

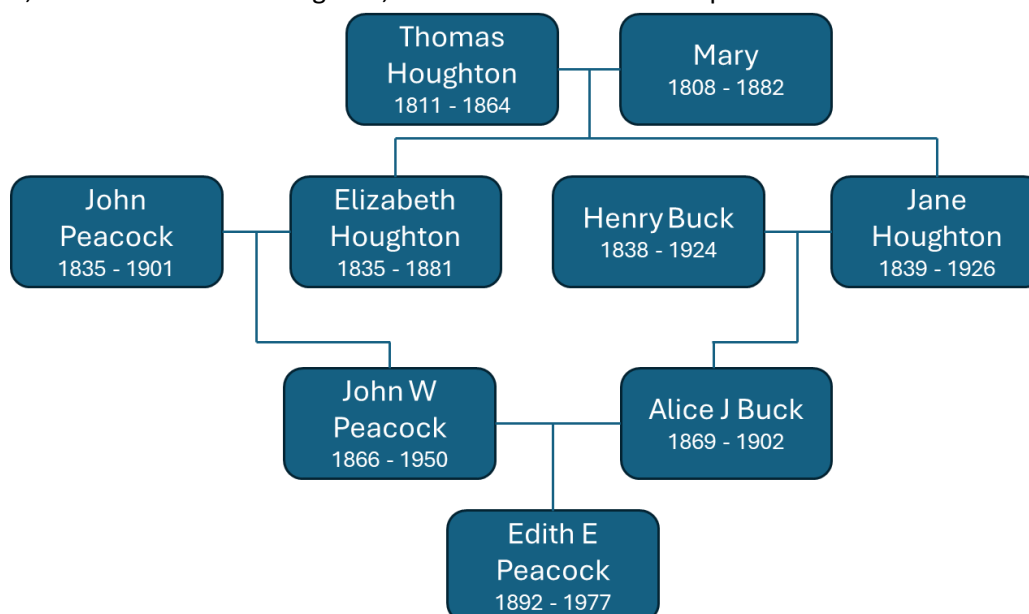
# This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



*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.*

## Edith Elizabeth Peacock's Story

Edith Elizabeth Peacock was born on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 1892 in Bedford<sup>1</sup>, the eldest child of John William Peacock and Alice Jane Buck. John and Alice married on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 1891 in Goldington, Bedfordshire<sup>2,3</sup>, with Edith born 5 months later. John and Alice were cousins, as their mothers, Elizabeth and Jane Houghton, were sisters<sup>4</sup>. Edith was baptised in Bedford on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1892<sup>5</sup>.



