

# *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.*

## **Winifred Redgrave 's Story**

Winifred Redgrave was born on 3 March 1892 and baptised at the Parish Church in Chertsey, Surrey, on 15 May of that year. Winifred was the third child of William and Clara Redgrave, their first child William having been born on 2 September 1888 and a daughter Clara Kate born on 27 May 1891. A fourth child, John, was born on 13 April 1894 but he sadly died six months later. The family lived at 23 Highfield Road Chertsey. Chertsey is a town 18 miles south west of London which is situated on the river Thames. William was a whitesmith, which means that he worked finishing or polishing iron or steel. His most likely employer was the Iron Foundry in Chertsey owned by W. A. Herring as there were other connections between the company and the family as we shall see.

Winifred was born deaf and initially admitted to Asylum for the Support and Education of the Deaf and Dumb children of the Poor in Old Kent Road School in London on 10 August 1900 when she was 8 years old. The admission process was by election of subscribers or by payment. Winifred was admitted by election. Although the school was described as being for children of the "poor" their parents were still required to pay a fee and Winifred's admission record states that her "sureties" were W. A. Herring, Iron Founder of Burley Orchard Chertsey, and E T Madeley, grocer of Windsor Street Chertsey. Both were wealthy businessmen from the family's local community. The firm of W. A. Herring could well have been her father William's employer throughout this time as he is stated as such on the 1921 census and was a major employer in the town. Correspondence from the school was to be sent to Rev E R Parr at Chertsey Vicarage. Perhaps he too had helped her parents with the admission process.

Winifred had other disabilities as well as her deafness. It was recorded that she was also partially paralysed "which makes her unable to wait on herself properly". The records do not give any further details of her paralysis or what being "unable to wait on herself" means. She also had a conjugated deviation of the eyes to the left which is a neurological disorder. This inability of her eyes to work together would have affected her ability to read. Winifred was moved to the school for the Deaf in Margate on 13 March 1901. In her school report from this time she was described as "weak in intellect". The school in general did not admit children of "weak intellect" but they did not give up on Winifred. By June 1901 it was recorded that she "signs intelligibly very simple communications, her wants and such like" but that she was "dirty in her habits". Did Winifred have difficulties with toilet training? By November of that year she was moved to a smaller class for "defectives". Although she improved in this environment the teacher wrote that "she was considerably below normal" and "cannot be expected to amount to anything like a satisfactory point in her education". Most pupils were helped to find work but Winifred would be unable to work due to her disabilities both physical and mental. Her end of school report showed she had been taught all the usual school subjects including religious knowledge and geography. She was taught to lip read easy sentences, to handle money, to knit and use a sewing machine. Her conduct was described as good and she signed her name very neatly. Winifred left school at the age of fifteen years on 17 December 1907.

When the 1911 census was taken she was living with her parents and siblings. Eldest son William was now working as a mechanic and chauffeur, and his sister Clara Kate as a dressmaker. Later that year, Clara Kate married Albert John Pond, a gardener, and went to live in Walton on Thames. In 1914 brother William married Lilian Perry at Ewell in Surrey. In the 1921 census William and his wife Lilian were living in the family home at 23 Highfield Road Chertsey. He described himself as an out of work chauffeur. Father William was working as a fitter at the engineering works of W. A. Herring in Chertsey. Winifred was described by the family as "afflicted".

The family continued to live in Chertsey taking part in community life. Sadly, Lilian was killed on 12 December 1924 whilst riding her bicycle when she skidded and fell under the wheels of a van. Winifred's father William died on 29 September 1930 at the age of 69 years.

In 1939 Winifred was living at the same address with her mother, now aged 69 years, and her widowed brother William, described again as motor mechanic and chauffeur seeking work. Winifred was described as "afflicted, deaf and dumb" in the register.

Later that year Winifred's mother Clara died after a fall down the stairs. It was reported in The Surrey Advertiser that she had been a resident of Chertsey for over fifty years.<sup>4</sup> Her son, William, found her at the foot of the stairs but she died shortly afterwards. It was probably after the death of her mother that Winifred was admitted to St Luke's House, Warren Road in Chertsey which was at that time a complex of buildings including the Workhouse, its Infirmary and maternity ward and a Casual ward for the homeless, still known as the Spike. This would be a huge shock to Winifred who apart from her time at boarding school, had always lived with her family in the same house in Chertsey. Presumably Winifred needed full time care and could not cope with being left alone or manage her affairs.

After the National Assistance Act of 1948 terminated the existing Poor Law, the provision for the welfare of the disabled such as Winifred was provided by the local authority. In Winifred's case, probably not much changed in her life under the new regime, as she remained in the same building as before.

Her brother William died at the age of 53 years on 10 December 1941 whilst at home. It was reported in the Surrey Advertiser a few days later that the milkman noticed that the previous day's milk had not been moved from the step and on looking through the window saw William sitting in his chair apparently dead. Winifred's only relative now was her sister, Clara, who continued to live five miles away in Walton on Thames with her family.

The Electoral Register recorded Winifred as living in St Luke's House until her death in 1962, when she was seventy years old.

## Sources

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