

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in July 2025, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who were born in the same year as Queen Victoria, 1819 in the parishes of Wem, Shropshire and Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk.

Mary Mindham's Story

Mary Mindham was born in Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk, and baptised on 22 August 1819, the second daughter and fourth of the five children born to John Mindham and Mary née Beckerton.ⁱ 1819 was also the year of Queen Victoria's birth and, as we shall see, Mary's life was to rival Victoria's in terms of longevity. Mary's father John was variously described as a carpenter, a cabinet maker and a joiner in the baptismal records of his offspring. Mary's mother died in August 1828,ⁱⁱ when Mary was just nine years old and we have further details of Mary's life at the first decennial census in 1841 when Mary was resident in Wells and living with her father, John, and a four-year-old child named Margaret.ⁱⁱⁱ

Margaret's birth was discovered in Wells' parish registers; she was born on 5 March 1837, the year Victoria became queen, and was baptised on 26 March at Wells parish church. The entry on the baptismal register recorded Margaret as the 'base born' daughter of Mary Mindham, spinster, which was a description frequently used of babies born to single women at that time. Mary was not as fortunate as Victoria, she had not married her one-time beau in 1837, but with the support of her father had nurtured the unplanned child.^{iv} John died in 1844 at

the age of sixty-five and Mary's marriage had taken place only weeks before her father's death. She wed James Ramm on 26 June 1844 at the parish church in Wells. Mary was described as a shopkeeper and James as a butcher in the marriage register, and both added their signatures to the register clearly and neatly.^v Victoria married Prince Albert on 10 February 1840, amidst vast spectacle and pageantry, which Victoria described as the 'happiest day of her life'. Mary's marriage to James also took place on a Monday and was witnessed by Robert and Mary Magness though nothing more is known of their wedding day.^{vi}

After twenty years of marriage in 1864 Mary had given birth to fifteen children, six of whom had died as infants: Arthur James in 1848; John in 1856; Jane in 1858; Jane and William, twins, in 1859 and Howard in 1862. Of the remainder, eight married and just one daughter remained single.

All children born to Mary and James Ramm:

Name	Birth	Status
Ellen Maria	1845	Married Charles Millman Thorne 1865 and died in 1883*
Mary Ann	1846	Married George Grummit December 1875
Arthur James	1847	Died 1848 Aged 0
Emma Sophia	1849	Unmarried
Arthur James	1850	Married Tabitha H Lee 1876 Died 19 February 1924
Harriet	1853	Married William Edwards 1878
Elizabeth	1854	Married Nelson Wilkinson 1880
John	1855	Died 1856 Aged 0
Robert Howard	1856	Married Eliza Green 1895 London
Jane	1858	Died 1858 Aged 0
Jane	1859	Died 1859 Aged 0
William	1859	Died 1859 Aged 0
William Mindham	1860	Married Jane Senior Dewsbury 1882
Howard	1862	Died 1864 Aged 1
Anna Maria	1864	Married Charles Millman* Dewsbury 1887

Nine children were born to Queen Victoria, five girls and four boys, none of whom died in infancy, whereas Mary lost six of her babies as infants.

Despite Mary's continual pregnancies she was actively involved in the butchery business as is evident from her court appearance in August 1859 on her husband's behalf. A dispute arose over a barrel of "bad" vinegar supplied to Mr Ramm, and subsequently a court hearing took place where the defendant "appeared by his wife", ie Mary Ramm appeared in court instead of her husband. The newspaper report states that "several documents were then handed up to his Honor by Mrs Ramm", confirming James' complete confidence in his wife's ability to handle legal matters.^{vii}

James died in 1867 at the age of fifty and a year later Mary was listed as a butcher, shopkeeper and beer retailer.^{viii} She continued living at 39 High Street, and in 1871 was described as a grocer, with her son Arthur aged 22, a butcher; also in her household were her daughter Elizabeth aged 20 a dressmaker, son Robert aged 14, a construction apprentice, two daughters Harriet and Emma who had no recorded occupation as well as William and Anna, aged 10 and 6 respectively, who were still at school. The first-born daughter of Mary's marriage to James, Ellen Maria, had married Charles Millman, a coal dealer, in 1865 and was living in Sykehouse Yorkshire, by 1871.



Picture of High Street, Wells, copyright Richard Humphrey,
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In 1881 Mary was herself recorded as a butcher in High Street, Wells, and with her were Anna who had become a dressmaker, daughter Emma without an occupation, and daughter Harriet who had married William Edwards at the Independent Chapel in Wells on 18 March 1878, plus the two children of that marriage, Mabel aged 2 and Earnest aged 1, also included in the household.

