

This is a Story from 'A Few Forgotten Women'



This story was written, in January 2023, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of girls from Leeds, Girls' Industrial School, Yorkshire.

Ann Elizabeth Robshaw

Ann Elizabeth Robshaw was a well built, 12 years old, brown haired, blue eyed, girl who was admitted to the Shadwell Children's Centre on 24th June 1869. Her crime was being destitute, for which she was convicted by Charles Chadwick and John Ellershaw, to 4 years in the institution. An identifying feature was a scar on her neck under her right ear. Her father was recorded as deceased and her mother, Elizabeth had been in the Barwick in Elmet Workhouse, but the record infers, now, had a position as cooke (sic) for a Mr Horsley.

A little education had been provided by the Burley Land Sunday School but she had not attended a day school. Ann blamed an Emma Wood for leading her into crime by encouraging her to steal from her master, there being quite a number. The longest appeared to have been a George Hardaker, a clothes weaver of Guisely for whom she had worked for a year and six weeks. She has spent 4 months with Mr Bas[wor]ths in Far Headingley but that would have ended when she stole money and a ball. After a week, Ann ran away from Mr Simpson, the druggist in Headingley

having again stolen money. Another employer was Mr Scoury from the watch shop in Woodhouse Lane, where she had stayed for 2 weeks, then stealing 2/6 and 4d. It was recorded that she had run away from all the places. Emma Wood, the girl who led Ann astray was probably found in Burley Village

According to Peter Higginbotham's Workhouses website a few days before Ann Elizabeth was admitted to the school, Carlton and Barwick in Elmet workhouse was abolished. This could have meant that her mother left the institution and found employment with Mr Horsley. If Ann was with her mother in the workhouse when it closed, had she abandoned her daughter in order to gain employment? As Elizabeth was in this workhouse, Barwick would have been her place of settlement. A search of the parish in the 1841 and 1851 census revealed several families name Robshaw, unfortunately it did not pinpoint Elizabeth Robshaw. There was a widower, Mr Francis Horsely living in South Parade, Leeds, in 1861. He did employ a cook and a servant. Ten years later he had remarried and moved house but was still employing a cook. This could quite possibly have been the gentleman who employed Elizabeth.

Ann's admittance record stated that her father was dead. However this does not necessarily mean that Elizabeth had been married to him. According to the GRO there are no Ann Elizabeth Robshaws born between 1854 and 1862. There was an Elizabeth Ann Robshaw registered in Dewsbury in Sept. ¼ 1856 with mother's maiden name of Calvert. There is a marriage in Dewsbury for James Robshaw and Ellen Calvert, however the family are together during the period covered by Ann's time in the school. There appears to be no other relevant marriage. There is a death for an Elizabeth in Wakefield age 41.

There is one line of enquiry that could be Ann Elizabeth from the Industrial School. The date allotted for Ann's release was 24th July 1873 when she would have

been around 17. 11th Nov 1876 saw a report in The Leeds Times of “A Dishonest Domestic Servant and her Sweetheart”. The dishonest servant was 19 years old, Annie Robshaw, the sweetheart was 26 years old Robinson Dunhill. If this was Ann, from the Industrial School, she was obviously back to her previous conduct as she had stolen £20-£30 worth of clothes from Mr Howard of Lovell Street, North Street, where she was in service. Letters in her possession confirmed the conspiracy between the two. In Leeds Quarter Sessions on 28th Dec. she was sentenced to 6 calendar months imprisonment with hard labour, having pleaded guilty. The newspaper report elaborated on the offence describing the stolen clothing a baby clothes. The Treasurer of the Borough of Leeds had to pay £10/6/4 to the prosecutors for prosecuting Ann and another for larceny which had been committed in the Borough.

Despite being caught, the couple married in New Malton, Robinson’s home town, on 24th Nov. 1877. Robinson was 27 whilst Annie was only 20. Richard, Robinson’s father was a labourer the same as the man recorded as Annie’s father, James Strother. Robinson’s name was probably derived from the fact that his mother’s maiden name was Hannah Robinson married to Robinson’s father, Richard, on 13th Feb. 1848.

James Strother was somewhat of a surprise, recorded on the marriage certificate as Annie’s father. I had initially rejected the marriage of Robinson and Annie because a James Strother was in the 1871 census with a daughter, Ann Elizabeth age 1. James did appear several times in the Quarter Sessions records being given 3 months for larceny in the Leeds July sessions in 1825. On 4th Oct. 1853 James and daughters, Susannah Margaret and Sarah were removed by the Guardians from the Barwick Workhouse. The place where Elizabeth Robshaw had been resident. Again on 1st July 1855 James and daughter, Sarah were removed to Thorner

in the South Riding. These records do mean that James and Elizabeth Robshaw were in the same vicinity at the appropriate time.

Annie and Robinson did not appear to have had a happy life after their marriage. According to Annie's submission on the 1911 census they had had 12 children, 11 of which were still alive but one had died. The baptisms of children, Ann Elizabeth and George on 4th Nov 1888 when the family was living at Barnaby's Yard Gardens, gives the mother as Ann Elizabeth which adds weight to the conclusion that she was Ann Elizabeth Robshaw from the school. She also uses the full name in the censuses.

Up to 1891 the family live together in Malton their youngest child being Ethel aged 3 months. 1901 sees the family at the not inconsiderable distance, of 65 miles away, in Bingley but Robinson is not with them. In the intervening 10 years 3 children had been born, Lucy, Edith and Albert Victor. In Albert's baptism the family are still altogether in Malton. A search for Robinson in 1901 returns a negative result but in 1911 he is still in Malton in a lodging house stating that he is single. Two of their daughters are married by 1921 and Annie is living with them. She entered an ambiguous return in the marriage column as "married, but both alive" underneath. Did she misunderstand the heading where children were supposed to have record their parents as alive or dead? Robinson, still in Malton, is head of the household with lodgers, but a widower, cattle drover with no place of work.

Another reason for Robinson's absence could be his name and list of offences as recorded in the 1911 Calendar of Prisoners. He had pleaded guilty to stealing a cow from Darley Nicholson and was sentenced to 6 calendar months in North Allerton prison, more than 30 miles from Malton. However his list of offences indicated a very itinerant life style.

“Robinson Dunhill:53, gardener:

3 Mon. & 3 Mon, (concurrent), Police Ct., Malton, 4th May 1908. (Stealing a dog, begging, R. & V. [*Rogue and Vagabond*]

23 Summarily: 17 drunkenness, 1 assault, 1 begging, 2 Education Act, 2 sleeping out, 1879-1909. “

He is bracketed with a Sidney Jackson, alias Sidney Sharp, 47, mason. Perhaps he was Robinson’s partner in crime.

Both Ann and Robinson probably die before the 1939 Register, Annie in the March Quarter of 1936, registered in the Keighley area and Robinson in Malton in 1929.

Ann Elizabeth Robshaw did not have the best start in life. It is not certain if her mother was married or she was the illegitimate daughter of James Strother. If she was the girl who married Robinson Dunhill mixing with questionable characters in her early life was continued into adulthood with the inevitable hard life.

Ann Simcock February 2023