

# *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.*

## **Mary Priscilla Douglas's Story**

Mary was born on 26 March 1890 to parents Frederick William Douglas and his wife, Mary Jane Warren at 4 Western Road, Walthamstow, Essex. She was baptised June 1890. Her parents had married on 11 January 1883 in Wareside, Hertford and she was their third child and first daughter.

In the 1891 Census, her father, Frederick is listed as a carpenter and the Old Kent Road admission book confirms that her parents were not related to each other. In the Census, Mary had 2 brothers, Rowland (b.1886) and Edward (b. 1888) and Rowland was listed as deaf and dumb, but Mary has nothing recorded against her name, although she was apparently deaf from birth.

In the Walthamstow Express on January 30, 1897, there was a petition to send 2 deaf and dumb children to school, however, Mary was already at school at this time, as she attended a local Board School.

1901 census shows Mary living in the Royal Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Poor in Margate, Kent. She is shown as 11 years old and from Walthamstow, Essex. The record shows she was deaf from birth, and it also shows the family have 2 other children who are deaf and dumb. Mary started at the Old Kent Road school on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1897, before being transferred to the Margate Asylum on 25 August 1898.

On admission, Mary is recorded as having had some childhood illnesses, but was also recorded as having being pigeon breasted, having signs of Rickets and defective vision. She was described as a 'disappointing girl' on her end of year report.

In June 1901 Mary took part in a Japanese dance recital at an awards ceremony, the children were dressed in nursery rhyme costumes, Mary was dressed as one of the Babes in the Woods. She was also mentioned in the previous June 1900 yearbook as one who was making good progress in gymnastics.

Mary left the school in December 1905 and was to work as a 'domestic girl' but there is no indication of whether this was a live-in position or one where she would live at home and go to work daily.

On the 1911 Census, Mary is living back with her parents Frederick and Mary, Frederick is listed as an Estate Carpenter at Brent Pelham, Buntingham,

Hertfordshire. In the household, besides her parents are Rowland (b. 1894) listed as being deaf and dumb, Edmund (b. 1888), Frederick (b. 1893) and her sisters, Ellen (b. 1894), listed as deaf and dumb and Ruth (b. 1897)

The 1921 census shows Mary Priscilla living with her uncle, Henry Bovington Phillips at 7 Wards Roads East, Seven Kings Road, Ilford. She is working as a dairy maid for Edward Barclay (Banker) at Brent Pelham Hall.

Mary Priscilla married John Dean in 1935 in Bishops Stortford, Hertfordshire. However, John died in 1941, aged 60 being 10 years older than Mary but in the 1939 Register, Mary is living with her father Frederick and sister Ellen at The Village, Braughing Road, Hertfordshire.

Mary passed away in 1978 aged 86 years old

### **Rowland Douglas**

Rowland was the older brother of Mary and Ellen, who was also born deaf and dumb. He was born on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1886 and may have also attended a local Board school, prior to his admission to the Old Kent Road in September 1894. He was transferred to the Margate Asylum in January 1896 and was still at the school, when Mary was admitted in 1898.

Rowland was awarded a Good Conduct prize in 1896 and again in December 1901 he was voted to win the Good Fellowship prize by his fellow pupils. He was listed among the leavers that same year, who all received a bible, and a prayer book presented by the committee. He was further rewarded for being a monitor by having an extra gift.

In the 1911 Census, Rowland is living back at home and working as an Estate Painter and in the 1921 census shows Rowland still living at home and working as a painter. In 1924, Rowland married Fanny Lawrence and on the 1939 Register Rowland is still working as a painter. Rowland passed away at Black Hall Cottages, Brent Pelham in 1957, the probate shows the beneficiary was his wife, Fanny Lawrence.

### **Ellen Susan Douglas**

Ellen was born on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1894 and was again possibly at a Board School prior to being admitted to Old Kent Road in January 1900. She was transferred to the Margate Asylum in December 1901, possibly just as her brother, Rowland was leaving the school. Ellen was again born deaf and her report in 1902 described her as 'seems fairly intelligent' and 'getting on nicely'.

Ellen left Margate in July 1910 and like her sister was described as a domestic girl, but again this may have been a live out placement. In the 1911 Census, Ellen is back at home, living in Brent Pelham, as a domestic help possibly working on the estate of Pelham Hall.

In the 1939 Register, Ellen is still living at home although her mother has now died, and she is looking after her father. When she died in 1946, she was still living in Brent Pelham and her estate was left to her father Frederick.

#### *Sources:*

Birth Registration - General Register Office. *England and Wales Civil Registration Indexes*.  
London, England: General Register Office

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Folio: 84; Page: 28; GSU roll: 6096465

1911 census- *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1911. Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives of the UK (TNA) Series RG14, 1911.*

*British Newspaper Archives-*

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0004558/18970130/112/0007>

*Death registration- General Register Office; United Kingdom; Volume: 10; Page: 0023*