

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written in August 2023 as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who enrolled in the first two cohorts [1908 & 1909] of Trainee Teachers at the Cheshire Country Training College, Crewe [CCTCC]

Elsie Taggart's Story



Elsie Taggart taken at a Fancy Dress Social in 1911¹

Elsie Taggart was baptised in St Peter's Church, Toxteth on 9th September, 1891 and confirms her date of birth as 10th August 1891. Her parents were William James Taggart, 'pilot', and Annie (Walkerling) and their address was Roseberry Street.²

William and Annie had married at St Michaels, Toxteth in July 1890.³ William appears to have several generations of 'pilots' in his family including his brother Robert who was a witness to the marriage. Annie had been born in Hull, the daughter of Frederick, a tailor, and Joannah who were German citizens. How much Annie's German heritage influenced Elsie's life is unknown, but it may reflect the close ties with Leah and the Unirowski family who were Russian citizens.

On 17th June 1897 Elsie's sister Nora (or Norah) May, born 24th May, was baptised in St Peters, Toxteth although the family were now living 'across the water' in Park Road, Seacombe.⁴

By the time of the 1901 census the family had moved to nearby Eaton Street.⁵ In this census William was described as a 'pilot (seas)'. Park Road and Eaton Street are streets of fairly large early Edwardian houses with plenty of room and modern amenities for the family. The Central Park was very near, as was Egremont Pier and we can imagine that Elsie and Nora had a comfortable and secure childhood.

William's occupation as a Mersey Pilot was an important and well respected one. Official Pilots have been guiding ships safely in and out of the Mersey estuary for over two hundred and fifty years. The pilots had to meet incoming ships outside the Mersey Bar and climb on board to take the ships through the shifting sandbank channels and docks. They did the same thing for ships leaving Liverpool.⁶

Since 1766 prospective pilots have had to undertake a five year apprenticeship, work as a boathand for a period and take practical and theory examinations before being given a Board of Trade Certificate.

The Pilotage Service was a big operation. In the 1850s there were 400 pilots and 12 pilot cutters. By the mid twentieth century there were about half this number due to reduction in sea traffic and larger ships. The pilot cutters, which were mainly steam in William's time would be out in Mersey Bay or in the Irish Sea and pilots would live on the cutter for two weeks, with a full crew of engineers, cooks and boathands, and when needed travelling out to the ships in a smaller boat. This would have meant that William was away from home two weeks out of three – Elsie would have accepted this as the norm and it probably helped when she later married a 'seafarer'.

We know from a newspaper report in 1903 that Elsie Taggart from Poulton Street Board School Seacombe was awarded a scholarship from Cheshire County Council. This consisted of a grant of £9 in the first year, £12 in the second year and £15 in the third year. Leah Urinowski's sister Annie also received a scholarship and was from Poulton Street School.⁷

Elsie then moved on to Wallasey High School. In 1906 she received a further intermediate scholarship tenable at grammar schools.⁸ This would have enabled her to continue at the High School until she was 17. During this time she gained, according to the College Register, Oxford Senior Local 1907, Liverpool Matriculation 1909 and the Preliminary Certificate 1909 with Distinctions in Teaching, English & Science.⁹ She was clearly a capable and ambitious young woman and being accepted in September 1909 to enter the newly formed Crewe Teacher Training College was a significant achievement. On the register entry

Elsie's address is given as Elsinor, 64 Grosvenor Road. Was the name 'Elsinor' given to incorporate the names of Elsie and Nora?

When Elsie started her training at the Crewe Training College she was among the second cohort of 35 female students. The College had opened the previous September in temporary accommodation at the Crewe Mechanics Institution. It would be another three years before the College moved to a permanent home on the edge of Crewe. Since the 1902 Education Act when local authorities were formed with the means to set up schools and colleges in each area, Cheshire was pro-active in building a training college and providing training of male and female teachers mainly from the Cheshire area. The tuition was free but trainees had to agree to teach for at least 5 years in a local authority school.¹⁰

The curriculum followed by the students included at least 25% of their time being spent in observation and practical teaching. This took place in the Demonstration School in the first year and in a variety of schools, both rural and urban in the second year. Students were encouraged to observe the physical and mental development of children.

