

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in March 2023, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who appear in the 1901 census for St. Joseph's Inebriate Reformatory, Ashford, Middlesex and Farmfield Reformatory for Inebriate Women, Horley, Surrey.

Mary Edward's Story

According to the 1901 English Census, Mary Edwards was an inmate of the St. Joseph's Inebriate Reformatory, Ashford, Middlesex. She was a married woman aged 50 yrs, a Roman Catholic and her place of birth is recorded as Carrick, Ireland. This small amount of information immediately causes challenges when researching Mary. From her age it appears that she was born in 1850/51 before civil registration became law in Ireland and, even if parish baptismal records remain for Carrick, which Carrick is that? Griffith's Valuation, the first full valuation of all Ireland, taken between 1847 and 1864, lists 1,837 entries for places with Carrick as a name or part thereof. (<https://askaboutireland.ie/griffith-valuation/>, accessed 04/04/2023) It is common for a placename such as Carrickfergus to be shortened locally to

Carrick. Also in the 1901 record, Mary is noted as married, so did she marry prior to moving to England or after? Without her maiden name or her husband's first name it would take more research than time constraints here allow.

So where to begin? If someone was an inmate of St Joseph's, it's likely that a court ordered them to be there. That being the case, it is also likely that the incident bringing the inmate before the court is reported on in local newspapers. Here another problem arises, Mary Edwards is not an uncommon name. A search of newspapers for the time has revealed many court appearances for 'Mary Edwards'. (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk, latest access 05/04/2023) Is this the correct Mary Edwards? Perhaps, is the best that can be said. A range of articles, in a variety of local newspapers, between the years 1896 and 1912 report 'Mary Edwards' being brought to court regularly. These court appearances are all to do with drunkenness, and behaviour resulting from that state, but some of the personal details of these Marys raise questions. The reported incidents occur mostly in the Croydon and Hornsey areas of London. These areas are approximately 20 miles apart so are these the same Mary? Was 'our' Mary familiar with either or both areas?

Hornsey Mary is reported as being 42 yrs. of age in The Holloway Press dated 18 December 1896, (ibid.), but aged 38 yrs. in the Islington Gazette dated 14 December 1897 (ibid.), still 38 yrs in the Hendon and Finchley Times, dated 15 April 1898 (ibid.), whereas the Islington Gazette dated 21 September 1899 has her as being 39 yrs. of age. (ibid.) All of these articles and many more report the same type of incidents, drunkenness, use of bad language, and general unruly behaviour. Sometimes Mary must be taken to the Police station in an ambulance because she is so incapacitated through alcohol. There are references to her

being remanded in custody, on one occasion for two weeks. Mary explains her actions by alleging that the people around her in the street are insulting her Irishness and her religion and she is reacting to that. There are also many references made to her appearance. She is a respectably dressed woman whose husband works for the council. She is also described as being well to do and as having no problems paying the fines imposed. The Islington Gazette article mentioned above reports that the Magistrate while fining her for this incident states that she will go to prison for three years the next time she comes before the bench. Mary on one occasion tells the court that her husband is trying to get her into the Good Shepherd Convent for treatment. (Hendon and Finchley Times dated 25 May 1900. (ibid)) This is clearly a woman who needs help more than punishment although the court imposes another fine on this occasion, and not the three year custodial sentence threatened in 1899. Then in July 1900, before the court again, the magistrate tells her that she 'had qualified by her repeat offences for different treatment to that usually imposed, and she would now be remanded in custody for a week, and then sent to a home for inebriates for 12 months '. (Hendon and Finchley Times, dated 13 July 1900 (ibid.)) Could this Mary be the Mary Edwards that is listed as being in St Joseph's in April 1901? The dates would fit, she is a married woman and Irish. Her age is wrong by nearly a decade, though. From the newspaper reports we know that this Mary lived at 39 Topsfield Road, Hornsey between the years of 1896 and 1899. We also know that she lived at Carlingford Road, West Green, Tottenham just a couple of miles from Hornsey in 1900.

Croydon Mary is reported in the Croydon Chronicle and East Surrey Advertiser, dated 14 November 1896, (ibid.) as living at 26 Longley Road, and at Derring Road, Croydon in Croydon Times 28 March 1900. (ibid.) She also appears in court

for being drunk and disorderly but there is no mention of her defending her nationality or religion as with Hornsey Mary. The only real details are in the 1896 article above. Here she is reported as using bad language which the arresting police constable reports is because she was quarrelling with her daughter. Croydon Mary doesn't appear to come before the court nearly as often as Hornsey Mary. There is the 1896 article and then she doesn't appear in print again until 1900. She is nearer the 1901 census age; her age having been reported in the 1900 article as 47 yrs. There are no details about her husband although she is reported in 1900 as being married, and we know from the 1896 article that she has a daughter who would appear old enough to be having a row with her mother in the street. It is possible that the Longley Road and Dering Road addresses are the daughter's homes, and that Croydon Mary just stays there at times, which would make Hornsey Mary and Croydon Mary the same person.

What is noticeable in reading the newspaper reports of both women is that reporting on the frequent attendances of Hornsey Mary in court is slightly wry in tone. That of Croydon Mary is more austere.

Moving forward five years and Reynolds's Newspaper dated 27 August 1905 (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk , latest access 0504/2023) reports that Mary Edwards, aged 42 yrs, Portland Road, Notting Hill, is found drunk in charge of a three year old child. She is taken to Willesden police Station where she finds her husband who has also been arrested for drunkenness. They both appeared in court and received fines. The drunk husband doesn't really seem to be the same man who was trying to get his wife help from the Good Shepherd Convent

so maybe not Hornsey Mary. There is a problem with the age too. Is it Croydon Mary or another Mary Edwards altogether?

Neither the 1891 nor the 1911 English census records provide any clarity. (www.ancestry.co.uk, last accessed 03/04/2023)

Hopefully, further research will provide more information and a definite identification. One thing is clear, these women needed more help than was available to them.

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