

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in April 2025, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who can be found as prisoners or staff in Dorchester Prison in the census returns, or who appear in the prison's admission and discharge registers.

Elizabeth Clode's Story

Elizabeth Clode was photographed when she was received into the Dorchester Prison on 24 November 1890¹. She had appeared at the Quarter Sessions held in Poole Guildhall on 10 October 1890 charged with breaking and entering a shop at Parkstone in Poole on 31 January 1890. Elizabeth stole a case containing twelve gold rings, another tray of approximately 15 rings plus additional unspecified rings with a total value of £15^{2&3}. It was noted that Elizabeth also used the aliases of Elizabeth Cold and Elizabeth Smith. Elizabeth was sentenced to 6 months hard labour in Dorchester Prison and on release was to be under police supervision for 2 years³. Details of a previous conviction in the name of Elizabeth Smith were given - Elizabeth had been

sentenced to 1 month of hard labour at the Southampton Quarter Sessions for stealing a jacket and bodice on 21 December 1889.

Elizabeth appears in the 1891 census at Dorchester Prison, she was discharged on 9 April 1891⁴. The register recorded that she was born in Tuleton, Devon in 1843. Elizabeth was described as being 5' 2 ¾" tall, with a sallow complexion, grey hair and grey eyes, an oval face and a cut on her right wrist. She was single and her occupation was lace maker. A later entry in 1894 stated she was born in Talaton, Devon in 1843⁵.

From the Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette of 29 July 1892⁶, Elizabeth Smith, a needlewoman aged 48, was indicted for breaking and entering the dwelling of a jeweller in Exmouth at 3.30am on the morning of 16 June 1892. The items stolen were listed – 28 gold rings, 8 pairs of gold earrings, 3 silver watches, 4 gold brooches, 9 gold bangles and one timepiece. Elizabeth Smith was arrested 1 mile from Exmouth some of the stolen jewellery in her possession. Elizabeth was identified by Gloucester police as Elizabeth Whitechurch who was convicted and sentenced to 7 years penal servitude at the Gloucester Assizes on 23 November 1891 for burglary. It was also noted that Elizabeth had been imprisoned for stealing in 1889 and burglary in 1890. Details of both thefts were given in the Gloucestershire Prison records⁷.

Elizabeth Smith alias Clode alias Whitchurch was released on 27 July 1894 as a working female convict with destination of Bristol⁸. She had been convicted on 22 July 1892. It was noted that she had 3 previous convictions as Elizabeth Clode, was deaf and missing several teeth. Details of the 1890 conviction were given.

Elizabeth was incarcerated again on 10 November 1894, this time in Aylesbury Prison for housebreaking⁵. She was accused of stealing 15 watches, 24 locket and charms, 12 scarf pins, 1 Albert chain, 17 brooches and other goods which were the property of Thomas Bryan of Honiton. Elizabeth was convicted at the Exeter Assizes in Honiton, Devon for a term of 7 years penal servitude plus the remanet of a former sentence. Her name was recorded as Elizabeth Smith alias Elizabeth Clode alias Elizabeth Witchurch. Details of her four previous convictions in 1889, 1890, 1891 and 1892 were given. Despite a release date of 3 November 1902 being recorded, Elizabeth was released on 7 April 1900. At the time she was described as being 5' 3" tall with a swarthy complexion, grey hair and grey eyes, a mole in the corner of her right eye, a pockmarked chest and it was noted that she had lost one breast. Elizabeth intended to resided at 84 Holloway in Bath and was to be employed as a needlewoman.

According to the Police Gazette of 23 November 1900, a warrant was issued for Elizabeth Smith/Clode/Whitehead after she failed to report having been released under licence on 7 April 1900⁹. The above description was given but it was also noted that Elizabeth was very deaf.

It is has been difficult to find confirmed entries for Elizabeth on any other census, her birth or death. She is probably the Elizabeth Smith, daughter of James and Dinah, living in Talaton in 1851 but we can't be certain.

Sources

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