Subjects covered in the college included the Theory of Education, Handiwork (which was different for male and female students) and Physical Education including the Swedish Drill Course. There were detailed syllabuses for English, History, Geography and Mathematics with a range of optional subjects such as Nature Study, Singing, and Rural science. Examinations were set in all areas and marked, or moderated externally, by the Board of Education and its Inspectors.

There were some opportunities for the students to take part in sporting activities. An active Hockey team thrived despite not having a suitable training ground. Even when the new College was completed there were fewer facilities for the women students to play team sports and less land allocated for tennis

courts and a hockey pitch than for the male students who had a football pitch and a cricket ground.¹¹

There was no hostel accommodation at the College until 1912 so students either lived at home or had lodging with vetted landladies. Each student was to have her own room, a bed was provided by the college, and a set menu was laid down by the college which included a roast on Sundays with vegetables and a pie or pastry dish for dessert! In the 1911 census Elsie was boarding with Edward and Mary Foster and their two young children at 10 Culland Street, Crewe.¹² There were two other boarders including Leah Urinowski who had attended the same primary and high school as Elsie in Liscard. It is probable that they had been with the Foster family for the whole time they were in Crewe.

During term time there were no lectures on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, and it is easy to imagine Elsie and Leah taking a walk around Crewe, feeling independent and fashionable with their hair pinned up according to the college expectations. There would have been opportunities to meet with the other female students and to discuss and debate the issues of the day including the growing suffragette movement. Elsie left the College in July 1911 having passed the Final Exam and gaining the Certificate of Education.¹³

The Teachers' Registration Council Registers tell us that Elsie registered in 1915 and that she worked as an Assistant Teacher from 1911 until she resigned (no date given). Elsie worked at Manor Road Council Boys School probably until she married in 1921.¹⁴ Her friend Leah Urinowski also worked at this school. No information found yet about their time there. Elsie probably returned to the family home at 64 Grosvenor Road where they were in 1911 and 1921. By 1921 her sister Nora was also working as an assistant teacher at Seacombe School.¹⁵

The first World War would have brought many challenges to Elsie and her family. Teaching at a Wallasey school, Elsie could have been supporting children whose father's had gone to war or who knew their fathers would not be coming home. Many of the children would have had family members in the Royal Navy or the Royal Naval Reserve.

There were dangers nearer to home too – on the 28th December 1917 a mine exploded under one of the pilot ships out in the Mersey. There was a terrific explosion and the ship sank within a couple of minutes with only two men surviving out of the 43 on board, including 15 pilots. Elsie's uncle Robert (Robert Taggart 1861-11917), who was a witness to his brother William and Annie's marriage, was amongst them. The harrowing accounts in the local papers make distressing reading.¹⁶ 'Robert Taggart Pilotage Authority, No. 1 Pilot Boat "Alfred H. Read" (Liverpool)' is commemorated on the Cheshire Roll and The Tower Memorial in London.¹⁷

At some time during this period Elsie was to meet her future husband, Harry Moore. Harry, just a year older than Elsie, also came from a seafaring background. His parents were Benjamin West Moore, a Master Mariner and Lucy Burley. He grew up in Liverpool and Seacombe and gained his Master's Certificate for 'foreign-going steamships only' in 1919.¹⁸ During the first World War he was in the Royal Naval Reserve as a temporary sub-lieutenant.¹⁹ He was in command of a 'Q' ship used as a decoy ship to hunt and destroy enemy submarines.²⁰ He later described this as having adventures with torpedoes!²¹

Harry would have presented as a dashing young man who had a sense of adventure and a Naval career ahead of him. Elsie and Harry were married at St Luke's Church, Poulton on 2nd June 1921. Harry's occupation was Master

Mariner and Elsie appeared to have no occupation. The witnesses to the marriage were Elsie's sister Nora and Harry's brother Norman Alfred Moore.²²

Several weeks later on 16th July at the same church Nora and Norman were married. Norman's occupation was Master Mariner and again Nora appeared to have no occupation.²³ We know that both Elsie and Nora were teachers but as was the law then they would have had to resign from their posts upon marriage. It is possible that both women did return to teaching later but evidence of this has not yet been found.

