

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story is one of a series that relate to women and girls who were associated with The Mount School, York, as pupils, teachers, or other members of staff. This project began in June 2023, as part of the York Festival of ideas.

Florence Dent Priestman and Margaret Priestman.

The two cousins Florence Dent and Margaret applied to attend Mount school in York on the 9th of May 1901 aged 15 years. Florence's parents were William Dent and Marion Priestman of 27 Westcott street, Hull and her date of birth was the 5th of October 1885. Margaret's parents were Samuel and Margaret Priestman of 18 Westcott Street, Hull, her date of birth was 24th October 1885. Both the girls were admitted to the school's training department the following January 1902 and their families belonged to The Society of Friends, more commonly known as Quakers.¹²

The Girls were clearly close in age and lived a short distance from each other down Westcott street in Hull, which was situated close to a large Park, East Park and must have spent some time playing there when they were growing up. The Priestman family were a well-known Quaker Family in Hull. The Girl's Grandfather, Samuel Priestman was born in Thornton Le Dale, North Yorkshire

in 1800. He learned Corn Milling with his father Joshua. A shrewd business man he eventually moved to Hull becoming a director of the North Eastern railway company and first purchased the Holderness Foundry in Hull. After the death of His First wife Rachel Rowntree, Samuel remarried Mary Ann Dent in 1841. They had eleven children on which Samuel and Mary doted including Florence and Margaret's fathers who were brothers. Samuel was faithful member and Minister of the Society of Friends and a committed philanthropist died in 1872.³

Florence's father William Dent Priestman was born in Sculcoates, Hull in 1847.⁴ William, an engineer patented the first oil engine "The Priestman Oil engine" and went into business with Margaret's father Samuel to form Priestman Brothers Ltd in 1872,⁵ Their company originally was asked to build equipment to recover lost Gold off the Spanish coast, the gold wasn't found but they began to develop grab dredging equipment⁶ however despite winning the Scott Prize the brothers went bankrupt in 1888 and the brothers lost control of their business.

William married Marion Bewley in 1878⁷ and had five children: Lionel born 1879, Rowland Born 1881, David born 1883⁸ and Phillip in 1893 and Florence. Samuel Married Margaret Priestman in 1878⁹ Margaret's parents were First cousins once removed, both descended from Joshua Priestman and his wife Hannah Hopkins. They had Four children Sydney born 1879, Hilda born 1882, Bernard born 1884 and Margaret.

When the girls were five years old in 1891 both families were found living next door to each other in Westcott Street, Kingston upon Hull, Florence in number

31 and Margaret in no 33¹⁰ the families clearly very close. In 1899 both girls were awarded prizes after school examinations Sir James Rickett presided. Margaret received first class honours in Religious, knowledge, English and algebra, Florence received a distinction in Religious knowledge, English and French.¹¹ In the 1901 census at age 15 the cousins were found together at 27 Westcott street with Florence's siblings (Margaret was a visitor).¹²

The Cousins both matriculated from the Mount School in the first division for The University of London as the Yorkshire Gazette reported on 18th July 1903.¹³ Their lives then seem to take different paths:

Florence:

Florence then appears having passed her intermediate exams at the Westfield college in 1906.¹⁴ Then is on the Graduation List of the University of London, Westfield College graduating with a B.A. in 1910,¹⁵ one of the first colleges to educate women. Margaret does not appear on these lists at this time.

In the 1911 census Florence was single aged 25 working as a Mistress at the Sidcot Friends School, Winscombe in Somerset.¹⁶

According to a Newspaper article in 1937 Florence became the Head mistress at the same Friends school, that Margaret had worked at in Saffron Walden in 1911 and occupied that position from 1920 to 1937.¹⁷

Florence was active within the Friends' charitable endeavours was reported raising funds for unemployed Coal Mine workers and their families in 1928.¹⁸ In 1939 Florence returned to the East Riding of Yorkshire at 2 Humber Dale Drive, (Likely North Ferriby). The care of her elderly mother the most likely

reason for Florence relocating from her post as Headmistress in Essex during the war years. Her mother Marion was 90-year-old who by then was a widow, Originally from County Wicklow, Ireland she was also a Quaker.¹⁹ Florence is listed as a retired teacher doing Social Work, the 1939 Register entry also explains "*We are conscientiously unable to give any direct help in the furtherance of...*"²⁰ Quakers were conscientious objectors to armed conflict. However, Florence immersed herself in wartime social work becoming the Secretary for the Hull Social service Clubs involved in raising funds for those affected by the catastrophic Air raids in Hull for which she coordinated activity in 1942²¹