## Edith's childhood

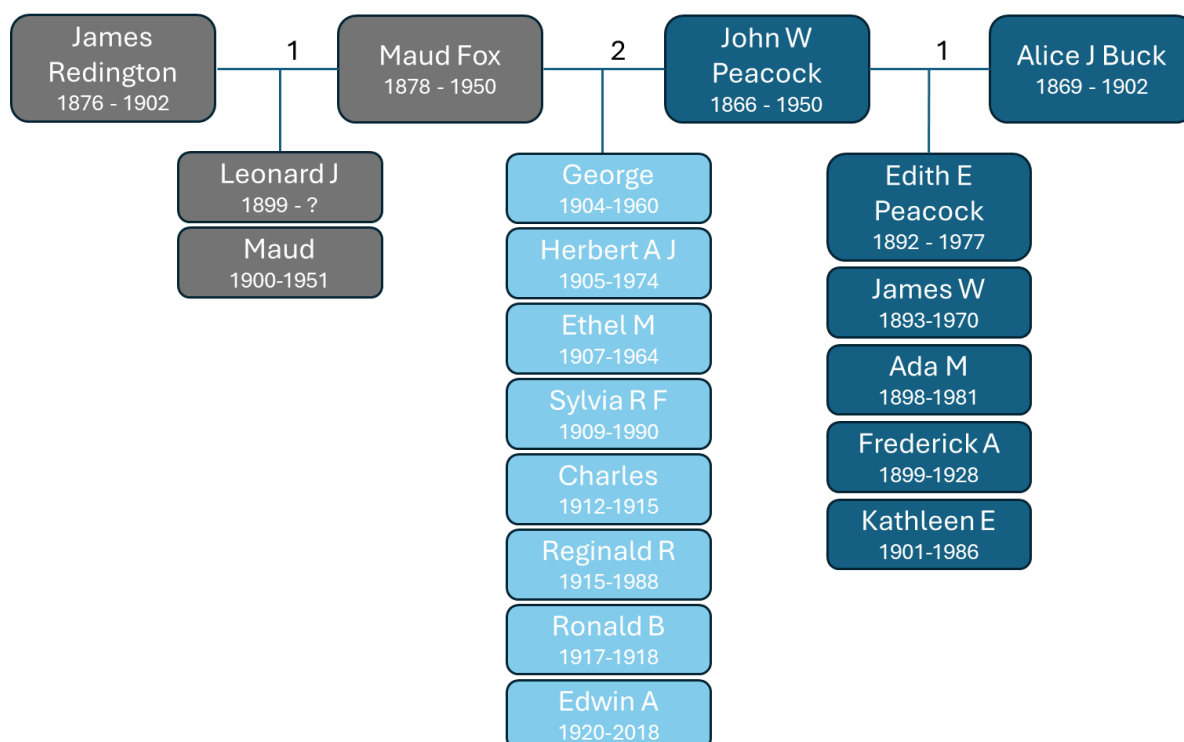
Edith's early childhood was spent in Bedford with her family, at Priory Street. Her eldest sibling, James William, was born in Bedford on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1893<sup>6</sup>, followed by Ada Mabel on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1898<sup>7</sup> and Frederick Arthur, in 1899<sup>8</sup>. Much of Edith's early childhood was punctuated by illness, with her having had measles, scarlet fever and whooping cough all before the age of 7<sup>9,10</sup>. In January 1894, aged 1 year and 10 months, Edith had an operation on her nose and throat, which left her deaf<sup>9</sup>. Despite this, she attended an infant school for 2 years<sup>5,10</sup>.

On 9<sup>th</sup> January 1899, Edith was elected for admission to the Asylum for the Support and Education of the Deaf and Dumb Children of the Poor<sup>5</sup>, and was admitted to the Old Kent Road site on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 1899<sup>9</sup>. On her admission she was examined and found to have "discharge from both her ears after scarlet fever", with a "very poor" voice, but "hope of improving as she is but young"<sup>9</sup>. The sureties for her admission were Miss Christian Henrietta May and Mrs Emma W Vipan, both of 10 Victoria Terrace, Bedford<sup>11</sup>. It is noted in Edith's admission documentation, that she was the only one of her siblings to be deaf and dumb<sup>9</sup>, and had no deaf and dumb relatives<sup>11</sup>; reflective of the surgical cause of her deafness. At Old Kent Road, Edith made "fairly good progress"<sup>11</sup>. Her report for 1899 notes good conduct in and out of school, with fair sewing and examination in articulation, lip reading and writing<sup>11</sup>. In 1900, she completed examinations in a wide array of subjects, scoring best in language, scripture and articulation, but struggling more in arithmetic and sewing/drawing<sup>11</sup>. On August 8<sup>th</sup> 1900, aged 8, Edith was transferred to the Margate site<sup>9,10,11</sup>, where she can be found as a 9-year-old Scholar in the 1901 Census<sup>12</sup>. At Margate, Edith appears to have struggled more academically, ranking poorly in her class in both 1901 and 1902<sup>11</sup>. However, it should also be noted that in Autumn 1902, she contracted scarlet fever for the second time<sup>13</sup>, and was absent from many exams in both these years<sup>11</sup>, so perhaps her continual ill health interrupted her early education at Margate. On December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1907, it was confirmed that Edith would be leaving the asylum<sup>14</sup>, and she was discharged on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December<sup>11</sup>. On leaving, her report notes her strengths in manual work (including being "fair" on the sewing machine and "improved cooking"), with "good" conduct and was reported to be "very useful in the house"<sup>13</sup>.