Married just days before the 1921 census we find Elsie and Harry as visitors in the home of Mrs Mary Rogers in New Brighton. Elsie and Mary were described as doing 'home duties' with no sign of a teaching job for Elsie. Harry was described as a Master Mariner working for the Bibby Steamship Company based in Liverpool. However, this whole entry is crossed out which suggests that Harry had already gone to sea.²⁴

By 1926 Elsie and Harry were living at 27 Stourcliff Road in Wallasey when their first son William Benjamin Clyde Moore was born. Sadly he died soon after birth. They went on to have three more children: William Norman Clyde born in 1927, Roy Benjamin West born 1929 and Annie Charmain born 1933 who was described as 'a gift of a daughter' in her birth announcement.²⁵ All the children were baptised at St Luke's in Poulton.²⁶

We next meet Elsie in the 1939 register when she is living at 15 Pennine Street, not far from Stourcliffe Road and a similar semi-detached house built probably just after the war. Elsie is described as on 'home duties' and her widowed mother Annie Taggart is living with her (Annie's husband William having died at sea in 1922).²⁷ Her three children and her nephew Kerry West Moore, born in 1929, were also there. The household did have a live-in servant.²⁸

It would appear from the Merchant Seaman Registers 1918-1942 that Harry did not pursue a career with the Bibby Line.²⁹ The incomplete Registers, used in conjunction with the Crew Lists Index Project give some indication of Harry's career path.³⁰ For example in July 1924 Harry was engaged as 1st Mate on the Baron Renfew, a steamship owned by Kelvin Shipping in Glasgow. The last entry from these registers for Harry is in January 1942 when he was Master of the Baron Herries, a steamship commissioned just two years before. It would have been difficult for Elsie as many of these voyages would have lasted several weeks or even months leaving the bulk of parenting to fall on her shoulders. Elsie and the children would have looked forward to letters from around the world and to hear Harry's stories when he returned on shore leave.

The outbreak of war in September 1939 would have brought extra worries for Elsie. The Wallasey area, so close to the Liverpool docks, suffered greatly during 1940/1 from night t air raids. An article on the Wallasey Blitz posted by the Wirral History website gives more information. There were 500 alerts, and 658 high explosive bombs, including 17 parachute mines, known to have fallen on the town, together with thousands of incendiary bombs. As the town was mainly residential it was houses and people most affected by this, over 50 people killed and more than 800 injured, 1200 houses destroyed and over 17000 damaged.³¹ There would have been no escaping the realities of war, not to mention rationing and the blackout affecting daily life.

Harry joining the Royal Naval Reserve as a Captain would have given Elsie more to worry about, not least because she would not have known where his ships were. We know from the Database of World War Two Medals awarded to Merchant Seaman that he was awarded the Atlantic Star, the Africa Star, the

Burma Star and the Italy Star which gives us a good indication of where his ships were in operation. It also shows that Harry was awarded an OBE.³²

Details of Harry's OBE emerge in an article in the Liverpool Daily Post of January 1944 reporting on the New Years Honours List. His ship was in a convoy taking 'items of an explosive nature' to the Mediterranean when it was struck by a series of bombs, flooding the engine room and causing the ship to list. Harry managed to empty the engine room and stop the listing by moving the cargo which must have been a dangerous operation. The ship was saved, and the cargo delivered with only one minor injury amongst the crew.³³

Harry received his medal from the King in March 1944.³⁴ This must have been an exciting day as Elsie and Harry, together with her sister Nora and oldest son William travelled to Buckingham Palace. (*names not verified on photograph below*) Elsie must have felt very proud of his achievements.

Harry died in 1950 leaving his estate to his widow, Elsie.³⁵ They appear to have moved to a new bungalow in Maisie Moreton, near Poulton, just before he died. Was this their retirement home where Elsie was looking forward to spending more time with his husband as he retired?

So much of Elsie's story is unknown after she married. Her husband has many official records of his employment, but we have to see Elsie's life through her husband and children. We can only summarize how life was for Elsie, hopefully she was proud of her family and her important role in its achievements. It was surprising not to find any reports of Elsie or her children in online newspapers. A visit to the Wirral Archives and a search through the Wallasey papers may reveal more.