After the death of her mother Marion in 1945, who lived to the incredible age of 96.²² Florence returned to Saffron Walden, Essex, where she continued her charitable endeavours and an Active Quaker member reporting on medical aid and Refugee support for widows and children during a crisis that occurred in Korea in 1954.²³ Florence also appears on a list of signatures Calling for peace and objecting to the U.S handling of the war in Vietnam and its effect on the civilian population In 1967.²⁴

Florence Died in her 88th Year in 1972, peacefully after a short illness at Musgrave Hospital Taunton, her obituary reports that she was Headmistress at Saffron Walden for 26 years, a much-loved Aunt, great Aunt and great great Aunt.²⁵

Margaret:

In 1911 Margaret was single aged 25 working as a teacher at the Friend's school, Mount Pleasant Road Saffron Walden, Essex. ²⁶

In 1921 There is a Margaret Priestman from Hull living in Pancras, London working as a nursery Governess. Her age is given as 37 and taking a part time Montessori training course,²⁷ this was an innovative approach to teaching which aims to give children choices to the educational activities they do aimed at building self-confidence and independence.

Margaret does appear to have travelled to the West Indies arriving back on 2nd July 1923 aboard the "*Intaba*" boarding in Trinidad, she gives her address as 111 Osbourne Road, Sheffield, Yorkshire.²⁸ confirmed because is the also the address of her sister Hilda Doncaster and husband Charles in 1939.²⁹

Tragic Death

Margaret's later life was reported in newspaper articles surrounding her tragic death in October 1930 aged 44 at a house at Woodside Avenue, Amersham Berkshire. Margaret had been found by a neighbour after apparently committing suicide by putting her head in a gas oven several hours previously. Evidence was given by her sister Hilda whose address was given as Osbourne street, Sheffield. Hilda reported that Margaret had nursed their mother during her final years of illness from 1913 to 1917 and was very distressed at her passing. However, Hilda denied that Margaret ever threatened to commit suicide. She had no financial difficulties though was described as very eccentric and occasionally prone to fits of depression. A local Author Laurence Benjamin said that Margaret was his friend had been helping him with his work over the previous two months and had rented a house for that purpose. Mr Benjamin said that she had recently been of good spirits, but he had known that she had previously been depressed and threatened to take her own life. The Coroner

said that he should have reported her fragile state of mind to her family or a doctor. The verdict was “Suicide whilst of unsound mind”^{30 31}

© Angela O'Connor June 2023

¹ The Mount School, York. Log Book PRIESTMAN, Florence Dent and Margaret. 09 May 1901.

Collection: National School Admission Registers & Log Books 1870-1914.

<https://www.findmypast.co.uk> : accessed 21 June 2023.

³ Society of Friends. Published Memorial. PRIESTMAN, Samuel. 1873. The Annual Monitor for 1873. Collection: U.S, UK and Ireland , Quaker Published Memorials , 1818-1919. pp.117-131. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 22 June 2023.k.

⁴ Births Index (CR) England and Wales. Sculcoates, East Yorkshire. 3rd Qtr. 1847. PRIESTMAN, William Dent. Collection: England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837-1915.

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 21 June 2023.

⁵ *William Dent Priestman*. <https://www.carnegiehull.co.uk/hull-firsts/william-dent-priestman.php>.

⁶ Hull History Centre Catalogue. *Records relating to Priestman Brothers Ltd, 1870-1981*.

<https://catalogue.hullhistorycentre.org.uk/catalogue/C-DBSP?tab=description> : accessed 22 June 2023.

⁷ Marriages (NCR) Ireland. 18 April 1878. PRIESTMAN, William Dent and BEWLEY, Marion.

National Register of Quakers. Collection: Ireland, Select Marriages, 1619-1898.

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 22 June 2023.

⁸ Census records. England. Southcoates, Kingston upon Hull, Yorkshire. 05 April 1891.

PRIESTMAN, William Dent (Head). Piece: 3925. Folio: 133. ED: 28. Collection: 1891 England Census.

⁹ Marriages Index (CR) England and Wales. Bradford, Yorkshire. 1st Qtr. 1878. PRIESTMAN, Samuel and PRIESTMAN, Margaret. Vol.9b. p.305. Collection: England and Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837-1915. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 26 June 2023.

