

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in January 2023, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of girls from Leeds, Girls' Industrial School, Yorkshire.

Jane's Story

Jane Sharp Rowley was born on 27 June 1857 (according to her baptismal record) and christened on 5 July 1857 at St Peter's, Leeds. Her father, William Rowley, was born in Leeds in around 1815, son of Joseph Gill Rowley; his occupation is given as either labourer (1851 census, marriage certificate for his son Joseph Rowley in 1865) or groom (Jane's baptismal record, 1861 census). His first wife was named Elizabeth, but I cannot trace this marriage.

Jane's mother, Johanna was born around 1816 in Priors Marston, Warwickshire and, although she gave her father's name as Samuel Mills on her marriage certificate, it seems likely that she was the illegitimate daughter of Elizabeth Mills, baptised at Priors Marston on 23rd June 1816 as Johanna Goode Mills.¹ Johanna married George Sharp on 26 March 1837 at All Saints, Leamington Prior, Warwickshire² and at some time between 1844 (third child born in Southam,

¹ Find My Past: Warwickshire Baptisms, Priors Marston Baptisms, 1813-1854, Page 8

² Ancestry: Warwickshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1910

Warwickshire) and 1851 (census) they moved north to Leeds. In the 1851 census, George and Johanna are living as 2 Moscow Street, Leeds, with William and Elizabeth Rowley living next door at number 3.³

I cannot trace the deaths of George Sharp and Elizabeth Rowley, but William Rowley, as a widower, and Johanna Sharp, as a widow, married on 7 July 1856 at St Peter's, Leeds.⁴ Jane Sharp Rowley appears to have been their only child. In 1861, they were living at 76 Lemon Street, Leeds, together with Johanna's daughter from her first marriage, Elizabeth Sharp and four lodgers;⁵ both William and Johanna also had older children who were no longer living at home.

Jane next appears in the 1871 census, a scholar at the Windsor Street Ragged School in Leeds.⁶ The School was certified as an Industrial School and its pupils were placed there by magistrates for offences such as vagrancy, theft or being out of parental control.⁷ As there is no sign of Jane's parents in the 1871 census, it is possible that they had died. The census was taken on 2 April 1871; by July she was definitely in trouble. She was committed of the offence of being "homeless, destitute and sent out to beg" by stipendiary magistrate William Bruce, Esquire in Leeds on 28 July 1871 and sent to the Leeds Industrial School at Shadwell Lane.⁸

³1851 census HO107 2320 folio 268 page 10

⁴ Ancestry: Warwickshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1910

⁵ 1861 census: RG09 3382 folio 50 page 1 schedule 3

⁶ 1871 census: RG10 4555 folio 115 page 6

⁷ <http://www.childrenshomes.org.uk/LeedsEdgarStreetIS/>

⁸ Ancestry: West Yorkshire Reformatory School Records 1856-1922, originals at West Yorkshire Archives Service WRT/1/72-77, 81-84

The admissions record for the school give an unflattering description of Jane; red hair, blue eyes, slight build, pale complexion, bad teeth and a “peculiar nose”, and comments about her very poor educational standard as well as her bad character “often in bad company. Sent to beg and steal.” Although her parents are stated to be William and Elizabeth (stepmother), little detail is given about them, and it is not clear whether they are still alive or not. William appears still to have been alive in 1865 when his son Joseph married. More detail is given about other family members though.

A sister, Elizabeth Smith, is said to be living at Frith Street. The 1871 census shows a Betsy Smith, wife of Henry Smith, living at 3 Firth Street⁹ and there is a record of a marriage between Mary Elizabeth SHARP (father George) and Henry Smith on 24 May 1863 at St Peter’s, Leeds.¹⁰ A brother, Henry Smith, would appear to have been incorrectly recorded as this is more likely Henry Sharp, son of George and Johanna, recorded with them on the 1861 census but I cannot find him in 1871 although the admissions record says he was a coal miner living in Rothwell. Another brother, William Sharp, is described as a carter, living in Cambridge Street, and this is confirmed by the 1871 Census for 12 Cambridge Street.¹¹

A further brother, Joseph Rowley, is said to be living at Edgar Street and employed as a “paper stainer.” Indeed, there is a paper stainer of this name, but living at 4 Walker Terrace in the 1871 census;¹² his marriage to Margaret Mrshall on 21 August 1865 appears to have been witnessed by his father,

⁹ 1871 census RG10 4558 folio 32 page 28

¹⁰ West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1813-1935

¹¹ 1871 census RG10 4558 folio 22 page 7

¹² 1871 census RG10 4555 folio 104 page 83

William.¹³ An aunt, Mary Broughton, is said to live at Somers Street but is not living there in the 1871 census and I have not been able to trace her; she is presumably a sister of William Rowley.

I can find no records which definitely relate to Jane after the committal to Shadwell Lane. There is, however, a record of a burial at Hunslet Cemetery, Leeds of a Jane Rowley, aged 41-42 who died on or around 12 February 1900, with the details “age 42, abode: street, found drowned at Knostrop”.¹⁴ Knostrop is an alternative spelling for Knowsthorpe, but the spelling is predominantly used for a large water treatment works. Is this Jane, living rough, and potentially suicidal? There is a possibility of a family history of mental illness. A Johanna Rowley was a patient at the West Riding Pauper Lunatic Asylum in Wakefield;¹⁵ she was admitted on 23 March 1865 and died on 17 August 1866 at the age of 53.¹⁶ The spelling of ‘Johanna’, her age, and the fact that William Rowley married for a third time on 27th July 1867 (to Elizabeth Smales, at St Peter’s Leeds)¹⁷ suggests that this could be Jane’s mother.

Sheila Jones January 2023

¹³ West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1813-1935

¹⁴ Find A Grave and <https://search.yorkshireburials.uk/>

¹⁵ West Yorkshire Archive Service: Stanley Royd Hospital, Wakefield records C85/3/6/18 pp591-592

¹⁶ Ancestry: UK, Lunacy Patients Admission Registers, 1846-1921 and England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837-1915

¹⁷ Ancestry: West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1813-1935