

This is a Story from 'A Few Forgotten Women'



Maria Bindon

It is the night of 7 April 1861. Civil War is about to erupt in America; Thomas Cook is planning his first package tour; Louis Pasteur is promulgating his Germ Theory and Charles Dickens is set to publish *Great Expectations*. Mrs Beeton has put the finishing touches to her book of Household Management but not all women were free to follow her advice. Alone at the police station in Bath High Street is Maria Bindon. Society has labelled her as a prostitute and prisoner.



Bath High Street

Image credit: Library of Congress, in the public domain

What had led to her imprisonment? What can we find out about her life after she had left the police cell? The following day, Maria faced the Mayor, J W Bush, and Dr Barrett in the Magistrates' Court. *The Bath Chronicle* tells us that, "Maria Bindon, an indifferent character, was charged with being drunk and using obscene language in Westgate Street. Fined 5s and costs or 7 days in prison if in default of the fine".

The census required everyone to be enumerated where they slept but in a household in 14 Milk Street, not far from Westgate Street, Maria is recorded again. She is listed as a launderess and with her is her three year old son, Edward, who had been born in Bath. Sharing the house was nineteen year old Fanny Stephens and her boarder, seventeen year old Sarah Hooper, both of whom were dressmakers and 'Confest Prostitutes'. Was Maria actually a prostitute, as the police station census claimed, or was she labelled as such because of where she was living? She certainly had a child out of wedlock. Could more be discovered about Edward? Very little as it turns out. He was baptised on 14 November 1856 at Bathwick; his mother's address was given as Sam's Court; no father was named and no birth registration has been found. Edward married Elizabeth Collins in 1880 and worked as a carter in Bath. He died in 1888, leaving no descendants.

So what of Maria? At first, life did not go well for her after her short stay in prison. Five years later, she was summoned to the Guildhall to appear as a witness at an inquest. On Whit Monday, Maria had been drinking in a beer house in Milk Street with Sarah Hooper, who was by this time twenty two and still working as a prostitute. Maria and Thomas Bell, who was also in the group, began quarrelling and went outside intending to fight it out. Others went to watch the proceedings and allegedly to try to prevent the fight. Sarah joined in the fray, throwing beer over James Pavey and hitting him on the head with a cup. James retaliated by hitting Sarah in the face and she fell to the ground. She was helped to a nearby house and about one in the morning, returned to her lodgings with her friends, presumably including Maria. Sarah then had a series of nose bleeds and by the end of the week she was dead. An inquest ensued and James Pavey was accused of Sarah's manslaughter.

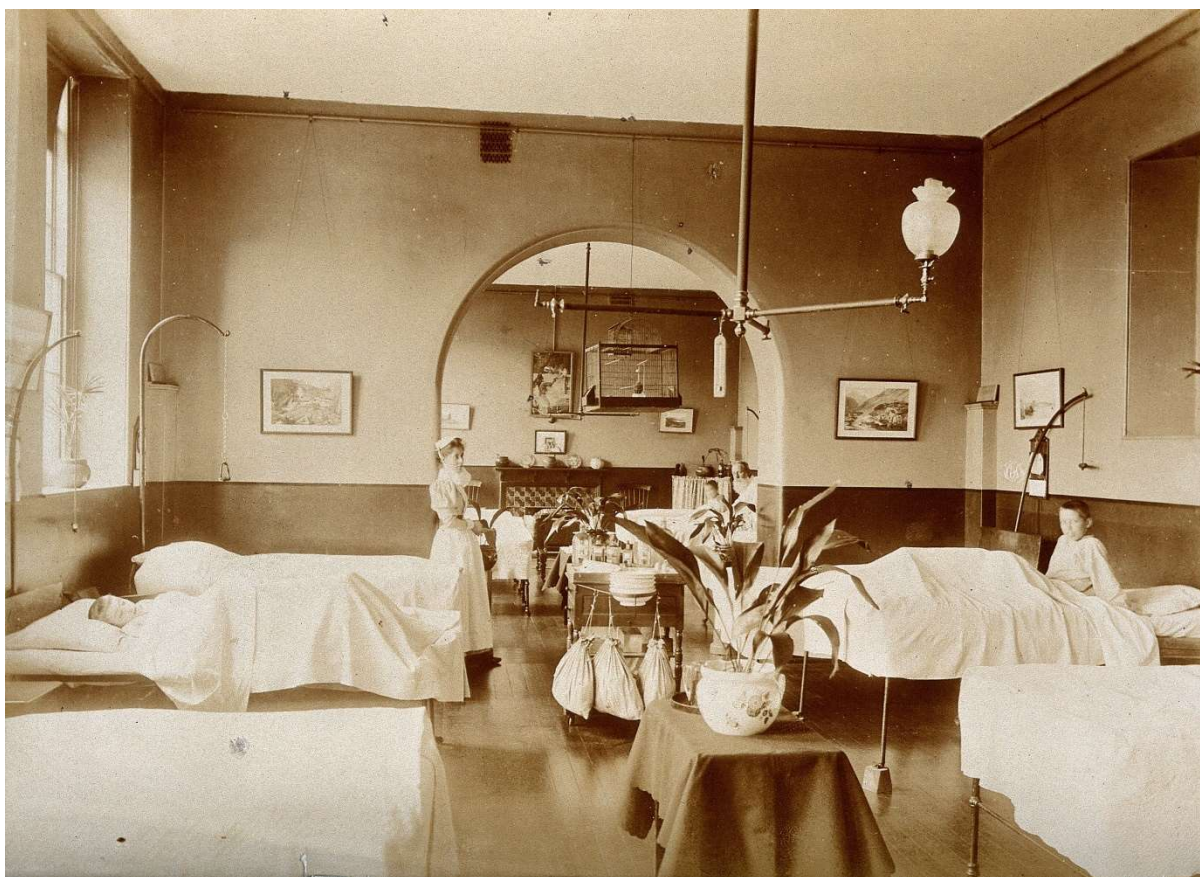
Is it possible to see what might have led to Maria's dysfunctional lifestyle? She was born about 1835 in Bathampton, Somerset, a village to the north-east of Bath, to which it was linked by the Kennet and Avon Canal. She was the fourth of George and Ann Bindon née Mason's seven children. She was baptised at Bathampton in 1838, along with her younger brother, William, who died the following year.

In 1841, the Great Western Railway line had just opened from Bristol to London. In the same year, Maria can be found, enumerated as 'Mary', with her mother and five siblings at Hampton Cottages, Bathampton. Confusingly, Maria has a sister called Mary Ann who is two years younger than her. There is no sign of her father, George, in 1841. Her mother's occupation is given as 'Labourer's Wife' but this has been crossed out. In 1847, Maria's fourteen year old sister, Elizabeth died. Her father, George, died in 1849.

Two years after the death of her father, Maria was working as a live-in servant for Katherine Browne in Bathampton. Close by was her mother, Ann and sisters, Mary Ann and Eliza.

There doesn't seem to be anything in her family history to explain Maria's drift into prostitution and we can't tell if her son, Edward, was a product of that lifestyle, or if his birth precipitated her need to sell her body.

By 1871, Maria was living at 1 Little Corn Street in Bath as a lodger in the household of William Morgan. Maria was working as a launderess and her son, Edward was a butcher's boy. Living in the same part of the house, presumably as Maria's common law husband, was labourer Samuel Tylee. Ten years later, the couple were still apparently living as man and wife, this time at 1 Southgate Place. Later that year Maria and Samuel finally got married. Sadly, three years later, at the age of forty six, Maria died at the Royal United Hospital in Bath. She was suffering from Bright's Disease, which is kidney failure and double pleurisy.



Royal United Hospital Bath c.1870 Image: Wellcome Collection, in the public domain

13th	August 1887	Abana Syle	Female 46 years	Wife of Samuel Syle a Labourer 1 New Quay Bath	MOTCO. Bright disease Double Pleurisy Certified by Edward J. Cave 14/8/87	Borsham The mark of Elizabeth Benden Daughter in Law present at death 4 Back Street	Stretcott August 1887	Francis Glover Registrar
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Sources

General Registrar's Indexes of Birth, Marriage and Death

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1851 census for Bathampton, Somerset HO107 1940 folio 320

1861 census for Central Police Office, St. James', Bath, Somerset RG9 1686 folio 7

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1881 census 1 Southgate Place, St. James', Bath, Somerset RG11 2437 folio 27

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