

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



These stories were written, in September 2024, as part 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. These are shorter stories, where only limited information could be found.

Alice Maud Chipping

Alice was born in Camberwell on 19th September 1885 to George and Eleanor Chipping. George was a Carman and according to the 1891 census the couple had three other children – 2 daughters and a son. Alice was born deaf but the other children were not. (A later census stated that there had been 6 children born but two had died).

According to the Old Kent Road school registers, Alice was admitted to the School from the Farncombe Street Board School on 14th January 1895. The registers for the school also state that her “apparent intellect” was moderate

but her sounds were very defective. She was transferred to Margate on 28th August 1896.

In 1897 she had made good progress but just one year later she is noted to be “backward”. She appears to be near the bottom of her class in every year that she attended.

Alice left the school in 1901 where it is noted that “she appears average” and her conduct is noted as “good”. Her entry on the leaving register is interesting; it shows what subjects and what basic subjects were taught e.g. geography, religious education, writing, but also practical skills that could help her in her life ahead, such as articulation, lip-reading and language. The comment under the heading “writing” simply states her name “Alice Maud Chipping” and I wonder if she was only able to write and sign her name.

The next written record finds that in 1911 Alice is back home with her parents. I am not sure if her parents completed the census correctly, since all four children appear to be living at home. None are shown to have an occupation and Alice’s three siblings are all shown to be married – however none of their spouses are living with them. It is highly unusual for married children aged 23, 29 and 32 to be living at home and with no employment. Even more unusual to find both married women still have their maiden names! In view of these possible errors, although no occupation is shown, Alice may well have been working at this time.

Alice married at the age of 27 in 1913 to George Frederick Lord also aged 27. His occupation is given as “leather presser”. Alice also has an occupation - she

is noted as being a laundress, a very common form of employment for working women at this time. George had been a soldier in WW1 (his rank was “driver”). He appears to have been discharged with an injury or illness but I cannot find any details on his records.

In 1921 George and Alice are living in Camberwell and George is still earning a living as a leather presser. Alice is not in paid employment. There appear to be no children from the marriage. On the 1939 register, George is now noted to be a glove maker, while Alice is back in employment as a paper sorter. In 1939 the British Government launched the National Salvage Campaign a campaign to encourage the recycling of many products, including paper. I wonder if Alice had found some useful, paid war work to help with the family finances.

Alice died soon after the 1939 census in Southwark in 1940 aged 55. A working class girl, she not only received a basic education but had been able to attend a “special” school for the deaf that hopefully helped her to communicate well with others and to have a happy and fulfilling life. She was married for 27 years and I hope this proved to be a happy and enduring relationship.

Jane Davidson

Jane Davidson appears on the 1841 census as a pupil in the West of England Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in St Leonards, Exeter¹. She was born circa 1832 in Scotland. The annual Report of 1845 noted that she was residing with friends². By the 1849 report, Jane was living with her parents². Unfortunately, their names were not given, nor an address.

Sources

1. www.ancestry.com.au 1841 England Census; Class: *HO107*; Piece: 263; Book: 23; Civil Parish: *St Leonard*; County: *Devon*; Enumeration District: 7; Folio: 14; Page: 23; Line: 3; GSU roll: 241329
2. Annual Reports DHC 7645C West of England School for the deaf and Dumb Annual Reports, 2 1826-1860 accessed July 2024 with kind permission from Devon Archives and Local Studies, and from the Deaf Academy, Exmouth

Ellen Donovan's Story

Ellen (Ellin) Donovan, aged 10 years old, was resident at the West of England School for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb in the 1841 Census of England, which also informed us that Ellen was born in either Ireland or Scotland. This would make her year of birth around 1831. According to the Annual Report for the school, she attended from 1837 to 1845/6. By 1847, aged about 16, the report recorded that she was a Stay Maker.

Unfortunately, the school records did not record the names of Ellen's parents and it has not proved possible to find any further information about Ellen.

