

# *This is A Few Forgotten Women Story*



*This story was written, in November 2024, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who were found residing or working in various homes for Fallen Women in the census returns.*

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## **Sarah Ann Mephram 's Story**

Sarah Ann Mephram is enumerated in the 1871 census as an inmate of The House of Mercy Magadalen Home in Great Maplestead, Essex<sup>1</sup>. Aged 17 and unmarried, she had been born in Brighton, Sussex. The census form states that all the inmates are employed in laundry work and the domestic work of the house.

A search in the 1861 census for Brighton<sup>2</sup> found 7 year old Sarah, her sisters Harriet Jane, aged 5, and Alice Mathilda, aged 3, along with her parents John and Sarah Ann Mephram, aged 31 and 30 respectively. Her parents were both from Lewes, while Sarah and her sisters had been born in Brighton. Her father

John, was a labourer. The Mephams were one of three families living at 48 Cheltenham Place, Brighton.

Although searches were carried out in the British Newspaper Archive, available on the FindMyPast website, no reports were found as to why Sarah might have been sent to the home in Essex.

Meanwhile, Sarah's family were enumerated in Brighton in the 1871 census<sup>3</sup>, living at 19 Marshall's Row. John is stated to be a brewer's labourer, and her mother Sarah is a laundress. Her sister Alice is a nurse child, and a new brother, John, aged 9, has been born. Although Sarah had been sent away the census record suggests that her family were still together, and this may have helped Sarah on her eventual release.

By 1871, Sarah's sister Harriett had left home and was working as a domestic servant in the household of William Hill, a draper, of Brighton<sup>4</sup>.

A search on the General Register Office birth index for the births of the Mephams children showed that their mothers' maiden name was Hayler. (This appears to have been incorrectly transcribed as "Haylop" on the record for Alice).

<b>Surname, First Names</b>	<b>Mother's maiden surname</b>	<b>GRO reference (accessed November 2024)</b>
<b>MEPHAM, SARAH ANN</b>	<b>HAYLER</b>	<i>GRO Reference:</i> 1853 S Quarter in BRIGHTHELMSTON Volume 02B Page 186
<b>MEPHAM, HARRIETT JANE</b>	<b>HAYLER</b>	<i>GRO Reference:</i> 1855 J Quarter in BRIGHTHELMSTON Volume 02B Page 198

<b>MEPHAM</b> , ALICE MATILDA	<b>HAYLOP</b>	<i>GRO Reference</i> : 1858 J Quarter in BRIGHTON Volume 02B Page 172
<b>MEPHAM</b> , JOHN WILLIAM	<b>HAYLER</b>	<i>GRO Reference</i> : 1862 M Quarter in BRIGHTON Volume 02B Page 202

Sarah's parents, John Mephram and Sarah Ann Hayler, had married in St John's Church, Lewes, on 20 June 1852<sup>5</sup>.

Their marriage record shows that John was a bachelor of full age, and both he and his father Samuel were labourers. Sarah Ann was a spinster, also of full age, and her father Benjamin was a fishmonger.

### **Sarah's life after she was released from the home in Essex**

Sarah married Francis Laycock on 3 August 1879<sup>6</sup>. One of the witnesses to the marriage was Alice Mathilda Mephram, and this, along with Sarah's stated age (25) and her father's name, John Mephram, as well as the place where the marriage took place (St Peter's Church, Brighton), convincingly suggests that the marriage record relates to the correct Sarah Mephram.

Francis Laycock was a bachelor, aged 22, who worked as a chairmaker. His father, Thomas, was a waterman. The address for both Sarah and Francis was 66 Hanover Square, Brighton

Francis and Sarah are enumerated in the 1881 Brighton census, at 96 Hanover Terrace, Brighton, with their son Francis, aged 1<sup>7</sup>.

The 1891 census shows Sarah and Francis living at 6 Richmond Hill, Brighton, along with children Alice 4 and Bertie, 2 months<sup>8</sup>. Francis, now aged 11,

appears to have been staying with his paternal grandparents, Thomas and Ann Laycock, at the time. Perhaps the grandparents were helping with childcare while Bertie was very young<sup>9</sup>.

Sadly, three children of Sarah and Francis died very young during the 1880s. They were Maud Elizabeth; born 1882, died the same year, Frederick; born 1883, dying the following year, and Daisy; born 1885, only to die in 1886.

<b>GRO Birth Index reference</b>	<b>GRO Death Index reference</b>
LAYCOCK Maud Elizabeth MMS MEPHAM 1882 M Quarter in BRIGHTON Volume 02B Page 247	LAYCOCK Maud Elizabeth Aged 0 1882 S quarter in Brighton Volume 02B Page 134
LAYCOCK, Frederick, MMS MEPHAM, 1883 J Quarter in Brighton Volume 02B Page 245	LAYCOCK Frederick Aged 1 1884 D Quarter in Brighton Volume 02B Paged 148
LAYCOCK, Daisy, MMS MEPHAM 1885 D Quarter in Brighton Volume 02B Page 253	LAYCOCK Daisy, Aged 0 1886 M Quarter in Brighton Volume 02B Page 240

By the time of the 1901 census, Sarah and Francis were living at 51 Lennox Street, Brighton, with their son Francis, 21, and his 23 year old wife Eliza, from Ware in Hertfordshire. Their daughter Alice and son Bertie were also living with them, as was their nephew, Thomas Laycock, aged 2<sup>10</sup>.

Sarah's husband Francis appears to have died in 1906<sup>11</sup>.

## **Sarah's life as a widow**

Sarah's son Francis, a shop assistant at an ironmongers, lived in East Finchley with his wife Eliza and their 3 year old daughter, Edie. The census shows that Francis and Eliza had had another child who had died. It also shows that Sarah was living with them in 1911<sup>12</sup>.

Sarah was still living with Francis and his family at the time of the 1921 census. By that time the family had moved to Finchley and Francis was the manager of an ironmongers on the Holloway Road, London, N19<sup>13</sup>.

Francis appears in the 1939 register with his family<sup>14</sup>. However, Sarah had died in 1933<sup>15</sup>. Whatever the reason for Sarah's enforced stay in the home in Essex, she appears to have gone on to live a long life surrounded by her family.

## **Sources**

1 The National Archives; Kew, London, England; 1871 England Census; Class: RG10; Piece: 1698; Folio: 117; Page: 7; GSU roll: 830745

2 1861 England Census RG9/598/83/21

3 1871 England Census RG10/1080/141/4

4 1871 England Census RG10/1079/48/13

5 East Sussex, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1936 accessed on Ancestry on 9 Nov 2024

6 East Sussex Record Office; Brighton, England; Sussex Parish Registers; Reference: PAR 277/1/3/6 accessed on Ancestry.co.uk on 9 November 2024 in East Sussex, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1936

7 1881 England Census: RG11/1083/66/27

8 1891 England census RG12/805/54/14

9 1891 England census RG12/805/84/27

- 10 1901 England census RG13/922/125/38
- 11 Register of deaths: Laycock Francis 48 Brighton 2b119  
[www.Freebmd.org.uk](http://www.Freebmd.org.uk) accessed 21 November 2024
- 12 1911 England census RG14/PN7177/Sch235
- 13 1921 England census RG15/PN06668/Sch 313
- 14 The National Archives; Kew, London, England; 1939 England & Wales Register; Reference: RG 101/773A
- 15 GRO Death register Q1 1933, Laycock, Sarah A aged 79 Barnet 3a 713  
[www.Freebmd.org.uk](http://www.Freebmd.org.uk) accessed 7 December 2024