

# *This is A Few Forgotten Women Story*



*This story was written in August 2023 as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who enrolled in the first two cohorts [1908 & 1909] of Trainee Teachers at the Cheshire Country Training College, Crewe [CCTCC]*

## **Florence Booth's Story**

Florence Booth was born on 21 March 1891 at 25 John Street, Monks Coppenhall – the name for an area which is now a part of Crewe. Her birth was registered in the Nantwich district and her birth registration shows that her mother's, maiden name was Evans. Less than two weeks later, it was time for the 1891 census and from this record we learn that her parents were Thomas who was a cabinet maker and a native of Crewe and that her mother, Jane, was born in Leominster, Herefordshire. Florence was their only child at this point. Their address remained 25 John Street. Thomas and Jane had married on 5 April 1890 in the Parish Church in Middlewich, a town about 8 miles north of Crewe. At the time of their marriage Thomas was living in Cemetery Road, Middlewich while

Jane's address was in Ealing, Middlesex. On 16 September 1894, Florence's brother George Lancelot was born.

Florence enrolled at Edleston Road National School on 1 February 1898 when she was almost 7. The admissions register states that her previous school was St Paul's. Maybe the reason for the move was that they moved house, to 179 Walthall Street in 1898. This was still the family's address on the 1901 census.

By the time Florence enrolled at Crewe Secondary School on 6 September 1904, the family had moved again, a very short distance to 62 Gainsborough Road. The *Manchester Evening News* of 6 July 1904 included a list of pupils, including Florence, who had been successful in gaining a scholarship tenable at Crewe Secondary School.

Florence left secondary school on 16 July 1908, having successfully passed the examination, the Preliminary Certificate, to be eligible to enter a training college. Her name appears in the *Crewe Chronicle* dated 12 September 1908 along with all the other successful candidates.

The Cheshire County Training College at Crewe was a new venture in education and part of the move away from the old pupil teacher system whereby young people intending to be teachers would be trained not only in their academic studies but also in how to teach before they undertook work in schools. While the necessary premises were being built, rooms were leased in the Mechanics' Institute in Crewe for the start of the teacher training course in September 1908.

Florence duly enrolled for her teacher training on 15 September 1908. She had met the first condition of admission because she had been in regular attendance at a recognised secondary school for three years previously. She could be admitted as a two-year student because she was over 17 years of age on the 1 August 1908. On beginning her studies, Florence would have signed an agreement that, on leaving the college, she would work in Elementary (or Secondary) schools in receipt of government grants for five years. She may have received special consideration in her application because she was from Cheshire, indeed she was extremely local to the college and presumably continued to live with her parents and travel to college on a daily basis.

Florence attended college from September to July with three weeks' vacation at Christmas and at Easter as well as short mid-term breaks. The working day was 9:00am until 4:00pm and longer on school practice days. About a quarter of the time during the course was spent on school practice and observation. During their first year, students carried out observations on school buildings and equipment and on the physical and mental development of schoolchildren by visiting a Demonstration School in Crewe. In their second year, all women studied the aims and methods of teaching infants and if, like Florence, they wished to specialise in the teaching of Infants, they were assisted to do so. Also, during the second year, the main teaching practice in schools in and around Crewe took place. Florence may have completed her teaching practice at Bedford Street School as this was where she obtained her first teaching post. Students would also study the Theory of Teaching to include discipline and organisation, child study with practical exercises, history of public education, general methods and methods of teaching individual subjects. There was also a varied list of subjects the students were expected to learn: handwork, physical

education, music, hygiene, drawing, English, history, geography, fieldwork, rural science and scripture.

Florence successfully completed her training and her final exam at the Training College in 1910. On 8 July 1910, the *Crewe Guardian* reported that "Miss Florence Booth of the Cheshire County Training College at Crewe has been appointed a certificated assistant teacher." Florence started her teaching career at Bedford Street School, in the Infants Department. The school was on the junction of Bedford Street and Atholl Avenue, just a short walk from Florence's family home. The school was the last school to be built in Crewe by the LNWR Company and it was opened in 1903. It was considerably enlarged by Crewe Borough Education committee in 1911. The Infants' department, where Florence worked, was on the ground floor with the junior and senior girls on the first floor and the boys in an adjacent building. On the 1911 census, Florence was living with her parents, her brother and a boarder at 62 Gainsborough Road. Thomas's occupation was coach maker for a railway company at this time. Florence's occupation was of course school teacher and her brother was a house painter.

In June 1911 the *Crewe Chronicle* gave an account of the celebrations surrounding the Coronation of King George V and Queen Mary. Following a large church service, all the children of the town were given tea at their respective schools where their teachers looked after them and presented the children with commemorative medals. The teachers worked hard to make the occasion memorable and happy for the children. Florence Booth is listed among the teachers of Bedford Street Boys, Girls and Infant School. Nine hundred and fifty-

eight children from the school took part. The tea was followed with sports activities and then there was a bonfire in the evening.

Sometime before 1918, Florence's parents and her brother moved to Belper in Derbyshire. The reasons for this move are not clear but perhaps it was connected to the war or perhaps Thomas had to move because of his work. Belper is near to Derby. Florence's mother, Jane, died in Belper during the second quarter of 1918, at the age of 61.

Florence stayed behind in Crewe to continue her work at Bedford Street and the 1921 census finds her a boarder at 44 Alton Street. She shared the house with another teacher at the same school. On a separate census form but with the same address were Mrs Jones and her young son, Raymond.

Florence's father and brother were living at 43 Long Row, Belper at this time. Thomas was retired (although he was not yet sixty) and George was still a painter and paper hanger. Co-incidentally Florence's future husband, John Cumberland, also lived in Belper and was also a house painter, though out of work at the time of the census. The addresses of the two families were about a ten-minute walk apart so maybe Florence met John when she was visiting her family but that is speculation.

The records show that Florence Booth married John William Cumberland in Chesterfield in north-east Derbyshire during the third quarter of 1926. There is nothing to explain why they moved there but they set up home at 3a Tapton View Road in Chesterfield and gave their home the name "Wistaston" after an area of Florence's home town near to where she had spent all of her early life.

As was customary at the time, it is probable that Florence had to stop teaching once she was married. The couple had one son, also called John, who was born in 1927. They all appear, along with a lodger, on the 1939 register, living at the same address. Florence's father was living in Derby at this time, with her brother George and his wife. Her father died there in 1940.

The next record relevant to Florence's story is that of her husband's death in 1963 and then her own in 1975, both in Chesterfield.

### ***Narrative by Jennifer Grice***

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