Sources

Admissions Register 1827-1836 Transcription/Extracts D123 by Joint project Devon Family History Society with Devon Record Office (Ref7645)

www.devonfhs.org.uk/product/weat-of-england-school-for-the-deaf-admission-register-127-1836

1841 England Census, www.ancestry.co.uk

Annual reports DHC 7645C West of England School for the Deaf and Dumb

Annual Reports, 1826-1860. Extracts provided by Forgotten Women Team

Louisa Evans' Story

Louisa Evans was from Bristol and was born around 1832. Her hearing difficulty was realised at a young age and she was found in the 1841 census, aged eight, in the West of England School for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, St. Leonard's, Exeter, Devon. Children are only accepted to the school from the age of seven. Unfortunately no records show the names of her parents. There is a baptismal record for a baby named Louisa Evans at the Methodist Church at Westbury-on-Trym, a suburb of Bristol, on 16 September 1832, to parents Joseph and Faith Evans. Joseph and Faith lived at Stoke Bishop and Joseph was a gardener. This may be the correct record but we have no way of confirming this. Records show that Louisa stayed at the school until 1849, after which she became a servant, according to the 'List of Girls' Occupations On Leaving School 1849'.

In the 1851 Census, 18-year-old Louisa was working as a servant in the household of Bellamy Brewett and his extended family, in Truro, Cornwall. We can't be certain about where Louisa spent the next two decades, but in the 1871 census she was working as a domestic servant in London, in the household of Doctor Edward Cromie at Claremont House on Brixton Road.

In the 1881 Census, Louisa was a housemaid in Gloucester Place, Marylebone, in a 'Home for Consumptive Females'. She was then recorded as being 48 years old.

By 1891, Louisa is surprisingly a visitor, rather than a servant, in a household in Williton, Somerset, in which the lady of the house, named Mrs Louisa Trebble, has also been 'deaf and dumb' (as a person with hearing loss and no speech was called in the 1800s) from childhood, just like Louisa Evans. Mr John Trebble, the head of the household, is a tailor, and he has taken on a young man named Uriah Knight, who also has hearing loss and no speech, as an apprentice.

We can find no further details about what happened to Louisa – I'm just amazed at how much she moved around the country. There is no sign of her on the 1901 census and there are too many deaths of a person of that name to be sure if one of them is this Louisa Evans.

Joy Smith

Amy Maud Harvey

Amy was born on 17th February 1890 in Dufferin Street in the City of London. A photo of the houses from that time shows it to have been a very poor area. Her father, William, was a coachman. Her mother's name was Amy Susan.

In 1901 Amy is shown to be in the Margate School, having been transferred from the Old Kent Road school. She had previously been a pupil at the Catherine Street Board School. On initial examination at the Margate School her intellect is noted to be “moderate”. She was born deaf but otherwise is stated as being in good health. At her second examination, in June of the same year, she has made very good progress even though she has been absent, unwell, for 131 days.

Amy left the school in December 1905 and was considered to be a “very nice girl” with excellent sewing skills (she scored 98% in her exam). A newspaper report about the school remarked that many girls were apprenticed to milliners and I have found a reference in the 1911 census to her being in that trade. It was also noted on this census that her sister was a bookkeeper and her brother a clerk. They seem to be doing very well in spite of the fact that her mother is now a widow.

In April of the same year Amy married Thomas Budgen, a cabinet maker. Thomas was born in 1887 and was one of 14 children. I discovered that he too as a pupil at the Margate School in 1901, at the same time as Amy. It seems likely that this is where they first met and of course, this led to their marriage 10 years later.

In 1921 Thomas was a motor fitter but sadly he wrote “out of work” in the occupation column. The couple had 3 sons. It would seem that Amy did not return to her millinery trade; her occupation is that of carrying out “domestic duties”.

