptised 7 April 1844, Lakenham St John and All Saints; citing Norfolk Record Office, Parish Registers Ref: PD 104/6.

¹⁹ "Norfolk, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1922", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed July 2025), Charlotte HANSELL, daughter of Clementine and Charlotte, baptised 3 May 1846, Lakenham St John and All Saints; citing Norfolk Record Office, Parish Registers Ref: PD 104/6.

²⁰ "England and Wales, Civil Registration Online Birth Index", database, General Register Office (www.gro.gov.uk : accessed July 2025), entry for Susanna LEECH; citing Register of Births, General Register Office, Southport, England, Registered: 1849, Quarter: Sep, Registration District: Norwich, Vol: 13, p.247.

²¹ "Norfolk, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1922", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed July 2025), James Clementine HANSELL, son of Clementine and Charlotte, baptised 5 Mar 1848, Lakenham St John and All Saints; citing Norfolk Record Office, Parish Registers Ref: PD 104/6.

²² "Norfolk, England, Church of England Deaths and Burials, 1813-1995", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed July 2025), burial of James HANSELL, infant, 29 May 1848, Norwich, St John de Sepulchre; citing Norfolk Record Office, Parish Registers Ref: PD 90/18.

²³ "1851 England Census", database with images, *FindMyPast* (www.findmypast.com.au : accessed 13 July 2025), entry for the household of Clement HANSELL, Lakenham, Norfolk; citing The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England, Class: HO107, Piece: 1815, Folio: 16, Page: 25; Registration District: Norwich, Sub-district: Mancroft, Enumeration District: 1A, Schedule: 113.

²⁴ "1851 England Census", database with images, *FindMyPast* (www.findmypast.com.au : accessed 13 July 2025), entry for the household of Charles LEECH, Lakenham, Norfolk; citing The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England, Class: HO107, Piece: 1815, Folio: 87, Page: 11; Registration District: Norwich, Sub-district: Mancroft, Enumeration District: 1D, Schedule: 46.

²⁵ "England and Wales, Civil Registration Online Death Index", database, General Register Office (www.gro.gov.uk : accessed August 2025), entry for Charles LEECH, aged 76; citing Register of Deaths, General Register Office, Southport, England, Registered: 1853, Quarter: Jun, Registration District: Norwich, Vol: 04B, p.105

²⁶ "British Newspapers", digital images, *FindMyPast* (www.findmypast.com.au : accessed August 2025); citing *Norfolk Chronicle*, 25 June 1853, page 3, column 3, Died. Same day [On the 17th inst] in his 76th year, Mr Charles Leech, carpenter, New Lakenham.

²⁷ "Norfolk, England, Church of England Deaths and Burials, 1813-1995", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed July 2025), burial of Charles LEECH of Lakenham, 24 June 1853, Norwich, St John de Sepulchre; citing Norfolk Record Office, Parish Registers Ref: PD 90/18

²⁸ "England and Wales, Civil Registration Online Birth Index", database, General Register Office (www.gro.gov.uk : accessed August 2025), entry for William Clement HANSELL; citing Register of Births, General Register Office, Southport, England, Registered: 1853, Quarter: Dec, Registration District: Great Yarmouth, Vol: 04B, p.109.

²⁹ "Norfolk, England, Church of England Deaths and Burials, 1813-1995", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed August 2025), burial of William HANSELL, 26 February 1854, Norwich, St John de Sepulchre; citing Norfolk Record Office, Parish Registers Ref: PD 90/18

³⁰ "England and Wales, Civil Registration Online Birth Index", database, General Register Office (www.gro.gov.uk : accessed August 2025), entry for Frederick Clement HANSELL; citing Register of Births, General Register Office, Southport, England, Registered: 1857, Quarter: Sep, Registration District: Great Yarmouth, Vol: 04B, p.16.

³¹ "England and Wales, Civil Registration Online Birth Index", database, General Register Office (www.gro.gov.uk : accessed August 2025), entry for Frederick Clement HANSELL; citing Register of Births, General Register Office, Southport, England, Registered: 1857, Quarter: Sep, Registration District: Great Yarmouth, Vol: 04B, p.16.

