

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in September 2024, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of pupils at the Royal Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Poor (later The Royal School for the Deaf), Margate, Kent and The West of England Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Exeter, Devon

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Winifred Mary Bell's Story

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Mary Winifred Bell was born on 30th July 1889 and baptised on 11th September 1892¹ at St Paulinus, Crayford, Kent to John Losh Bell and Sarah his wife and his occupation was listed as florist.

On the 1891 Census² the family were living at Main Road, 1 Amelia Place, Crayford with her family. She had 3 older brothers, Frederick, William and Andrew.

¹ www.ancestry.co.uk Mary Winifred Bell Bexley, England, Kent, Births and Baptisms 1813-1925

² www.ancestry.co.uk 1891 Census RG12/636 Pg 18 Folio 82

On the census it says that her father John moved to Crayford from Carlisle and in 1891 was listed as a florist. He was married to Sarah who gave her place of birth as Borough, London.

We next find Mary on the 1901 census, and she was listed in the Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Children, Margate in 1901³ with many other children.

On the admission book entry it says she was enlisted on 13th July 1896 and admitted on 13th September 1896⁴ The Register of Children Old Kent Road with transfers to Margate lists Mary's father as John and his occupation as Gardener, and his address as 1 Amelia Place, High Street, Bexleyheath where the family were still living in 1901. Mary was transferred to Margate on 20th January 1892 it also says her Apparent Intellect is Fair and that she had a clear voice and was deaf from birth.

There is a Headmaster's report from Old Kent Road⁵ says that Mary had no complaints made about her and the family had moved on 1st September 1901 to 257 Broadway, Bexleyheath.

On another page on the Register of children: Old Kent Road⁶ Mary left Margate Asylum on 27th June 1905 but whilst there she won a prize for Conduct and Writing in 1901.

The leavers' book gives an insight into Mary's life at the school and her conduct but it states she was absent 184 times. Despite this she scored very highly on all her exams and lists her height at 4ft and 11inches and that she was confirmed on 1st June at Herne Bay Parish Church, Herne Bay, Kent⁷

On the 1911 census⁸ the family lived at Higham House, Brampton Road, Bexleyheath. Mary's older brothers had all left home and she lived with her parents and her father is listed as a Nurseryman and lists that Mary was deaf from birth.

Her brother William J Bell served in World War I and died in 1918⁹ in France aged 37

³ Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Children, Margate 1901 RG13 824 folios 30-35

⁴ Ch192/R1/1/1 Entry 5406 Admission Records Application for Admission 4325-7615 (1880-1925)

⁵ Ch192/R2/1/6 Entry 119 Register of Children Old Kent Road [1-369] with transfers to Margate

⁶ Ch192/R2/1/5 Entry 5357 Register of children: Old Kent Road [5256-5670] (with transfers to Margate)

⁷ Ch192/R8/1/3 Entry 231 Leavers Records: Registers of Children Leaving School (1902-1912)

⁸ www.ancestry.co.uk 1911 Census RG14 RD43 RSD1 ED11

⁹ Findagrave

Mary is still living with her parents on the 1921 census¹⁰ they are still living at Higham House, and John is employed by Brampton Nursery.

Mary's parents John Losh Bell and Sarah Ann Higham married at St John's Church, Wellington Street, Greenwich on 26th January 1878¹¹.

John Losh was aged 25 and was a bachelor and his occupation was Gardener and his father was listed at John Bell also a gardener.

Sarah Ann was aged 23 and her father was Thomas Higham, Shipwright.

Sarah Ann Bell, Mary's mother, died on 30th March 1925¹² and is buried at Bexleyheath Cemetery. Her father died in 1933¹³¹⁴ aged 80 and is buried at Bexleyheath Cemetery and according to the burial record the family still lived at Higham House. John is buried with his wife and son William.

Her father left a will¹⁵ and her brothers Frederick Higham Bell and Andrew Bell were the executors and he left quite a considerable sum for 1933.

On the 1939 Register¹⁶ Mary was living all by herself at 166 Brampton Road, Bexleyheath

Her brother Frederick lived in the same road at number 178 with his wife Alice and children Stanley, Gladys, Sidney and Douglas.

Mary died on 29th March 1964¹⁷ and was still living at 166 Brampton Road, Bexleyheath and died at Joyce Hospital, Dartford and was never married and left a will.

Mary's father John Losh Bell came to Kent from Carlisle, Cumberland to find work in London. His father was also John Bell who was gardener, and the family was found on the 1861 Census¹⁸. John Losh Bell's father was born in Burgh, Cumberland and the family had 3 children, John Losh born in Hawick,

¹⁰ www.findmypast.co.uk 1921 Census RG15/03881 SN147 RD43 RS1 ED13

¹¹ www.ancestry.co.uk Marriage Register *London, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1938*

¹² Ancestry.com. *UK and Ireland, Find a Grave® Index, 1300s-Current*

¹³ www.ancestry.co.uk Bexleyheath, Kent, England; *Registers of Burials*; Reference Number: LABX/DA/2/1/3

¹⁴ Ancestry.com. *UK and Ireland, Find a Grave® Index, 1300s-Current*

¹⁵ www.ancestry.co.uk England and Wales Government Probate Death Index 1858 - 2019

¹⁶ www.ancestry.co.uk 1939 Register

¹⁷ www.ancestry.co.uk England and Wales Government Probate Death Index 1858 – 2019

¹⁸ www.ancestry.co.uk 1861 Census RG9/437 Pg 12 Folio 22

Cumberland, Edward William and Frederick William who was both born in Hascombe, Surrey. John Bell had to travel to Surrey for work and on Frederick William's baptism record¹⁹ he was listed as the gardener at Park Hatch Lodge in Hascombe.

¹⁹ www.ancestry.co.uk Surrey, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1813-1921