

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.

Mary Lilian Warr's Story

Early life

Mary Lilian Warr was born in the second half of 1883 to **William Warr** and **Maria (nee Smith)** and was baptised at the parish church of her home town Bridport, Dorset on August 5th. William and Maria had been married in the same church in June 1880, and Mary was the second of their six children. Her older sister **Elizabeth May** was born in 1881, and Mary's birth was followed by **William Charles Samuel** in 1885, **Beatrice Victoria** in 1887, **Freda Maria** in 1889 and **Randolph Churchill** in 1892. Her father was a net braider at the time of her birth; this was a cottage industry, making fine nets for fishing and usually undertaken by women, so maybe Maria also worked at this. A painting called Net Braiding by Fra Newberry (1920) hangs in the Bridport museum. By 1901, William is a self-employed Fruiterer and fishmonger.

In 1901, Mary was studying housework at the School of Housewifery at The Grange, Street, Somerset, some 30 miles from Bridport. At 17, she is one of the older pupils.

Making a new life

The next record for Mary is on November 12th 1909, when she is listed as Lilian Warr travelling on the SS Corinthic to Wellington NZ; she is described as a cook. A further record shows her going through immigration at Wellington on 27th December, then arriving at Lyttleton, Christchurch on the south island, on 30th December 1909, after a voyage lasting some 49 days. (Another passenger is PN Warr, a Gent, but it is not clear who this is or if there is any link to Lilian).

By 1911, Mary Lilian is on the electoral register in Riccarton, Canterbury NZ, where her address is Burnham School; she is possibly a member of staff, maybe a cook or housekeeper. Later that year, on 19 October at the Church of St Matthew, Christchurch, she married **Arthur Philip Rose**, two years her junior. His electoral record for 1911 shows him also living in Burnham, where he is a painter. So this gives a possible explanation as to how they met.

Mary and Arthur went on to have four children, **Doreen Freda** 1912 – 1998; **Beryl Lilian** 1914 – 1996; **Charles William Philip** 1916 – 1962 and **Randolph John Warr** 1917 – 1993. It is interesting how many of Mary's family names are given to the children.

Arthur Philip died on 20th December 1958, Mary Lilian on 6th October 1964. They have a shared plot in the Canterbury Memorial Gardens and

Crematorium, and there was a short obituary in the Press on 8th October, reporting that she had died suddenly at the home of her daughter.

It is not clear why Mary, from a family that seemed to be well settled in Bridport, chose to make the long voyage to NZ. However, it turns out she was not alone in spreading her wings, as most of the family left Bridport.

The rest of the family

Maria, Mary's mother, and her brother **Randolph**

In 1911, Mary's mother Maria was living with the youngest son Randolph in Chew Stoke, not far from Bristol. Her husband William is not listed, although she is described as married rather than widowed. There are no obvious alternative records for William.

Randolph was awarded a WW1 victory medal, having served as a gunner. In September 1924, he married Amy Kathleen Bennett in Clutton, and on 16th October the couple left for New Zealand on the SS Athenic. Randolph's occupation was a carpenter. His mother Maria went with them, and they settled in the Christchurch area.

Elizabeth May, Mary's older sister

Elizabeth married Thomas Cowdery in 1907, and by 1911 they had moved to St Helier, Jersy. They had 3 children. Elizabeth's blue registration form from the occupation of Jersey is on file.

William Charles, Mary's younger brother

2nd Lieutenant William Charles Samuel died at the Somme on 1st July 1916 age 31 and is buried at Dantzig Alley British Cemetery.

Beatrice, Mary's younger sister

In 1911, Beatrice was a nurse in Taunton Hospital, and then served as a nurse in France in WW1, being awarded British and French Red Cross service medals. She married David Lawrence Jones in Paris in the early

1920s and spent much of her life there, returning to England occasionally (such as in 1937 when they travelled from Cherbourg to Southampton). Beatrice died in France in 1953.

Freda, Mary's youngest sister

Freda married Thomas Henry, a farmer, in 1907, and they travelled to New Zealand in December that year. Freda Victoria Kempton Elmes was born at sea on 17th December at 2.30pm.

Mary's mother Maria died on 16th July 1943, age 85. She is buried in the same location as Mary would be 23 years later. Her death notice says:

'On the 16th July 1943 at the residence of her daughter Mrs A Rose, 98 Hawford Road Opawa, Maria widow of the late William Warr, Dorset, England and lived mother of Mr R Warr, 91 Caledonian Road and Mrs T Elmes 138 Cargill St, Dunedin: in her 85th year.'

So it seems likely that it was Freda who established herself first in New Zealand, Mary followed next and finally Maria with Randolph and Amy. They remained close. But even those who didn't make the long journey south didn't stay in Bridport for long, making their lives in Jersey and France. Only William remains a mystery!

Mary put her housewifery skills to use as a cook for some time, but maybe her life was more of an adventure than she imagined when she enrolled back in 1901.

With thanks to Mary's grand daughter and great granddaughter in New Zealand

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Sources

Ancestry

Find my Past

Family Search

GRO

New Zealand Archive

Jersey Heritage

Find a Grave