## The Peacock Family

The early 1900s was a time of significant change in the Peacock family, and when Edith returned in December of 1907, aged 15, she would have been met with significant change. Firstly, she had a new sister, Kathleen Eliza, who was born on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April 1901<sup>15</sup>. Sadly, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 1902, Edith's mother, Alice, died aged 32<sup>16,17</sup> of Placenta Previs<sup>18</sup>, so it's highly likely Edith had another sibling who was stillborn as no birth or death registrations are found of this child. In 1905 John was charged with acting as a hackney carriage driver without a license, resulting in a total fine of 10s 1d<sup>19</sup>, equivalent to ~£50 in 2024. However, John's run-ins with the law continued with a charge for obscene language in 1909<sup>20</sup>, resulting in further fines<sup>21</sup>.

After the death of Alice, by 1904, Edith's father John had met a new partner, Maud Redington. Maud Fox married James Redington in 1898 in West Ham<sup>22</sup> and had two children, Leonard James in 1899<sup>23</sup> and Maud (also known as Gladys) on 10<sup>th</sup> September 1900<sup>24</sup>. In 1902, James died, leaving Maud to care for two young children alone. Maud was born in Bedford<sup>25</sup>, so after James' death moved from 92 Hazelwood Road, Walthamstow<sup>26</sup> back to Bedford, where she likely met John.



I have found no evidence in Marriage register indexes or parish registers that John and Maud ever married, however, the two lived together for the rest of their lives and were referred to as Mr and Mrs. Peacock<sup>27</sup>. Together John and Maud had 8 children: George (b. 1904)<sup>28</sup>, Herbert Arthur John (b. 1906)<sup>29</sup>, Ethel May (b. 12<sup>th</sup> Aug 1907)<sup>30</sup>, Sylvia Rosina Florence (b. 1909)<sup>31</sup>, Charles (b. 1912)<sup>32</sup>, Reginald Robert (b. 28<sup>th</sup> Feb 1915)<sup>33</sup>, Ronald Bert (b. 1917)<sup>34</sup> and Edwin Albert (b. 4<sup>th</sup> May 1920)<sup>35</sup>.

By 1911 the Peacock family have moved from 105 Priory Street to 6 Gravel Lane, Bedford<sup>36</sup>. The household was comprised of John (a 44-year-old cab driver), Maud (aged 36), Edith (aged 18-years-old, deaf and dumb and working at home), William (a single 17-year-old working at home), Frederick (11-year-old scholar), Kathleen (11-year-old scholar), George (7-year-old scholar), John (aka Herbert, 5-year-old scholar), May (aka Ethel, aged 3) and Sylvia (aged 1). Notably, Edith's sister, Ada Mabel, as well as Maud's children from her first marriage are missing from this census return. Maud and Leonard Redington are listed as having spent the census night at 4 Gravel Street, as visitors of the Hawes family<sup>37</sup>. Whether they were living with the Hawes family full time, residing in a spare room or were just visiting that evening is impossible to discern. Ada is missing from the family home, and instead is listed at 7 Beauchamp Row, Bedford with James and Eliza Emma Wilson as their 13-year-old, scholar niece<sup>38</sup>. At the time of her mothers' death, Ada would have been 4 years old. Perhaps before John had met Maud, four young children to care for (given Edith was at Margate) had been too much to handle, and Ada was given to childless relatives to be cared for.

