

# *This is A Few Forgotten Women Story*



*This story was written, in April 2024, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women staff and female patients associated with the Fleming Memorial Children's Hospital, Jesmond, Northumberland*

## **Margaret Victoria Potts**

Researching people in the records can be a journey of discovery, especially if they are strangers to us and not part of our own history. Stories range from exciting, sad, to those who just appear in basic records with no detail to no information at all. Often someone just has a few appearances in disparate records and on their own we do not get a wider picture of their lives, however if we look at the year by year events and even without personal letters or diaries sometimes a feeling about the person and their lives emerges.

This was the case when I looked at the basic records in which Margaret Victoria Potts appeared. I was introduced to her via the 1891 census in the Fleming Children's Hospital in Jesmond Northumberland. She was recorded

as Victoria, age 7, a patient from North Shields. Initially she did not appear to be any other records until it was discovered that she was actually, Margaret Victoria. According to the 1939 Register she was born on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1884. While Margaret was in hospital in 1891 her family of father, Stephen 37 a teacher in the public elementary school, who was born in Hebburn, Durham, mother, also Margaret, age 33 from North Shields were living at home at 54 Queen Street Tynmouth with Margaret's siblings, William J, a shop boy age 12, Henry J age 9 and younger brothers Frederick, 4 and Arthur Edward 2. The census did not record the reason for Margaret's stay in the hospital but ten years later she was back with her family in Back Tynmouth Road, still in North Shields when there were additional 3 siblings Stephen, 9 Mattew 5 and Stanley 3.

Margaret's parents were Stephen Potts and Margaret Nicholson. They were married in South Shields in the December ¼ of 1875. In 1911, even though Margaret was a widow, she recorded that she had had 9 children, 2 of whom had died. Stephen as an elementary school teacher would have been well regarded and was called to give a character witness, in court, for a man named Wilson who he had taught for 3 years in the evenings, so Stephen appears to have been supplementing his income with either night school teaching or private tuition. Stephen did not live long enough to witness an event which possibly could have brought disgrace to the family, the birth in 1908 of an illegitimate daughter, Lily, to Margaret.

In many families this event would have resulted in the daughter being turned from the home and possibly a new family found for the baby but this was not the case with Margaret. In 1911 she and her daughter are living with mother, Margaret, now a widow, and 4 of her brothers, Arthur, aged 22 and a water clerk, Stephen 19 and a glazier, Matthew, 15, a “doctor’s boy” messenger and Stanley who aged 13 was still at school. Despite Margaret’s mother dying in 1919 members of this family were still close, living together at 159 Grey Street in North Shields. Margaret was the head carrying out “home duties”. She was looking after brother Matthew who worked in the same company as brother Stephen, as a glazier. Stanley was working as a tug boat owner’s clerk. Also living with them was brother, Arthur, 32, a tug boat owner’s assistant manager.

In 1913 Arthur had married Ellen G Hepple and they had had a daughter, Ellen, who sadly had died. Their second daughter was Beatrice born in 1917 then in the December ¼ of 1920 twins, Arthur and Frank were born. Ellen was 28 years old but perhaps she was not of a strong constitution as she is recorded as passing away in the same quarter. Arthur did not survive and with father, Arthur and Beatrice living with Margaret in 1921, Frank was a patient in the Poor Law Institution of North shields. Sadly he also did not survive.

Ten years passed and Margaret’s daughter, Lily, married Leonard Bolton in April. By the time of the 1939 Register, Margaret who was incapacitated was being looked after by her daughter and son in law. Living at the same

address, 12 Hazel Ave, Margaret died aged 61 on November 19<sup>th</sup> 1945. She was buried in the Preston and Tynemouth Cemetery

The records we have for Margaret only provide us with the barest of information. There are no personal letters or diaries recording her own thoughts but the family stand out in the records as a caring and supportive family through very difficult circumstances.

Sources:

Ancestry/FMP:

1881 census RG11/5080/117/48

1891 census RG 12/4228/78

1901 census RG 13/4802/52/37

1911 census RG 14/30748/559

FMP: 1939 Register RG 101/2947J/004/24

1921 census RG15 /25454/200

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