

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



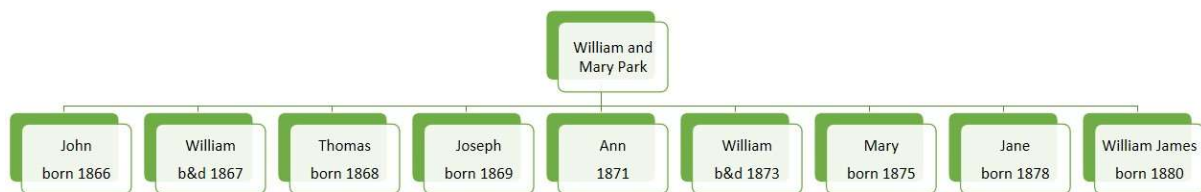
This story was written, in April 2024, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women staff and female patients associated with the Fleming Memorial Children's Hospital, Jesmond, Northumberland.

Jane Park's Story

In 1901 Jane Park was a nurse at the Fleming Memorial Hospital, though later she crossed the world to marry. She started life in the north of England and ended in the south of the country. Perhaps she inherited the travel bug from her father, a master mariner. Jane was the eighth of William and Mary Park's 9 children. She was born on 14 May 1878 in Westoe, an area in South Shields close to the docks on the banks of the River Tyne and was baptised in St Paul's Presbyterian Church, near to their home¹. Her father William was a local man, born in 1838 to John Park, a brewer and his wife Ann². When the 1851 census was taken, he was living with his widowed father and working as an errand boy³, then in 1855 he joined the Merchant Navy as an apprentice, signing on for 4 years⁴. He was certified as a Mate in 1862, 2 years later he got his

Master's certificate⁵ and married a Scottish lass called Mary Wallace the following year⁶.

In 1871, William was at sea, while Mary and their children lived in Jarrow⁷ but in 1881 William was back at home with his wife and children (see below).



John was 15 and working as an errand boy, while most of the others were at school (Jane and William were too young)⁸.

By 1891 William was back at sea, as were sons John and Thomas, who got his First Mate's certificate in 1890⁹. Joseph was a seaman, though he was home with his mother, sisters Ann, Mary and Jane - who was at school - and young brother William¹⁰. Later that year, Jane's eldest brother John, a marine engineer, got married to Elizabeth Stobie Morrison in the Presbyterian Church where he had been baptised¹¹.

Tragedy touched the family's life in 1898 when Jane's father William died¹², just before the 17th birthday of his youngest son, who had been named after him. Jane and Mary must have been good scholars, because by 1901 Jane was a nurse and her sister was a trained elementary school teacher. The Fleming Memorial Hospital for sick children where Jane worked was in Jesmond, on the other side of the Tyne from her home. She must have lived there as that's where she was when the census was taken¹³. At 22, she was probably fully

trained to take care of her young charges. Though nurses weren't formally registered at that time, they did have training and the reputation of the professional had increased since 1860, when the Nightingale Training School opened at St Thomas's Hospital in London¹⁴.

Jane's family were at home or at sea in 1901. Her mother lived with Jane's sisters, Ann and Mary¹⁵, while her brother Joseph lived close by¹⁶. Though he was described as an able-bodied seaman there's a note on the census explaining that Joseph had lost 2 fingers of his right hand in an accident. Her other brothers: John, a marine engineer, Thomas, a master mariner, and William, then a first mate, were away from their homes the night the census was taken. John and Thomas were both married by then and their wives and John's young son remained at home.

Jane's mother, Mary Park, died in 1906¹⁷. The following year her youngest brother William, by then a master mariner, married Elizabeth Annie Grimes¹⁸ and their only child, John Grimes Park, was born on 30 December¹⁹.

I cannot trace Jane on the 1911 census. We can only speculate why. Did she choose not to complete a census return, like many women that year who were protesting for suffrage? Was she away from the country? She was not working on census night at the Fleming Hospital, so perhaps she had left there, though there's evidence she continued nursing. Jane's elder sister Ann was also absent from the census, though their sister Mary completed her return showing she was single and a headmistress working for Cambridge Borough Council²⁰. Their brothers, John, Thomas, Joseph and William were at sea. All except Joseph were married by then and left their families at home.

Jane next shows up in records as a passenger in a list of people departing from London on 7 March 1914²¹. The Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Co (P&O SN Co) ship was bound for Kobe, though the list shows 1st class passenger Miss J Park had contracted to land at Penang. There is no doubt it is Jane, because The Overland China Mail published on 25 April 1914²² says Jane had travelled on the “Sunda” to marry Arthur J Darby, a Government Surveyor in “a pretty wedding ... solemnised at the Presbyterian Church, Penang”. The report goes on to say Jane “was formerly one of the nursing sisters of the Government Civil and Victoria Hospitals”, which suggests Jane had continued nursing after she left the Fleming Hospital, perhaps even travelling abroad to do so.