At some point between 1911 and 1918 (following the 1918 electoral act abolishing the property qualifications to vote<sup>39</sup>), the Peacock family moved from 6 Gravel Lane to 1 Tower Court Gardens<sup>40</sup>. In 1915, Charles died aged 2 years old<sup>41</sup>, followed by the death of Ronald, aged 1 in 1918<sup>42</sup>. Then in 1919, James William became the first of the Peacock children to marry, marrying Isabel Bannister in Bedford<sup>43</sup>. By the time of the 1921 census, the Peacock family was comprised of John (a 55-year-old cab driver employed by Mr. Galletly at the Midland Hotel on Midland Road, Bedford), Maud (aged 43), Edith (a 28-year-old domestic servant), Kathleen (a 20-year-old), May (aka Ethel, aged 13), Sylvia (aged 12) and Edwin (aged 1)<sup>44</sup>. Also present is Maud's daughter, Maud, a 20-year-old domestic servant. Missing from the family home are James, Ada, Frederick, George, Herbert, Reginald and Leonard.

James, an out-of-work bottler, was living with his new wife, Isabel, at 12 Greyfriars Walk, Bedford<sup>45</sup>. Frederick (an odd man at a fishmonger in Silver Street), Herbert (an errand boy at a greengrocer in Kimbolton Road) and Reginald (aged 6) are all listed as “sleeping only” at the house of the Parker family at 7 Tower Court Gardens<sup>46</sup>, so it seems the families’ practice of having some of the children sleeping at a neighbours’ house continued into the 1920s. George (a porter at a greengrocers on the high street) and Leonard (a warehouseman at a shop on Harpur Street), were lodging with Charles Chamberlain at 3 Tower Court Gardens<sup>47</sup>. Ada remains at 7 Beauchamp Row, continuing to live with James and Eliza Emma Wilson, as their ‘Niece adopted daughter’, she was a dressmaker for Miss Dayton of Howard College<sup>48</sup>.

In 1924 the Peacock family moved from 1 Tower Gardens to 47A Kelvin Avenue. Due to the eligibility of individuals to vote<sup>39</sup> (and thus appear on electoral registers) in the 1920s, we can only track this movement via John William Peacock and Maud Fox/Redington/Peacock<sup>49</sup>. However, Leonard James Redington, George and Herbert Peacock all would have been eligible to vote in 1924, however, the first mention of Leonard and George at 47A Kelvin Avenue in 1925<sup>50</sup>, and Herbert in 1927<sup>51</sup>. We cannot know where Edith was living between 1921 and 1929 when she turned 21. In 1929, she is listed as living at 47A Kelvin Avenue<sup>52</sup>, where she remained until 1939. It’s probably therefore a safe assumption that she moved with her father and Maud to Kelvin Avenue.

### **Edith’s employment for Charlotte Moule**

Interestingly, the 1921 census return includes the address of work for both Edith and Maud for their domestic servant duties<sup>44</sup>. Edith was working at 19 Cornwall Road, Bedford and Maud at 59 Goldington Avenue, Bedford. These two houses were only 0.1 miles apart. Kelvin Avenue and Cornwall Road are a 2-mile walk apart, perhaps Edith and Maud walked to work together. In 1921, 19 Cornwall Road appears to be a boarding house run by the widowed Charlotte Moule<sup>53</sup>, this is the earliest mention of Edith working for Charlotte, but she continued to do so right up until Charlotte died in 1946, giving at least 25 years of service!

19 Cornwall Street was described in 1949 as a “semi-detached... well built of brick and slate... converted into 2 s.c. flats with separate entrances”, the upper flat had 3 large bedrooms and the lower 2 bedrooms<sup>54</sup>. Charlotte Moule was said to have offered<sup>55</sup> her home as a place for “aged people seeking a haven”<sup>55</sup>, employing 2 domestic servants in 1921 (Edith and Elizabeth Ann Warren)<sup>53</sup>, which had increased to 4 staff members by 1939 (domestic servants; Edith, Elizabeth Ann Warren and Anne L Wright and a companion/chauffer, Ethel Holliday)<sup>56</sup>.

