

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in March 2023, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who appear in the 1901 census for St. Joseph's Inebriate Reformatory, Ashford, Middlesex and Farmfield Reformatory for Inebriate Women, Horley, Surrey.

Mary Crawley's Story

Mary was one of the many women that we come across that prove difficult to research. Her 1901 entry in the census return for St Joseph's Inebriate Reformatory gives us very little to go on. She is listed as a 39-year-old inmate, a widow with no occupation and having been born in Commercial Road, London.¹

Which Mary Crawley!

There are numerous Mary Crawley's in the census returns and the fact she was a widow means that tracking down a birth for someone called Mary in Commercial Road, London is nigh on impossible.² Marriage details are equally

¹ 1901 England and Wales Census, RG13, Ashford Registration District, Piece 1171

² Commercial Road is in the East End of London, Commercial Road was constructed in 1802–1806 as a direct route to link dock traffic between the West India Docks and East India Docks to the City of London.

difficult to research as the name of her husband has not been mentioned. A Mary Crawley that perhaps is a good candidate was admitted to the Stepney Workhouse in Tower Hamlets in April 1905, the 43-year-old was noted as the widow of John, who was a stevedore. Her address was 35 Duval Street, and she had a cut on her head and an injured leg when admitted.³ I cannot definitely say that this Mary is the Mary at St Joseph's a few years earlier. A search of the newspaper comes up with nothing concrete using the street address as a keyword, but there is a report in 1892 that possibly might be this John and Mary.

Under the heading '*Assaulting a Drunken Wife*', a John Crawley who was said to be '*either blessed or cursed with a drunken wife*', was charged with assaulting his '*better-half*'. He had no difficulty in convincing the magistrate that his wife was addicted to drink, as she was in the court almost too drunk to give evidence. John went on to say that his wife was always out at public houses and that the children were cold and hungry, he couldn't trust her not to spend money on drink. The magistrate said that he was sorry John had such a wife and that her conduct in coming to court so drunk was disgraceful, but that he must '*keep his hands off her and would be bound over to keep the peace*'.⁴ Is this the same Mary Crawley?

In 1907 a Mary Crawley of 114 High Street, Deptford was arrested and after being brought up at the Greenwich magistrates court on 14 November she was committed to a certified inebriate reformatory for 3 years. Could this be the Mary Crawley that was in St Joseph's in 1901? If so then she seems to have been a habitual inebriate. The 46-year-old charwoman was described in the police

³ London Workhouse Admission and Discharge Records, 1764-1921, accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk

⁴ *East London Observer*, 8 October 1892, 6

gazette register as being 5 foot 6 inches high, of slight build and a fresh complexion, she had dark brown hair and brown eyes, with a scar over her left eye.⁵ There is nothing in the press regarding this 1907 conviction and so again I'm left unsure as to whether this is the Mary Crawley under consideration on this narrative.

Looking at death records for clues is another fruitless exercise unfortunately, there are numerous deaths of women called Mary Crawley right across London, Kent and Middlesex , any of which could well be the Mary I'm looking for, but they are too abundant to be research and so sadly this Mary's story must remain unresolved for the time being.

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⁵ 1907 UK, Registers of Habitual Criminals and Police Gazettes, 1834-1934, accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk
An image of Mary can be seen via this database -

