

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

Alma Sophie Pooley and Hilda Mary Pooley's Story

This is the story of two sisters, Hilda and Alma, who were both born deaf. This story traces their lives from their early years in Cambridgeshire, then their time at The Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Children of the Poor (later The Royal School for Deaf Children of the Poor, Margate) and finally their later lives.

Hilda Mary Pooley was born 21 Sept 1887 according to the records of the Old Kent Road Asylum when she was accepted into the school¹. Her birth was registered with the GRO in December 1887 under the registration district of Chesterton, Cambridgeshire². At the time of her birth, her family lived in Fulbourn, as recorded in many School and medical documents³. Two years later her sister, Alma Sophia Pooley, was born on 17th June 1889⁴, with the family still living in Fullbourn. Alma's birth was registered in September 1889 also in Chesterton Registration District⁵

According to school records Hilda was baptized 27th Nov 1887⁶, however no church was mentioned, I have been unable to find a baptism on the online genealogy sites Ancestry and The Genealogist. Likewise, school records stated that Alma was baptised 29th September 1889 also in Fulbourn⁷.

The family were still living in Fulbourn at the time of the 1891 census⁸ together with an older sibling and other relatives; the table below summarises the family living at Church Street;

Name	Relationship	Condition	Age	Occupation	Where Born
Cowell John Pooley	head	Marr	31	Coal mechanic	Norfolk; Hillsborough
Alice Pooley	wife	Marr	38		Cambs; Fulbourn
Florence Pooley	dau		4	scholar	Cambs; Fulbourn
Hilda Pooley	dau		3		Cambs; Fulbourn
Alma Pooley	dau		1		Cambs; Fulbourn
Laura Parker	Step dau		13	Mother's assistant	Cambs; Fulbourn
Agnes C Pooley	sister	Single	35	Living on own means	Norfolk; Hillsborough

It was interesting to note that although later school records state that both Hilda and Alma had been born deaf, there was no indication of this in the final column where enumerators were supposed to indicate if a person was deaf and dumb, blind or Lunatic, Imbecile or Idiot.

Hilda was initially accepted into a school at Old Kent Road asylum on 8th July 1895 and was transferred to Margate Asylum 21st January 1897. Her entry record states that her mother was a needlewoman and for her father it stated occupation uncertain. Hilda was born deaf; her parents were noted as being unrelated to each other and she was described as having a rather nasal voice and being of moderate intellect⁹. Documentation showed that she had not succumbed to common childhood ailments such as Whooping cough, measles, smallpox and scarlet fever and her health upon admission was described as healthy.

Alma was accepted into the same school at Old Kent Road on 11th February 1897 and was also transferred to Margate Asylum, on 25th August 1898. Her entry record also states that her mother was a needlewoman, and that Alma was also born deaf, her parents were again noted as being unrelated to each other. Alma was described as having a nasal voice and being of moderate intellect¹⁰. Documentation showed that she also had not succumbed to the common childhood ailments, although she was described as having a Mitrial murmur (heart murmur) which was described as "possibly harmless". Her school records note a lot of absence due to ill health.

In the 1901 census both girls can be found recorded as pupils at Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Children, Margate¹¹; both girls were described as scholars aged 13 and 11 years.

Hilda left school on 19th December 1903, her leaving document states that the family had by this time moved to Hadleigh in Essex¹² residing at 2 St John's Cottages. The documentation summarised Hilda's achievements. She was 11th in her class and during her 8 years at the school had been absent 574 times. Her conduct was described as good, her top mark was in Needlework, where she achieved 90%. Her articulation was described as "fairly intelligible" and she understood some arithmetic, geography and history. She could also lip read and had some proficiency in writing. However, her teacher had summarized her Intellectual capability as "Poor". It also stated that Hilda had been confirmed into the church of England on 20th November 1903 at St Peters parish church. In 1900, aged 13, Hilda was measured and found to weigh 5 stone 10 pounds and was 4 foot 10 inches tall, therefore three years later when she left, she may have grown further.

A similar document exists for Alma¹³, she left the Margate school in June 1905. By this time the family had moved to Fairlight Villa, Hadleigh and her father was described as a gardener. Alma's Intellectual capability was described as "good" with a further comment she has "much improved". Alma was 3rd in her class, with an "excellent" conduct. She gained over 90% in all subjects except arithmetic, where she was noted as being capable of simple fractions but nevertheless scored 88%. In religious knowledge she gained 100% and a note was made that she had good general knowledge, geographic and historical knowledge. Alma was also confirmed in a local church and just before she left school aged 16, she was recorded as weighing 7 stone 8 and was 5 foot 1 inch tall.