¹⁰ (1891) op. cit.

¹¹ Hull Daily News. (1899) Cambridge local examinations - Distribution of Prizes. *Hull Daily News*. 26 July. Hull, East Yorkshire column 5 p. 5. <https://www.newspapers.com>.

¹² Census records. England. Southcoates, Kingston upon Hull, Yorkshire. 31 March 1901. PRIESTMAN, Florence Dent (Daughter). Piece: 4487. Folio: 103. ED: 36. Collection: 1901 England Census.

¹³ Yorkshire Gazette. (1903) London University matriculations. *Yorkshire Gazette*. 18 July. column 6 p. 4. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>.

¹⁴ Yorkshire Gazette. (1906) Successes. *Yorkshire Gazette*. 16 August. column 5 p. 6. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>.

¹⁵ University of London (1910) PRIESTMAN, Florence D. Collection: UK, University of London Student Records, 1836-1945. p.520. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 26 June 2023.

-
- ¹⁶ Census records. England. Winscombe, Somerset. 02 April 1911. PRIESTMAN, Florence Dent (Boarder). RG 314 Piece: 14624. ED 15 .Collection: 1911 England Census. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 27 June 2023.g.
- ¹⁷ Bradford Observer. (1937) Friends' school Head. *Bradford Observer*. 20 February. column 7 p. 9. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 27 June 2023.
- ¹⁸ Saffron Walden Weekly news. (1928) Distress in the Coalfields. *Saffron Walden Weekly news*. 2 November. column 1 p. 9. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 27 June 2023.
- ¹⁹ Daily Mail. (1945) Death Announcements. (1945). PRIESTMAN, Marion. *The Daily Mail*. 28 December. Hull, East Yorkshire column 7 p. 1. <https://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 27 June 2023.
- ²⁰ 1939 Register, England. Beverley, East Yorkshire. PRIESTMAN, Florence D. 29 September 1939. Schedule 294/2. RG 520/5. Collection: 1939 Register. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 27 June 2023.a.
- ²¹ Daily Mail. (1942) Fine Social Work. *Daily Mail*. 28 October. Hull, East Yorkshire column 3 p. 3. <https://www.newspapers.com>.
- ²² Daily Mail. (1945) Death Announcements. (1945). PRIESTMAN, Marion. *The Daily Mail*. 28 December. Hull, East Yorkshire column 7 p. 1. <https://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 27 June 2023.
- ²³ Saffron Walden Weekly news. (1954) Quaker work in Korea. *Saffron Walden Weekly news*. 5 February. column 3 p. 13. <https://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 27 June 2023.
- ²⁴ The Guardian. (1967) Vietnam- How much Longer ? *The Guardian*. 21 April. London column 6 p. 4. <https://www.newspapers.com>.
- ²⁵ Death Announcements. (1972). PRIESTMAN, Florence Dent. *The Daily Telegraph*. 21 July. London column 8. p. 30. <https://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 27 June 2023.
- ²⁶ Census records. England. Saffron Walden, Essex. 02 April 1911. PRIESTMAN, Margaret (Assistant). RG 203 Piece: 10486. ED 13-14. Collection: 1911 England Census. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 27 June 2023.d.
- ²⁷ Census records. England. St Pancras, Middlesex. 19 June 1921. PRIESTMAN, Margaret.(boarder) RD 9. PN 747. SN 172. ED 24. <http://www.findmypast.co.uk> : accessed 29 June 2023.
- ²⁸ Passenger list for "*Intaba*" from Trinidad, West India. PRIESTMAN. Margaret. 02 July 1923. Collection: UK and Ireland Passenger lists, 1878-1960. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 27 June 2023.j.
- ²⁹ 1939 Register, England. Sheffield, West Yorkshire. DONCASTER, Hilda. 29 September 1939. Schedule 136/2. RG 510/6. Collection: 1939 Register. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 27 June 2023.b.
- ³⁰ Sheffield Daily Telegraph. (1930) Suicide's strange note. Sister from Sheffield gives Evidence. *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*. 21 October. Sheffield column 7 p. 7. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>.
- ³¹ Middlesex Advertiser and County Gazette. (1930) Tragedy of Chesham Bois. Middlesex Advertiser and County Gazette. 24 October. Middlesex. column 5. p. 8. <https://www.newspapers.com>.