In 1939 Thomas was a cabinet maker once more. Their son, Thomas is living with them. He was a coal depot manager and noted that he was responsible for domestic deliveries (surely very soon to be an important job, once the war led to rationing and shortages of fuel). There is a column in the 1939 register for noting any voluntary war duties. Thomas is a Special Constable in the Wembley area.

Amy died in 1949 with her husband dying in 1961. Amy had a good basic education and it would appear she also found employment through the school. Of course, she also met her future husband there, an unexpected outcome!

Agnes Phyllis Montague's Story

Agnes was born on 12th October 1890 in Kingston, Surrey to Thomas David Montague, a grocer's assistant [1843-1929], and his wife Agnes (nee Davis) [1857-1942]. She was born deaf, and had a brother Thomas (b.1895), Annie (b.1896) and Sybil (1898), and was elected to Old Kent Road with the name Alice (seemingly an error, corrected in Ch192/R2/3/1 Page 17) on 11 July 1898, with her being admitted on the 8th September 1898. She was then transferred to Margate Asylum on 8th August 1900, around the same time her youngest sister Gladys was born. While at the Margate her report card suggests that she wasn't academically gifted, often coming last or second to last until 1900. Her Articulation marks were notably higher in other subjects, in 1906 being described as 'Fairly intelligible'. Agnes's grades improved after the transfer to Margate, with her lip reading improving greatly in this time as well, with

her conduct described as good upon leaving Margate on 18th December 1906, aged 16. Her family had moved to Brighton in October 1906. One year later her life would have looked utterly different however, as on the 27th September 1907 the Montagues arrived in Montreal, Quebec aboard the Empress of Ireland. The Montagues moved at a time when the Canadian government was seeking sturdy European immigrants to farm and her father gained employment as a foreman at the railroad, with Thomas and Annie being employed as a bookkeeper at the railway and a saleswoman of dry goods respectively according to the 1911 Canada census. Agnes doesn't appear there however, on 7th March 1912 she married Adam Edward McHardy, a wagon maker in Toronto. He was originally from Aberdeen and had arrived in 1905. They had three children, Lachlan (b.1913), Phyllis Caroline (b.1915) and Mary (b.1920).

Sources

Ch192/R1/1/1 Entry 5431 Admission Records Application for Admission 4325-7615 (1880-1925)

Ch192/R2/1/6 Entry 221 Register of Children Old Kent Road [1-369] with transfers to Margate

Ch192/R2/2/2 Page 90 Headmaster's Register of Children: Old Kent Road (1891-1904)

Ch192/R2/3/1 Page 17 Headmaster's Register of Children 1895-1913

Ch192/R2/1/5 Entry 5451 Register of children: Old Kent Road [5256-5670] (with transfers to Margate)

Ch192/R8/1/3 Entry 196 Leavers Records: Registers of Children Leaving School (1902-1912)

1891 England Census, The National Archives of the UK (TNA); Kew, Surrey,

England; Census Returns of England and Wales, 1891; Class: RG12; Piece: 610; Folio: 122; Page: 40; GSU roll: 6095720

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Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826-1940 Ontario, Canada, Select Marriages, Archives of Ontario, Toronto

Minnie Prior's Story

Minnie Prior was a pupil at the Royal Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb from 1897 to 1904. She was born on the 12 October 1888 in Milton, Berkshire and according to her admission record Minnie was baptised on the 23 Dec 1888. No record has been found to confirm her baptism or those of her siblings.

Minnie's parents were Thomas Moses Prior and Emily Prior who had 13 children that were listed as all having survived on the 1911 census. Her parents were born in Steventon and Milton of Berkshire respectively and Minnie Prior's admission record states that her parents were second cousins.

Minnie Prior was the only child in her immediate family to have been born deaf.

In July 1897, Minnie Prior was elected to the school i.e. received funding, and was admitted on the 8th September 1897. At her first assessment, Minnie's intellect was described as moderate and that she was non-verbal. On her second recorded assessment in June 1899, it states that there is moderate improvement but her articulation was not good.