³² "England and Wales, Civil Registration Online Birth Index", database, General Register Office (www.gro.gov.uk : accessed August 2025), entry for Frederick HANSELL; citing Register of Births, General Register Office, Southport, England, Registered: 1859, Quarter: Sep, Registration District: Great Yarmouth, Vol: 04B, p.17.

³³ "Norfolk, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1938", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed August 2025), marriage of Thomas LEECH and Eliza Elizabeth HANSELL, 29 December 1859, Great Yarmouth; citing Norfolk Record Office, Parish Registers Ref: PD 28/85

³⁴ "England and Wales, Civil Registration Online Birth Index", database, General Register Office (www.gro.gov.uk : accessed August 2025), entry for Thomas Frederick HANSELL; citing Register of Births, General Register Office, Southport, England, Registered: 1860, Quarter: Dec, Registration District: Great Yarmouth, Vol: 04B, p.4.

³⁵ "1861 England Census", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed August 2025), entry for the household of Charlotte HANSELL, Yarmouth, Norfolk; citing The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England, Class: Rg 9; Piece: 1193; Folio: 96; Page: 17; Registration District: Yarmouth, Sub-district: Yarmouth Northern 2; Enumeration District: 15, Schedule: 81.

³⁶ "1861 England Census", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed August 2025), entry for the household of Elizabeth LEECH, Yarmouth, Norfolk; citing The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England, Class: Rg 9; Piece: 1191; Folio: 180; Page: 31; Registration District: Yarmouth, Sub-district: Yarmouth Southern 1; Enumeration District: 12, Schedule: 180.

³⁷ "1861 England Census", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed August 2025), entries for Clement HANSELL and Thomas LEECH in the household of William BASHAM, Norwich, Norfolk; citing The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England, Class: Rg 9; Piece: 1215; Folio: 11; Page: 20; Registration District: Norwich, Sub-district: Conisford 3; Schedule: 119.

³⁸ "1871 England Census", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed August 2025), entry for the household of Clement HANSELL, Yarmouth, Norfolk; citing The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England, Class: Rg 10; Piece: 1786; Folio: 29; Page: 52; Registration District: Yarmouth, Sub-district: Southern; Enumeration District: 9, Schedule: 341.

³⁹ "Norfolk, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1938", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed August 2025), marriage of Frederick HANSELL and Clara Matilda STACEY, 5 September 1880, Great Yarmouth; citing Norfolk Record Office, Parish Registers Ref: PD 28/98

⁴⁰ "1881 England Census", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed August 2025), entry for the household of Clement HANSELL, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk; citing The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England, Class: Rg 11; Piece: 1910; Folio: 68; Page: 40; Registration District: Yarmouth, Sub-district: Yarmouth Southern; Schedule: 640.

⁴¹ "England and Wales, Register of Deaths", General Register Office, Southport, England, registration of death (digital image) for Clement HANSELL, died 12 July 1882; Registered: 1882, Quarter: Sep, Registration District: Yarmouth, Vol: 04B, p.1.

⁴² "1891 England Census", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed August 2025), entry for Charlotte HANSELL, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk; citing The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England, Class: Rg 12; Piece: 1498; Folio: 24; Page: 42; Registration District: Yarmouth, Sub-district: Yarmouth Southern; Enumeration District: 1; Schedule: 257.

⁴³ "England and Wales, Register of Deaths", General Register Office, Southport, England, registration of death (digital image – top missing) for Charlotte HANSELL, died ?? August 1894; Registered: 1882, Quarter: Sep, Registration District: Great Yarmouth, Vol: 04B, p.12.

⁴⁴ BMJ Reports on the Nursing and Administration of Provincial Workhouses and Infirmarys, 1894-5, <https://www.workhouses.org.uk/BMJ/Yarmouth.shtml> : accessed August 2025

⁴⁵ "Norfolk, England, Church of England Deaths and Burials, 1813-1995", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed August 2025), burial of Charlotte HANSELL, 9 August 1894, Great Yarmouth; citing Norfolk Record Office, Parish Registers Ref: Not specified.