

This is a Story from 'A Few Forgotten Women'



Mary Ford née Brown aka Brahen

Having a name which is fairly common means that distinguishing the correct person can be somewhat daunting. The starting point for Mary Ford was the 1901 census where she was recorded in the St. Joseph's Reformatory for inebriate women in Ashford (ref: RG13/1171/13/18/109). She was age 31 with no occupation, being born in Leeds.

The reason for her incarceration in the reformatory can be found in the West Yorkshire Prison records 1801-1914 and the Leeds Calendar of Prisoners, for 9th Oct 1900; 19 x drunk, neglecting her child. Her age was 31 and an occupation of millhand. Her offence *"Having the custody, control and charge of Martin Ford a child under the age of 16 years to wit one year and 9 months did on divers dates between 6th August 1900 and 4th September 1900 wilfully neglecting the said Martin Ford in a manner likely to cause the said child injury to its health, and with being an habitual drunkard within sections 1-16 and 62 Vic. Cap 60. 4 calendar months hard labour at the termination confined for 18 calendar months to St. Joseph's Reformatory, Ashford Middlesex. Found guilty.*

Mary's case was reported in the newspaper. Added information informed the public that Mary had 5 children and she had on one occasion been so drunk that she had registered a living child in mistake for a dead one. Her drunken conviction rate was 29 times and she was to serve another four months.

Where were her children and husband while Mary was in court and then in St. Joseph's? According to the census (RG13/4216/43/28/144) husband James, a 35 year old dyer's labourer was with four children, Mary 12, James 9, John 8, and Anthony 4 at 7, Brook Street in Leeds.

There is a possible marriage for James and Mary in Leeds in September ¼ 1888. The names James Fordey and Mary Brahen. Mary's maiden name was Brown or was known by several variants of that name including Brahen. In 1881 when Mary was 10 she was with her parents, John Brown a 30 year old cloth dresser and Mary's mother, Bridget along with 5 siblings.

The facts are written down in the record but what turned that 10 year old girl into an habitual drunkard who neglected her children? Was it grinding poverty or the loss of 5 children a fact that she records in the 1911 census when she and 2 children, Richard 8 and Bridget 6 along with lodger Elizabeth Renon and were living in a 3 roomed house in one of the infamous courts of Leeds. James was not present.

James is next found in his army attestation papers where we learn a little about him. He was 38 years and 8 months 5feet 1 inch with a 37 inch chest but with no distinguishing marks. Mary is given as the next of kin, living in St. Mary's Richmond Hill Leeds. Bridget and Richard are recorded as his children. James had joined the Yorkshire Regiment and his character and conduct on discharge was said to be good.

Despite this James and Mary are not together in 1921 when Mary, 51, Bridget 17 and Richard 16 were joined by brother Anthony 24. There is once again a lodger.

Mary is probably the Mary Ford who died in Leeds in September ¼ 1923 age 53, a young age for a woman who had lead such a disturbed life.

Records used on Ancestry and Find My Past