Elsie died in Fulbourn Hospital, Cambridge on 2nd January 1970.³⁶ Fulbourn Hospital was for patients suffering from mental illnesses.³⁷ Her son Roy of St Neots was the person who applied for cremation. She was cremated at Cambridge Cemetery on 7th January and her ashes scattered in the Cemetery Gardens.³⁸ A long way from her hometown of Wallasey on the Wirral.



Elsie and Harry outside Buckingham Palace, March 1944³⁹

Narrative by Andrea Knowles

Sources

¹ Image of CTCC student Elsie Taggart, 1911, CCTCC Archives, Unpublished data, under the care of the Family History Society of Cheshire, Crewe

² Ancestry: Liverpool Record Office; Liverpool, England; *Liverpool Church of England Parish Registers*; Reference Number: 283 PET/2/91

³ Liverpool, Lancashire, England, Marriages and Banns, 1813-1921

⁴ Ancestry: Liverpool Record Office; Liverpool, England; *Liverpool Church of England Parish Registers*; Reference Number: 283 PET/2/96

⁵ 1901 Census for 12 Eaton Avenue Liscard RG13 3403 folio 161

⁶ <https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/about-us/fellows/corporate-fellows/the-liverpool-pilots>

⁷ Cheshire Daily Echo 01 June 1903 pg.2

⁸ Liverpool Daily Post 17 September 1906 pg.8

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- ⁹ CCTCC Student Registers [1908-1935]: CCTCC Archives, Unpublished data, under the care of the Family History Society of Cheshire, Crewe
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- ¹¹ Roberts, M. and Webb, S. Students at Play: Sport in the Cheshire County Training College, 1908-1918, In Day, D. (ed), *Playing Pasts* (Manchester: MMU Sport and Leisure History, 2020), 37-55.
- ¹² 1911 census for 10 Culland Street, Crewe, Cheshire RG14 21791 SN 140.
- ¹³ CCTCC Student Registers [1908-1935]: CCTCC Archives, Unpublished data, under the care of the Family History Society of Cheshire, Crewe
- ¹⁴ <https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/teachers-registration-council-registers-1914-1948>
- ¹⁵ 1921 census for 64 Grosvenor Road RG15 17522 SN16
- ¹⁶ Liverpool Daily Post 24 January 1918 pg.3
- ¹⁷ <https://www.cheshireroll.co.uk/soldier/?i=6359/pilot-1st-class-Robert-Taggart>
- ¹⁸ *Master's Certificates*. Greenwich, London, UK: National Maritime Museum.
- ¹⁹ <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/SearchUI/Details?uri=D8292192>
- ²⁰ <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Mystery-Ships/>
- ²¹ Liverpool Daily Post 26 January 1944
- ²² Marriages 1918-1928 St Luke's Poulton accessed at Cheshire record office.
- ²³ Marriages 1918-1928 St Luke's Poulton accessed at Cheshire record office.
- ²⁴ 1921 census for 19 Vale Drive, New Brighton, Wallasey RG15 17328 SN 235
- ²⁵ Liverpool Daily Post 13 September 1933
- ²⁶ Baptisms 1917-27 & 1927-1938 St Luke's Poulton accessed at Cheshire record office.
- ²⁷ Liverpool Echo 06 September 1922 pg 8
- ²⁸ 1939 register for 15 Pennine Road RG101/3966E/007/39
- ²⁹ Britain, Merchant Seamen, 1918-1941 find my Past
- ³⁰ <https://www.crewlist.org.uk/#top>
- ³¹ <http://www.wirralhistory.uk/wallaseyblitz.html>
- ³² <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/browse/r/h/C11138125>
- ³³ Liverpool Daily Post 26 January 1944
- ³⁴ Liverpool Evening Express 22 March 1944
- ³⁵ Ancestry.com. *England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1995* [
- ³⁶ Deceased on line Cambridge Cemetery Cremation Records
- ³⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fulbourn_Hospital
- ³⁸ Deceased on line Cambridge Cemetery Cremation Records
- ³⁹ Liverpool Evening Express 22 March 1944