Jane’s husband Arthur John Darby was born in Wolverhampton, Staffordshire and was baptised there on 24 February 1878²³. He was one of 11 children, 8 of whom survived to adulthood. His parents were John, a solicitor born in Wolverhampton, and Ann Eliza, nee Tandy, from Redditch, Worcestershire. On 8 January 1900, after being a volunteer for some time, Arthur joined the 3rd Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment, but was discharged a couple of weeks later for failing the riding test²⁴. This didn’t put him off! He rejoined the South Staffordshire Regiment on 3 February 1900 and obviously passed the riding test this time, as he went on to serve in the Boer War until 19 December that year, when he returned home wounded in his right eye²⁵. He was discharged as medically unfit on 23 February 1901 and was a surveyor living at home with his parents, 3 brothers and 2 sisters when the 1901 census was taken a couple of months later²⁶.

At some point, he was posted to Hong Kong as a land revenue surveyor and lived there for some time, serving in the volunteer forces there and on 21 November 1908 was initiated into the Masons²⁷. After 6 years in Hong Kong he transferred to the Malay Free State and again joined the volunteer forces, attaining the rank of Sergeant-major in the Malay States Volunteers²⁸.

How did Arthur and Jane meet? They married just after she arrived in Penang, which suggests they must have known each other before she set out. Perhaps they met in 1900, when he was getting treatment for his eye injury? Perhaps she spent time working in a Government Civil and Victoria Hospital in Hong Kong or Malaysia?

Three months after the couple married, war broke out. Arthur and Jane must have watched from afar as conflict raged long after most had hoped it would end. Some of Arthur's brothers signed up to serve in the Army, while Jane's brothers served the war effort in the Merchant Navy. In June 1916 the couple travelled back to the UK so Arthur could play his part. He joined the Royal Field Artillery on his return and a newspaper early the following year reported that he had "been gazetted second lieutenant in the R.F.A."²⁸.

Arthur's military career was reported on again when, in 1918, he was awarded a Military Cross for "conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty"²⁹. He had, according to the London Gazette, "remained at his post issuing ammunition until the last, finally destroying and firing all charges and loose cartridges by laying a trail of powder and setting fire to it". All this while under fire³⁰.

No newspapers report what Jane did and she is not listed on the Red Cross website as a volunteer for the Voluntary Aid Detachment³¹.

Thankfully Arthur, Jane and their siblings all survived the war and in June 1919 the couple returned to the far east, this time going to Singapore³². They stayed for just over a year before returning to the UK in 1921, when they attended the wedding of Arthur's youngest brother Horace Darby to Mary Lilian Bonner in October. A local paper described it as "among the foremost in the fashionable weddings in Streatham". Horace and Mary's nuptials were a large affair, where "As is usual at the Roman Catholic church, the music was a strong feature of the impressive service ... Dr Darby, the bridegroom's eldest brother, rendered appropriate voluntaries, and the wedding marches prior to and after the service"³³.

Dr Darby was Arthur and Horace's eldest brother, George Ernest (though he was usually known by his middle name). His doctorate from Durham University was in music and he was the organist at St Mark's in Wolverhampton for many years, as well as being the musical director for the Wolverhampton Opera Company and conductor for the Wolverhampton Town Choral Society³⁴. Naturally then he provided some of the music for the wedding. Jane and her husband Arthur went back to Singapore on 1 January 1922³⁵, though they return to England just 8 months later, saying their intended future residence was in the UK. They gave Dr E Darby's address in Wolverhampton as a care of address³⁶. They later moved to Rigton Hill Estate, East Keswick, Leeds, as they gave it as their previous address when they moved again.

On 28 August 1926, Arthur - described as a Ret. Civ. Serv. - and Jane travelled from London to South Africa. Their destination was Natal³⁷. The couple set up home in Pietpotgietersrust (now called Mokopane) where Arthur worked as a farmer.

There's no further evidence of Arthur or Jane travelling, though they would have kept in touch with their families. Maybe Arthur and Jane went back to the old country to attend family funerals, including that of Arthur's father in 1928³⁸.

Jane's sister Mary joined them in South Africa, perhaps emigrating to live with them after she retired from years spent as a teacher and headmistress. Mary passed away in 1935 in Johannesburg and the probate record shows she was survived by her sisters Ann and Jane and brothers John, Joseph and William³⁹. Jane's brother John died in 1937⁴⁰, and in 1947 Jane suffered more loss when her husband Arthur died. The record of his death shows he had been a general farmer⁴¹. After staying a couple more years in South Africa, Jane returned to England⁴² and after her lifetime of travelling, settled in the beautiful city of Canterbury, Kent.



A view of Canterbury Cathedral from Butchery Lane in 2019. | Hoy.

In 1956 her sister Ann, who - like Mary - had never married, died in Eastbourne. She left shares, furniture and articles of personal use or ornament, including jewellery to Margaret Wait and the remainder of her estate to Jane⁴³. Jane outlived her siblings. She died in hospital in Whitstable, Kent on 27 July 1964. She and Arthur never had children, so she left her estate, over £3800, to friends and relatives, including Margaret Wait, her brother-in-law Horace and a great-nephew⁴⁴.

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Sources

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