Minnie left the school in 1904 and is recorded on the 1911 census as working as a domestic servant. This was for Francis Smith, an engineer, and his family in Steventon, Berkshire.

On 25 May 1913 Minnie Prior married Ernest Merry in Abingdon, Oxfordshire. According to the 1921 census and 1939 Register, Minnie and Ernest remained in Oxford where they had two children.

Minnie Merry (nee Prior) died July 1956 in Sittingbourne, Kent.

Sources

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Leavers records: Registers of Children Leaving School (1902-1912), Reference: Ch192/R8/1/3 Entry 131, original data:

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Register of children: Old Kent Road (5256-5670) with transfers to Margate, Reference: Ch192/R2/2/1/5 Entry 5402, original data:

Elizabeth Simon's Story

Elizabeth Simons was born in 1826 in the market town of Buckfastleigh, Devon. It is known primarily for its manufacturing of woollen materials and paper mills.

The 1841 census shows us that Elizabeth Simons at the age of 15, is old enough to be soon leaving the institute. Having enrolled¹ in 1833 at the age of 8, alongside 21 other girls, she will have no doubt witnessed many changes.

¹ West of England School for the Deaf – Admissions Register 1827-1836 Transcription/Extracts D123 by joint project Devon Family History Society with Devon Record Office (Record Office Ref 7645).
<https://www.devonfhs.org.uk/product/west-of-england-school-for-the-deaf-admission-register-1827-1836/>

It is interesting that Elizabeth has been mentioned alongside several other members in the 1842 ²Annual Report. It specifies that having left the institute, she is now working as a Straw Bonnet Maker.

Being able to live and work independently show that the skills taught during Elizabeths formative years have been hugely beneficial for her. To be mentioned in the annual report, represents the institutes core values to educate and guide deaf children who previously would have often been abandoned by their families in asylums.

The ³1843 Annual Report that Elizabeth is now working as a Tailor, showing that as one of the institutes success stories, she has progressed into further employment since leaving the school.

It is possible that having been introduced to the manufacturing of woollen garments in her hometown of Buckfastleigh, Elizabeth may have had previous tailoring skills which were possibly then actively encouraged.

Unfortunately, we have no other information regarding Elizabeth Simons.

Shelly Matthews

² Annual Reports DHC 7645C West of England School for the Deaf and Dumb Annual Reports, 1826-1860 accessed July 2024 with kind permission from Devon Archives and Local Studies, and from the Deaf Academy, Exmouth

³ See previous reference for Annual Report

Hannah Tyrrell's Story

Hannah Deborah Tyrrell, whose surname is spelled in various ways, including Terrell, was baptised on 15 April 1932 at Cerne Abbas, Dorset. She was the second eldest of ten children born to parents Robert and Elizabeth Tyrrell, née Miller.

Hannah's hearing difficulty was realised at a young age and she was found in the 1841 census, aged eight, in the West of England School for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, St. Leonard's, Exeter, Devon. Children are only accepted to the school from the age of seven.

Records show that Hannah stayed at the school until 1849, after which she became a servant, according to the 'List of Girls' Occupations On Leaving School 1849'.

Hannah cannot be located in the 1851 Census, but in the 1861 Census she was working as a servant in the household of Annie Beer, a landed proprietor, in Market Street, in the Parish of St James, Poole, Dorset. Annie was a widow with a young daughter named Christiana, who was 12 years old, and had been born in Cerne Abbas, Dorset, the same place that Hannah was born and where her father's family had lived for generations. Perhaps that was how she got the job with Annie Beer – the families may have known each other.

In 1865, when Hannah was thirty-three years old, she appears to have given birth to an illegitimate son, whom she named George Edward Tyrrell. We can't

be 100% certain that this is the correct Hannah Tyrrell, but George was born at Cerne Abbas, where Hannah's family lived, so it seems possible.

Sadly Hannah seems to have passed away 18 months later, aged just thirty-four, with her death being registered at Poole, Dorset in March 1867. We don't know how she died.

Joy Smith