In 1925, Edith’s brother, Frederick, was summoned to court for cycling without a light for which he was fined five shillings<sup>57</sup>. Frederick died in 1928 at the age of 29 years<sup>58</sup>. Despite working for Charlotte Moule from at least 1921, I believe Edith to have largely resided with her family at 47A Kelvin Avenue between 1924 and 1939, as she appears on the electoral register there between 1929 (when women over 21 years were given the vote<sup>39</sup>) and 1939<sup>52,59</sup>. However, as part of her duties for Mrs Moule, she likely resided at 19 Cornwall Road overnight on occasion, including the night of 29<sup>th</sup> September 1939, when the 1939 Register was taken<sup>56,60</sup>. During WW2, electoral registers were not published<sup>39</sup>, so I do not know where Edith was residing. However, in 1946 and 1946, she appeared on the electoral roll at 19 Cornwall Road, so was likely now living in as a domestic servant<sup>61,62</sup>.

On 12<sup>th</sup> October 1946, Charlotte Moule died at 19 Cornwall Road, aged 80<sup>63</sup>, with a funeral at St Peter’s Church attended by the staff at 19 Cornwall Road<sup>55</sup>. After which, the furniture<sup>64</sup> and property<sup>65</sup> were sold. The location of Edith in 1947 and 1948 is unknown. From locating her siblings, father and stepmother in the electoral rolls across Bedford, I know she was not living with any of them.

## **Edith's employment for Vanda Bridge**

In 1949, Edith moved to 14 Cornwall Road where she moved in with Vanda Bridge<sup>66</sup>. Vanda was a physiotherapist<sup>67</sup>, who had placed an advert in the Bedfordshire Times<sup>68</sup> advertising a

*“Large Bed-Sittingroom offered to a single lady in return for light reception duties to physiotherapist.  
Apply in writing to Bridge, 14 Cornwall Road, Bedford”.*

Edith remained at 14 Cornwall Road with Vanda until 1954<sup>69</sup>. In this period, Edith's stepmother, Maud, died on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1950 at 47a Kelvin Avenue<sup>70,71</sup>. This was followed on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1950 by the death of her father, aged 84 years at 47A Kelvin Avenue from senile myocarditis<sup>72,73,74</sup>

## **Edith at 3 Kimbolton Avenue**

In 1954, Edith moved from 14 Cornwall Street to 3 Kimbolton Avenue<sup>75</sup>, which was the premises of Manor Nursing Home. In 1954, Edith would have been 62 years old. Manor Nursing Home advertised for Domestic Help positions<sup>76</sup>, and vacancies for Elderly People in 1954<sup>77</sup>. It is difficult to know whether Edith went to Manor Nursing Home as someone needing or giving care. On the 1954 electoral roll<sup>75</sup>, Edith is listed among 11 other individuals. I have identified one to have been a nurse, but the others ranged in age between 74 and 89 in 1954, so Edith would have been considerably younger than the other residents.

## **The end of Edith's life**

Between 1958 and 1960, Edith moved to 47A Kelvin Avenue<sup>78,79</sup>, where she lived with her sister Ethel May, as well as Ethel's husband<sup>80</sup>, Clarence Cook, and their child. Her brother, George Peacock, who lived at 49 Kelvin Avenue, died on 5<sup>th</sup> April 1960<sup>81</sup>. In 1964 Edith's sister, Ethel died<sup>82</sup>, but Edith remained living with Clarence Cook and Ethel and Clarence's child until 1966<sup>83</sup>. Between 1967 and her death, I have not managed to locate where Edith was living. In 1970, her eldest brother, James died<sup>84</sup>, followed by the death of Herbert in 1974<sup>85</sup>. Edith died on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 1977, aged 85, at Fairfield Hospital, Arlesey, Bedford<sup>86</sup> and her estate was probated in Birmingham in April 1978<sup>87</sup>. It is possible that Edith was an inpatient at Fairfield Hospital between 1967 and her death in 1977, however, as patients do not appear on the electoral register this has been impossible to confirm. After her death in 1977, her siblings' deaths followed; Ada Mabel in 1981<sup>88</sup>, Kathleen Eliza in 1986<sup>89</sup>, Reginald Robert in 1988<sup>90</sup>, Sylvia Rosina Florence in 1990<sup>91</sup> and Edwin Albert in 2018<sup>92</sup>.

Written and researched by Sophie Alexander  
September 2024

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