

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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Patience Bray's Story

Patience was the fourth of twelve children born to Andrew Bray and his wife Ann nee Best.¹ The couple married in Stoke Damerel, Devon on 4 April 1825.² Patience herself was baptised on 23 September 1832, the family were at that time living in Moorswater, a suburb of Liskeard in Cornwall, where Andrew was recorded as an agricultural labourer.³

¹ Cornwall Baptisms via www.findmypast.co.uk

² Devon Marriages and Banns via www.findmypast.co.uk

³ Cornwall Baptisms via www.findmypast.co.uk

We can first find Patience in the public records at the West of England School for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, where she was enumerated as an eight-year-old pupil of the school in the 1841 census.⁴ She had been admitted the previous year, her papers having been examined in June 1840 by the Gentleman's Committee.⁵



The West of England Institution for the Deaf and Dumb
Source: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/library>

Pupils were admitted usually by recommendation from three donors to the institution and a letter from their local vicar, who would know the family and be able to explain the circumstances of the child's infirmity. The child would have had to have been baptised, something the vicar could also confirm, as well as being fully inoculated and have no other medical ailments or conditions. There

⁴ 1841 Census, H0107, St Leonard, Devon, Piece: 263

⁵ West of England School for the Deaf - Admissions Register 1827-1836 Transcription/Extracts D123 by Joint project Devon Family History Society with Devon Record Office (Record Office Ref 7645). <https://www.devonfhs.org.uk/product/west-of-england-school-for-the-deaf-admission-register-1827-1836/>; Minutes of the Gentlemen's Committee 1837-53 DHC 7645C West of England School for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb. Accessed July 2024 with kind permission from Devon Archives and Local Studies, and from the Deaf Academy, Exmouth. Extracts transcribed by Helen Shields

is an excellent summary of the school and the conditions under which pupils were accepted on the Few Forgotten Women website.⁶ Patience was admitted to the school 'on the foundation' meaning that the family would have paid 3/- a week for her to attend, which represented a significant saving on the full cost.⁷

Whether Patience was born deaf and dumb or her disability was result of injury or illness we do not know, but three of her siblings, Jane Ann, born in 1834, William Henry born in 1842 and David born in 1844, were also deaf and dumb, with Jane and William both attending the same school as Patience in later years, which perhaps suggests that the condition was genetic in character.⁸ The cost of sending all the siblings to the school could well have been offset somewhat by the Bazaar fund which often paid up to an extra 1 shilling per child to reduce the family burden.⁹

The principal of the school, Dr William Robson Scott [1811-1877], was an eminent teacher of the deaf and dumb. He undertook his training in Yorkshire and was in charge at Exeter from 1841 until his death 36 years later, although an attack of paralysis partially incapacitated him for the final five years of his life. His wife Mary Mandell, nee Mason, was matron at the school. Dr Scott wrote a number of books and pamphlets on educating the deaf and dumb as well as giving numerous lectures across the country.¹⁰

Sir William Robert Wilde, the Ear, Nose and Throat doctor and father of Oscar, wrote in 1854

⁶ <https://www.fewforgottenwomen.com/general-8-4>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Cornwall Baptisms via www.findmypast.co.uk;

⁹ <https://www.fewforgottenwomen.com/general-8-4>

¹⁰ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/library>; 1841 Census, H0107, St Leonard, Devon, Piece: 263

By far the best work that has appeared in this country on the Deaf and Dumb during the present century is by Dr Scott, the Principal of the West of England Institution at Exeter – a work should be in the hands of every parent or guardian of a mute child.¹¹

He also undertook some research which is particularly pertinent to the Bray family. He examined the occupation of the parents of the pupils, thinking that there may be a link to be found that caused deafness within certain occupations but he *'failed to find any appreciable difference in this direction'*. He did produce a table to show the tendency to deafness to run in families, specifically in the experience of the West of England Institution. Writing in 1870 his statistics of the pupils to that date were:

243 cases with 1 in the family
30 cases with 2 in the family
13 cases with 3 in the family
4 cases with 4 in the family
1 case with 5 in the family

Scott goes on to claim that these figures are similar to other institutions across the UK.¹² The Bray family then, with at least four cases, were something of a rarity. There may well have been more who were deaf and dumb among the twelve siblings but tracing them all so early in civil registration has proved difficult, I suspect that some of the children died very early in life.