By the time of the 1911 census both girls were back at home with the family at Fairlight Villa, Hadleigh Essex¹⁴. Hilda aged 23 and Alma, 21, were both listed as dressmakers. Their father, Cowell, was listed as an employer, working from home as a Contractor and Carman, whilst their mother was no longer listed as a needlewoman. The family had a lodger, 23 year old Alfred Foreman, a milkman from London. Both girls on this census were recorded as deaf since infancy.

I looked to see where their parents were living in 1901 to see if they had already moved from Cambridgeshire to Essex. Instead of getting census results, the search results produced records indicating that Cowell John Pooley had been sent to prison in 1896 for 12 months for fraud at the Cambridge Borough Sessions¹⁵. Upon his release, the documentation stated that he was to return to Fullburn. The police document provides a physical description of Cowell; he was described as 5' 2", his right toes were contacted, causing him to be lame. This document also stated that he was a habitual fraudster having already had 3 previous convictions. He had a further conviction in 1898, for three years, again, for fraud. He was sentenced and sent to Parkhurst prison at the Cambridge Assises on 13th January 1898 and was due to be released on 12th Jan 1901¹⁶. It therefore appears that Cowell would have been in and out of prison during Hilda and Alma's early years.

Indeed, his absence may have been a contributory factor to them being admitted into the School in Old Kent Road for the children of the poor and he would have been away for much of the time that Hilda and Alma were attending school at firstly Old Kent Road and then Margate.

I have been unable to find Cowell in the 1901 census. Alice was found to be still living in Fulbourn with her widowed brother, Stephen Parker¹⁷. Florence was not mentioned, but a search showed her listed as a domestic servant, living in Maidstone, Kent with Charles Parker and his wife Annie¹⁸. Charles could well be Florence's uncle due to the same surname of Parker.

Hilda married Thomas Arthur Childs on 9th April 1917 in All Hallows Church, Bromley by Bow, Tower Hamlets¹⁹. She was 27, Thomas was 30, his occupation a harness maker. Hilda's sister Florence was a witness, their father Cowell was still living and his occupation recorded as a contractor. The officiating minister was a chaplain for the Royal Association in aid of the deaf and dumb.

I don't have access to the 1921 census so could not find where Hilda and Thomas were living but they were in Dagenham, Essex in 1939²⁰ along with their son Kenneth born in 1921, he was listed as a Cabinet Worker. A search of the GRO records held on ancestry suggest they had another son Charles born 1918²¹.

Alma married Fred R Hersee, in Rochford, Essex in July 1938²² and according to the 1939 Register, they were living at 75 Ennismore Gardens, Southend on Sea²³. Fred was described as an Old Age Pensioner aged 72, born in 1867 and Alma was listed as carrying out Unpaid domestic duties. Fred died only 3 years later, aged 74, his death was registered with the GRO in January 1942²⁴. This was a difficult period for Alma as it appears likely that her sister Hilda had died the previous September. In 1941 at Southend, there is a GRO death entry for Hilda M Childs aged 54. This could be Hilda Mary as the age at death corresponds to Hilda's birthdate of 1887²⁵. It looks likely either Hilda was nursed by her sister, or that Hilda and Thomas moved to Southend. I have been unable to confirm a death for Thomas. Alma outlived her sister by 40 years, dying at the age of 92 in 1981²⁶ she was still living in Southend.

References;

- 1) School register giving details of Hilda's birth date; Ch192/R1/1/1 Entry 5380 Admission Records Application for Admission 4325-7615 (1880-1925).
- 2) GRO record of Hilda's birth; original data; GRO; Dec 1887; registration district Chesterton; vol 3b pg 451; www.ancestry.co.uk ; accessed 8th October 2024
- 3) Confirmation of Hilda's birthplace place being Fulbourn; school and medical records; Ch192/R1/1/1 Entry 5326 Admission Records Application for Admission 4325-7615 (1880-1925)
- 4) School register giving details of Alma's birth date; Ch192/R2/1/5 Entry 5375 Register of children: Old Kent Road [5256-5670] (with transfers to Margate)

