

This is a Story from 'A Few Forgotten Women'



This story was written, in January 2023, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of girls from Leeds, Girls' Industrial School, Yorkshire.

Isabella's Story

Isabella Hutton was admitted to the Industrial School in Leeds on 16 December 1862, at the age of eleven, having been sentenced at Leeds to spend four years there. There is some confusion as the date 16 December 1866 is also mentioned but this is possibly an error as Isabella appears in sequence with others who were admitted in 1862.

Isabella was described as being well built, with brown hair, blue eyes and a light complexion. The reformatory record also states that she was 'of restless habits'. She was unable to read and write and had not been employed. Her father, John, was a joiner and her step-mother was named as Frances. The family home was at 8 Wigglesworth Street, the next word begins with B but is illegible. Her mother was described as 'a bad character'; she had deserted the

family in Liverpool. Allegedly, Isabella had two brothers in gaol. Isabella's offence was sleeping out and keeping the company of thieves.

The record reveals that Isabella stole money and various articles from her father's house, she refused to work and when she did, she ran off with the wages. It is noted that she was discharged to the Reformatory School in Doncaster but it is not clear if or when this took place; her page in the ledger is crossed through. On discharge, her character was described as 'bad' she was still illiterate and her general knowledge was not good. This may be when she was discharged to Doncaster, rather than her final discharge. It might be that she was sent to Doncaster during the typhus epidemic in the home in 1866; girls were certainly sent to Harrogate at this time

Her conduct during detention was described as follows and the account gives an impression of life in the home for girls: 'In the school her conduct was dishonest, impure and immoral. Stole blankets and other articles and deserted two or three times, at the time we had most inadequate provision for girls. Indeed we had not a fair chance to deal with girls at all. Had them in a cottage house opposite the school in Edgar Street to sleep at nights. Gave us much trouble with the boys. Could not keep them separate, would be together, which was a great grief to us.'

The post-discharge reports paint a happier picture. 'I am told she is married and doing well' and in April 1871, 'resides on the Bank conduct good', followed by, in 1873, 'married conduct good'.

What can be discovered of Isabella's life before and after her time in the reformatory? She was born in Hull, Yorkshire in 1851, the fourth child of John and Jane Hutton née Rennard or Reynard.

In the 1851 census, Isabella's pregnant mother, Jane, was living in Trippett Street, Hull with her two sons, Isaac and John. There was no sign of Isabella's father, John, who was probably away at sea as a mariner at the time. It appears that Isabella's sister, Hannah Kezia, who was born in 1843, was brought up by her maternal grandparents in Bridlington, where her grandfather had a greengrocer's shop. In 1854, it seems that Jane gave birth to twin girls Ann and Jane, who died as babies; so three-year-old Isabella would have lost her baby sisters.

On 5 February 1857, six-year-old Isabella was admitted to Liverpool Workhouse; her place of settlement was unknown. Perhaps the family were there because James' work as a mariner took them there. She was discharged on 5 May. No other Huttons were admitted with her. This is presumably the desertion referred to in the reformatory ledger.

In 1861 however John and Jane are together, with Isabella and her brothers, living at Malt Shovel Lane in Leeds. John was a lathe minder and Isaac and John, aged fourteen and thirteen, were a blacksmith and an iron moulder, respectively. No firm evidence of any offences for the brothers has been found. A teenaged John Hutton does have minor brushes with the law but it is not an uncommon name and may not be the same John and there is no suggestion that he was imprisoned.

Little is known about Isabella's parents after 1861. There are no further sightings of her mother. In 1881, her widowed father was living with his mother in Sculcoates; he died the following year. There is no trace of the 'step-mother' Frances, who may just have been whoever John was living with at the time.

In November 1862, Isabella appeared at Leeds Quarter Sessions Court, not as the accused but as a witness. Eliza Mullins and Sarah Murray were accused of taking two shawls from children, one of whom was Isabella. The shawl, perhaps one Isabella was wearing, was said to be the property of her father and worth ten shillings. It was just a month later that Isabella was sent to the reformatory. Was there more to this than meets the eye? Is this the 'keeping the company of thieves' that is referred to in Isabella's ledger entry?

Isabella's life did improve in some respects after she left the reformatory. On 26 April 1871, she married Charles Frost Wilson at Sculcoates; both gave their address as New George Street. It seems that Isabella had learned to write, as she signed her name. John and Maria Hutton were witnesses, suggesting that Isabella was in contact with her family; John and Maria were almost certainly Isabella's brother and his wife. Her father's occupation was given as mariner.

The early years of marriage were marred by the infant deaths of four of the Wilsons six eldest children, as the couple moved round various addresses in Sculcoates, Hull, where Charles worked as an oilman. Their first child, Charles, was born and died in 1871. He was followed by Hannah Kezia in 1872 and Dorothy Jane in 1874 who survived. Watson Wilson was born in Hull district, as opposed to Sculcoates, in 1876 and died there the following year. He seems to

fit the family and the different registration district might represent a short-distance move. Another Charles followed in 1878, only to die the next year. Mary Ann also died at a few weeks old in 1880, by which time the family were living in Gibson Street, Sculcoates.

Charles, Isabella and their two surviving daughter can be found at 2 Sheldon's Square, Gibson Street, Sculcoates in the 1881 census; Charles was an oil man. Three more children were born to Isabella, all of whom reached adulthood: George in 1881, John Hutton in 1883 and Minnie in 1886. By 1891, Isabella was living at 52 Canning Street, Hull, with her husband Charles, an oilpressman and the four younger children, Dorothy, George, John and Minnie.

Isabella died in 1894. Online trees have her date and place of death as 15 April 1894 14 Franks Terrace, Sutton Park, Yorkshire, but with no supporting evidence.

Interestingly, in 1901, Millie was in the Park Avenue Industrial School and it seemed as though history might repeat itself. Millie however married in 1908 and there is no suggestion that her life was in any way unfortunate after that.

Janet Few January 2023

Sources

Peter Higginbotham's Children's Homes website www.childrenshomes.org.uk

West Yorkshire Reformatory School Records 1856-1922, originals at West Yorkshire Archives Service WRT/1/72-77, 81-84 accessible on www.ancestry.co.uk

General Registrar's Indexes of Birth, Marriage and Death

1861 census for Malt Shovel Yard, Leeds RG9 3396 folio 77

1881 census for 2 Sheldon's Square, Gibson Street, Sculcoates, Hull RG11 2764 folio 121

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Marriage register for St. Mary's, Sculcoates, Yorkshire

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