The records of the West of England school contain the Ladies Committee Minutes and the set of minutes of 22 November 1841 stated

¹¹ Wilde, William Robert. *On the Physical, Moral, and Social Condition of the Deaf and Dumb*, London: John Churchill, 1854

¹² Scott, William Robson. *The deaf and dumb: their education and social position*. London: Bell & Daldy; Exeter: H. S. Eland. 1870

The ladies wish to name to the Gentlemen the case of Patience Bray and that they think it necessary that she should be sent home as she has some complaint in her head that has been of many months standing and the child got very thin and has no appetite. The Matron is obliged to keep the child in a room by herself lest she should infect the other children which makes the poor child very uncomfortable.¹³

There are no further comments, so I am unable to add any further information other than the admission records show that Patience was a pupil between 1840 and 1845, so she obviously recovered and returned to the school. The annual report of 1846 recorded that she had found employment as a dressmaker.¹⁴ Sadly, Patience died aged 16 on 22 June 1849 of consumption, she was living with her parents and her father was witness to her death, she was buried locally two days later on 24 June, her age in the parish registers being recorded as 18.¹⁵

Patience's sister Jane Ann was admitted to the school in 1845 and remained as a pupil until 1850.¹⁶ She was at home with her parents in the 1841 census, aged 7 but with no indication on that particular census as to her deafness.¹⁷ By the time came to complete the 1851 census Jane was still living with her parents and employed as a dressmaker, which chimes with the 1851 Annual Report from the school, among her other siblings is David, who is noted as deaf and dumb aged

¹³ The Minute Book of the Ladies Committee 1830-1859, DHC 7645C West of England School for the Deaf accessed July 2024 with kind permission from Devon Archives and Local Studies, and from the Deaf Academy, Exmouth, Extracts transcribed by Helen Shields

¹⁴ Annual Reports DHC 7645C West of England School for the Deaf and Dumb Annual Reports, 1826-1860 accessed July 2024 with kind permission from Devon Archives and Local Studies, and from the Deaf Academy, Exmouth 3

¹⁵ Death Certificate, Patience Bray, 22 June 1849; England, Cornwall Parish Registers, 1538-2010, *via FamilySearch*

¹⁶ West of England School for the Deaf - Admissions Register 1827-1836 Transcription/Extracts D123 by Joint project Devon Family History Society with Devon Record Office (Record Office Ref 7645).

<https://www.devonfhs.org.uk/product/west-of-england-school-for-the-deaf-admission-register-1827-1836/>

¹⁷ 1841 Census, H0107, Liskeard, Cornwall, Piece: 38

7.¹⁸ Interestingly her mother is not at home on the night of the census, she can be found as a nurse assisting Joseph Wallis and his wife Mary with their 6 day old child Martha.¹⁹ Meanwhile her younger deaf and dumb brother William Henry was a pupil at the school in Exeter, aged 9.²⁰

Ten years later the three siblings can be found living with their parents still, along with a younger sister Emma. Jane is still employed as a dressmaker, William as a plumber and David as a shoemaker, which are recognised as vocational skills taught to the deaf and dumb.²¹ David married Ellen Rhodda in 1869 and the couple moved to Plymouth, it does not seem that Ellen was deaf or dumb. David was employed as a bootmaker and at one point boarded in the household of William Gendle, whose son-in-law John Pollard was also deaf and dumb.²²