- 5) GRO record of Alma's birth; original data; GRO; Sept 1889; registration district Chesterton; vol 3b pg 462 ; www.ancestry.co.uk ; accessed 10th October 2024
- 6) School record confirming Hilda's baptism; Ch192/R1/1/1 Entry 5380 Admission Records Application for Admission 4325-7615 (1880-1925).
- 7) School record confirming Alma's baptism; Ch192/R2/1/5 Entry 5375 Register of children: Old Kent Road [5256-5670] (with transfers to Margate)
- 8) 1891 census entry for the family; original data; The National Archives; *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1891*; Class: RG12; Piece: 1281; Folio: 42; Page:20; www.ancestry.co.uk accessed 19th October 2024
- 9) Hilda's entry record for the Old Kent Road Asylum in 1895; Ch192/R2/1/6 Entry 70 Register of Children Old Kent Road [1-369] with transfers to Margate in 1897
- 10) Alma's entry record for the Old Kent Road Asylum in 1897; Ch192/R2/1/6 Entry 145 Register of Children Old Kent Road [1-369] with transfers to Margate in 1898
- 11) 1891 Margate school census entry for Hilda and Alma; original data; The National Archives; *Census returns of England and Wales, 1901*; Class RG13 Piece:824; Folios 30-35 Page:58 to 69; www.ancestry.co.uk accessed 19th October 2024
- 12) Hilda's leaving document; Ch192/R8/1/3 Entry 83 Leavers Records: Registers of Children Leaving School (1902-1912)
- 13) Alma's leaving document; Ch192/R8/1/3 Entry 135 Leavers Records: Registers of Children Leaving School (1902-1912)
- 14) 1911 census entry for the family no living at Hadleigh Essex; original data; The National Archives; *Census returns of England and Wales, 1911*; Class RG14; Hadleigh, Essex; Schedule 75; www.ancestry.co.uk accessed 19th October 2024
- 15) Record of Cowell John Pooley being sent to prison for 12 months in 1896; original data; Metropolitan Police: Habitual Criminals Register 1900 piece no 8 pg no 635; accessed via www.thegenealogist.co.uk accessed 10th October 2024
- 16) Record of Cowell John Pooley being sent to prison for 3 years in 1898; original data; MEPO 6 Metropolitan Police: Habitual Criminals Register 1900 piece no 12a pg 117; accessed via www.thegenealogist.co.uk accessed 10th October 2024
- 17) Alice Pooley 1901 census entry; original data; The National Archives; RG13; Piece: 1526; Folio: 68; Page: 25; www.ancestry.co.uk accessed 14th October 2024
- 18) Florence Pooley 1901 census entry; original data; The National Archives; RG13; Piece: 768; Folio: 113; Page: 35; www.ancestry.co.uk accessed 14th October 2024
- 19) Hilda's marriage to Thomas Childs; original data; London Metropolitan Archives; London, England, UK; London Church of England Parish Registers; Reference Number: P88/ALH2/053; www.ancestry.co.uk accessed 14th October 2024
- 20) 1939 Register showing Hilda and Thomas Childs living in Dagenham; original data; The National Archives; Kew, London, England; 1939 Register; Borough or District; Dagenham; Piece 1082; Schedule 185/1-3; www.thegenealogist.co.uk accessed 18th October 2024
- 21) GRO record of Hilda's eldest son Charles' birth; original data; GRO; Mar 1918; Registration District; Poplar; vol 1c pg 583 ; www.ancestry.co.uk ; accessed 10th October 2024
- 22) GRO Marriage record for Alma Pooley and Fred Hersee July 1938; original data; GRO; Sept 1938; Registration District; Rochford; vol 4a pg 2635 ; www.ancestry.co.uk ; accessed 18th October 2024
- 23) 1939 Register showing Alma and Fred Hersee living in Southend on Sea; original data; The National Archives; Kew, London, England; 1939 Register; Borough or District; Southend on Sea; Piece 1462; Schedule 155/1-2; www.thegenealogist.co.uk accessed 18th October 2024
- 24) GRO death entry for Fred R Hersee in; original data; GRO; Mar 1942; Registration District; Rochford; vol 41 pg 1172; www.ancestry.co.uk accessed 18th October 2024

- 25) GRO death entry for Hilda M Childs in Southend in 1941; original data; GRO; Sept 1941; Registration District; Southend; vol 4a pg 0972; www.thegenealogist.co.uk accessed 18th October 2024
- 26) GRO death entry for Alma S Hersee in Southend in 1981; original data; GRO; Dec 1981; Registration District; Southend; vol 9 pg 2900; www.thegenealogist.co.uk accessed 18th October 2024