

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



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.

Sarah Ellen McDonald

Sarah Ellen McDonald, or McDonnald, was born in 1857 in Barnsley. She was admitted to the Industrial School on 9 July 1869. Her offence was wandering, begging, sleeping out and being homeless. She was committed to the home for four years.

The pages before Sarah's admission page contained information about her two younger brothers John aged ten and Richard aged seven. From these it seems that their mother was Mary McDonald and that their father was dead. It was recorded that he had died in the Manchester Workhouse. It is recorded on John's admission form that there are other members of their family in the area, one of which is a sister (see below) and also a grandfather and grandmother. The children's mother, Mary, and an elder sister Julia are on the

1861 census with Sarah and John in Barnsley, the mother is recorded as a Hawker and born in Leeds.

Sarah is on the 1871 census and is still an inmate of the "Girls Ragged School", Windsor Street, Leeds. Her brothers are also still inmates at "Edgar Street Boys School" but it lists them as John aged 11 and Richard aged 12 where as previously they were admitted as John aged 10 and Richard aged 7. Their sister Julia is recorded as a servant in the home of the Matron of the Home for Destitute Girls, 7 Quaker Terrace, also in Leeds. Julia married Samuel Bunting on April 13th 1874 in St Peters, Leeds.

On 14th April 1879 in St Peters Leeds Sarah married John Copley. Sarah is on the 1881 census as Sarah E. Copley aged 22 with husband John, who is working as a Paviour, his father and brother, and her brother John, who is working as a Puddler. Although he claims to be unmarried, John had married Eliza Binns in 1879 but she was living elsewhere. Eliza had also been in the industrial school and her story is told elsewhere. It is very likely that John is the John MacDonald who spent ten days in prison at Wakefield for disorderly behaviour in 1886. A missing end to a finger is mentioned both in the prison records and on his admissions' record to the industrial school.

In 1891 Sarah is listed as Sarah *Ann* Copley living with husband John, her mother Mary (who is now Fielden) and her 3 children John Copley born 1882 in Leeds, Thomas Frederick Copley born 1889 in Leeds and Mary Ellen Copley who is 1 month old also born in Leeds. In 1901, she is still resident in Leeds but is erroneously recorded as Sarah E Bopley. She is living at Museum Terrace, Leeds with her husband, John and two of her children, Thomas and Mary, also

her nephews James and Samuel Bunting who are Julia's sons. Sadly, her son John was institutionalised at the Leeds Union Workhouse and is recorded as an "imbecile" on both the 1901 and the 1911 census returns. I have searched to see if I could find evidence of an accident but have failed to find anything, given the large gap between John and Thomas maybe there was an issue even when he was a small child but initially they could manage.

In 1911, Sarah is living in Holbeck, Leeds with her husband and three children, John having returned to the family home.

Sarah died in 1934, she was buried on 21 Mar 1934 at Killingbeck Roman Catholic Cemetery, Killingbeck, Leeds. Her husband John died two years later and is buried in the same plot.