Jane and William Henry continue to live in the family home with their parents. Their father Andrew died in 1879 and Ann, who in the 1881 census describes herself as a former nurse neatly tying in with her 1851 census entry, passes away in 1885.²³ The siblings can be found living together in the home they had occupied all their lives in 1891 and are both continuing with in their careers of dressmaking and plumbing.²⁴

¹⁸ 1851 Census, HO107, Liskeard, Cornwall, Piece 1902; Annual Reports DHC 7645C West of England School for the deaf and Dumb Annual Reports, 1826-1860 accessed July 2024 with kind permission from Devon Archives and Local Studies, and from the Deaf Academy, Exmouth 3

¹⁹ 1851 Census, HO107, Liskeard, Cornwall, Piece 1902

²⁰ 1851 Census, HO107, St Leonard, Devon, Piece 1866

²¹ 1861 Census, RG9, Liskeard, Cornwall, Piece 1529; <https://www.fewforgottenwomen.com/general-8-4>

²² GRO Marriage Indexes; 1869 April Quarter, Liskeard Dist, Page 5c, Vol 102; 1871 Census, RG10, Liskeard, Cornwall, Piece 2237; 1881 Census, Plymouth,, RG11, 2193

²³ GRO Death Indexes, 1879 January Quarter, Liskeard District, Page 5c, Vol 46; 1881 Census, RG10, Liskeard, Cornwall, Piece: 2238; West Briton and Cornwall Advertiser, 5 February 1885, p5;

²⁴ 1891 Census, RG11, Liskeard, Cornwall, Piece 1810

Jane is still alive in 1901 and at the age of 66 is still working as a dressmaker, however William is not with her. She seems to have moved to Cannon Hill in Liskeard.²⁵ I cannot definitely locate William in 1901 or confirm his death, Jane also seems to drop from the records in 1911 and sideways searches for siblings David and Emma fail to locate her living with them. A search of the parish burials shows a 1914 burial of a Jane Ann Bray aged 75 on 5 December at Liskeard.²⁶ The deceased lived at Cannon Hill, also referred to as Cannon Terrace, and the burial was by order of the coroner. The death certificate confirms that this was Jane, she had died in the Liskeard Borough Workhouse two days earlier, a spinster of no present occupation but had previously been a dressmaker. The cause of death, certified by Mr Glubb the coroner for Cornwall after an inquest, cited vascular disease and syncope [loss of consciousness for a short period of time].²⁷

As there was an inquest, I carried out a newspaper search and discovered a much sadder end to Jane's life than the cause of death on her death certificate suggested. The West Briton and Cornish Advertiser, under the headline *Wretched Death Due to Drink*, describes how the 75-year-old spinster and old-age pensioner was admitted to the infirmary late on the night of 23 October, after her neighbours in Cannon Terrace heard noise that suggested Jane had taken a fall. They had had to gain entry via an upstairs window using a ladder and found Jane huddled at the foot of the stairs in an intoxicated condition. They moved her to a bedroom and Dr Nettle was called, on examination he found a wound to her head and blood oozing from one ear, which he thought may have been due to a fracture of the skull. Once in the infirmary it was discovered that

²⁵ 1901 Census, RG12, Liskeard, Cornwall, Piece 2193;

²⁶ Cornwall Parish Registers, accessed via www.Ancestry.co.uk

²⁷ Death Certificate, Jane Ann Bray, 2 December 1914

Jane had a cut on her ear, hence the blood. She recovered from the incident but on the fateful day in December she succumbed to syncope, brought on by a 'valvular diseased heart', a condition she had suffered for some years. Although the early fall was not thought to be linked to her death, it may have accelerated it. It was known, the report went on to say, that Jane was addicted to drink and the coroner knew personally that she had received two small legacies some time previously which gave Jane the means to buy alcohol.²⁸ Certainly a sad end to Jane's silent life.

Margaret Roberts
Few Forgotten Women Team

²⁸ *West Briton and Cornwall Advertiser*, 10 December 1914, p6