Next door to Mary in the High Street, her son Arthur, also a butcher, was living with his wife Tabitha. They had wed in 1876 and in 1881 had three children, Edith, Arthur and Alice. There was also a servant in their household: Susannah Bich aged 14.^{ix}

In 1883 a trade directory recorded Arthur James Ramm as a butcher in High Street and Mrs Mary Ramm as a grocer in High Street.^x

The census of 1891 for High Street, Wells, showed Mary, a widow aged 70, though still working as a grocer, with her unmarried daughter Emma, aged 41, living with her and still without an occupation ascribed to her; Emma was the only one of Mary's offspring without an occupation ever being specified. Next door to Mary, was Arthur Ramm, her son, now aged 40, described as a butcher

and dealer, and with him his wife Tabitha, together with their family of three sons and three daughters, all described as scholars. They employed a domestic servant, Mary Wordingham aged 17.^{xi}

On 2 February 1895 it was reported in the *Norwich Mercury* that:
the contract for tramway work and goods carting for the Great Eastern Railway Company, held for a great many years by the late Mr. Robert Spicer, has been transferred to Mr. Arthur James Ramm, butcher and cattle dealer of this town who undertakes the business from February 1st.

Arthur was assuming the role of business manager of the Ramm family as Mary's involvement decreased with her advancing years.

The death of Mary Ramm was recorded in the *Norfolk News* on 8 April 1899:
We have to announce the death of one of the oldest inhabitants of the town, Mrs Mary Ramm (wife of the late Mr James Ramm) at the ripe age of 80 years. The deceased was left a widow with ten young children about 32 years ago, and continued to manage the business of a butcher in High Street until a few years ago, when she retired in favour of her eldest son. She enjoyed a robust constitution, her health only breaking down about a week previous to her death, and her excellent business habits won for her the respect and esteem of all classes. The funeral takes place today.

Prince Albert died in December 1861 at the age of forty-two, while Mary's husband died in 1867 at the age of fifty so both Victoria and Mary became widows in their forties, but what a difference in their respective widowhoods: following Albert's death, Victoria remained in mourning and partial retirement for forty years, indeed until the end of her life, continuing to dress in widow's weeds (deepest black) and laying out Albert's clothes on his bed every night, while avoiding public duties whenever possible.^{xii} Only one year after James' death, Mary had taken on the role of butcher, shopkeeper and beer retailer in the High Street shop, where she was still working in 1891 at the age of seventy-two, continuing to support the family business that she and James had begun in the 1840s; a remarkable woman. Queen Victoria outlived Mary Ramm by one year; she was eighty-one years old at her death in 1901.

For more than twenty years after his mother's death, Arthur continued to run the family business begun by his parents in 1844. He became a local JP in the early twentieth century and moved from the High Street into Glencoe House, The Buttlands. In 1922 Arthur Ramm junior was running the shop in High Street,

Wells, and after Arthur James' death in 1924, Arthur junior and his son Charles (great-grandson of James and Mary Ramm) retained the family business which continued as a butchers for another forty years until it was eventually sold in 1964.



Arthur Ramm, and his son Charles, were both born over the shop
Picture provided by Stephen Adcock of Wells Local History Group used with permission



1964 – The Ramm family business was sold to another local butcher (Arthur Howell)

Picture provided by Stephen Adcock of Wells Local History Group used with permission

Arthur James Ramm of Wells-next-the-Sea died on 19 February 1924. Probate was granted to Arthur Ramm butcher, Walter Ramm bank manager and Alexander Hugh Munro estate agent. Effects £7520.5s.3d.^{xiii} This was estimated to be worth £308,773 in 2017.^{xiv}

James and Mary Ramm started their retail shop in 1844, the year of their marriage, which culminated in a successful business that provided a livelihood for at least four further generations of their family. After the death of her husband, Mary continued physically working for another twenty-five years to maintain and develop the business they had begun together – an impressive undertaking for a woman in the Victorian era.

Sources

ⁱ *Norfolk Record Office; Norwich, Norfolk, England; Norfolk Church of England Registers; Reference: PD 679/8*

ⁱⁱ *Ancestry.com. England, Select Deaths and Burials, 1538-1991*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Class: HO107; Piece: 772; Book: 16; Civil Parish: Wells Next The Sea; County: Norfolk; Enumeration District: 1; Folio: 13; Page: 18;*

^{iv} *Norfolk Record Office; Norwich, Norfolk, England; Norfolk Church of England Registers; Reference: PD 679/9*

^v *Norfolk Record Office; Norwich, Norfolk, England; Norfolk Church of England Registers; Reference: PD 679/17]*

^{vi} *Norwich Mercury, Saturday 19 April 1851*

^{vii} *Norfolk News 13 August 1859 accessed via Findmypast*

^{viii} *Wells Local History Group 22.07.2025*

^{ix} *Class: RG11; Piece: 1998; Folio: 91; Page: 33; GSU roll: 1341481*

^x *William White's History, Gazetteer & Directory of Norfolk p782*

^{xi} *The National Archives of the UK (TNA); Kew, Surrey, England; Census Returns of England and Wales, 1891; Class: RG12; Piece: 1560; Folio: 101; Page: 12; GSU roll: 6096670*

^{xii} <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Victoria-queen-of-United-Kingdom/Last-years>

^{xiii} <https://probatesearch.service.gov.uk/>

^{xiv} <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter>