

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.

Linda Bush née Gummer

Linda was born on 22nd March 1867 to George and Elizabeth Gummer and baptised on 21st April 1867 at St Paul's Church, Deptford, Kent. She was the youngest child of thirteen. In 1877 at the age of 10 we find her attending Frankham Street School, a school her brother Frederick attended when it was called Regent School. On the 11th February 1884, at the age of 18 she married Frederick Bush at St James, The Great Church, Bethnal Green. Between the years of 1885-1897 five children are born to the couple. Sadly 3 died before reaching their 2nd birthdays.

Frederick W (B) 11.3.1885 (D) 1951

Florence Linda (B) 1888 (D) 1889

Rosina May (B) 30.9.1891 (D) ?

Florence Ethel (B) 1894 (D) 1895

Violet Edith (B) 1897 (D) 1897

In the following years, Linda and Frederick were frequently recorded in Workhouses with Linda even being admitted, discharged and re-admitted on the same day, and Frederick also listed as being in prison. For example, on 6th November 1894 Linda was admitted to Greenwich Workhouse, Woolwich Road. She was 27 and named as Lydia, wife of Frederick, a carman (in prison) of 54 Mill Lane. Three children were with her.

Walter Fredk 10yrs

Rosina May 3yrs (This is the last record I found for Rosina)

Florence 10mths

The reason given for admittance was destitution.

In 1897 the following was reported

[West Kent Argus and Borough of Lewisham News Tuesday 7th September 1897](#)

Linda Bush was charged with wilfully exposing her two children, aged three months and five years respectively, in a manner likely to cause unnecessary suffering.—P.C. 5041 said he found the prisoner and her two children at 4 o'clock in the morning sleeping on a doorstep in Watergate-street, Deptford.—Prisoner smelt of drink, but was not drunk. Inspector Chown, N.S.P.C.C., said prisoner's husband ill-treated her and they lived a wretched life.—Prisoner said her husband had sold up the home and she only had the workhouse before her. It was stated that the eldest child had a bad cough, and the mother was in a dirty condition. Kennedy said it was a wretched story, and committed the prisoner for a month's hard labour.

Other Newspaper reports at this time give many instances of drinking and disruptive behaviour. The couple were charged with neglect on more than one occasion and in 1897, partly due to exposure, Violet died aged 9 months. it seemed Linda had nowhere to go.

A year later Linda was charged at Woolwich Court and admitted to Farmfield Reformatory for Inebriate Women on 30th October 1900 at the age of 34 to serve 3 years. The 29th of October 1903 given as a release date. On admission her physical description is given as height 4ft 10, weight 115lb, with grey eyes, fair complexion, and brown hair. The examining doctor described her as most filthily dirty with inflamed eyes but generally healthy. Prior to arriving at Farmfield, she was living at 21 Rope Yard Rails, Woolwich with her husband and two children. It is mentioned that four children had died, (although I have only been able to find 5 births and 3 deaths), and their loss was the cause of her intemperance. It was also noted that she was literate, reading and writing well and had been educated at a Public Day School.

In her early days at Farmfield she is described as

“One of the worst Women at Farmfield, giving great trouble, and quarrelsome. A weak little women with no knowledge much of truth and honesty.

However over time she is noted as

‘much improved, although needing firm treatment’

She was released three weeks before her time expired and was boarded at a Mrs Reynolds, Norfolk House, Balham. A situation was arranged for her but did not last as she gave great annoyance to her employer and was dismissed.

Shortly after leaving Farmfield the following report shows that Linda did try to summons Frederick for desertion.

[Woolwich Herald Friday 13th November 1903](#)

[Fredk. Bush, of 62, Addey-Street, Deptford, summoned by his wife, Linda Bush, of 29, Regent-Street, for desertion.—Dismissed.](#)

I also found her in 1908, sadly still drinking.

[Greenwich and Deptford Observer Friday 7th August 1908](#)

[WOOLWICH WOMAN FINED. Linda Bush, 38, of 21, Ropeyard Rails Woolwich, was charged with having been drunk and disorderly at Woolwich-road, East Greenwich.—Fined 5s. or seven days.](#)

Despite what sounded like a very rocky marriage, she remained married to Frederick until his death in January 1911. I did not find any information between 1911 and 1920 when she died.

The death of three children must have been a great sadness in her earlier life and we can understand why she found it difficult to maintain a sober life once she had started drinking and when she was often homeless. There seem to be many examples of the male

dominated society shown in the way Frederick was often exonerated in court and Linda not wanting to press charges against him for domestic violence.

One happier instance in the story is that their first born and only son Frederick Walter joined up at the age of 15 and became a musician in the Yorkshire regiment, staying in Yorkshire where he married, brought up a family and lived for the rest of his life , passing away in 1951.

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Sources

Farmfield Reformatory for Inebriate Women, Horley, Surrey RG13 629 folios 151-152

Ancestry, London, England, Poor Law Hospital. Admissions and Discharges 1842-1918

Ancestry School Admissions and Discharges 1840-1919

Ancestry Census Returns

British Newspaper Archive

GRO BMD