

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written in August 2023 as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who enrolled in the first two cohorts [1908 & 1909] of Trainee Teachers at the Cheshire Country Training College, Crewe [CCTCC]

Dora Bradbury's Story

Dora was born on 18 March 1891¹ in Antrobus, a small village in Cheshire. Antrobus is graced with a church designed by notable architect Sir George Gilbert Scott, better known for The St Pancras Hotel in London². However, Dora was not baptised there. Her family travelled some 14 miles east to Great Warford, where her father had been born some 34 years earlier, and she was baptised there in the Methodist Chapel on 15 Oct 1891³.

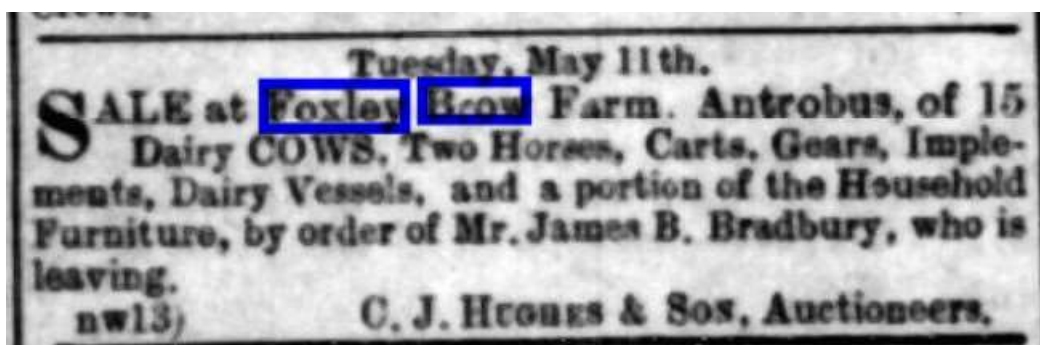
Dora was the eldest of three children of James Blackshaw Bradbury and his wife Rachel, nee Burgess⁴. James' parents were Thomas, a farmer and butcher⁵, and Mary Ann, nee Blackshaw⁶. Rachel's father John Burgess was a provision dealer⁷. Most of Dora's forebears were Cheshire born and bred, though Rachel's mother

Hannah was from Yorkshire⁷.

In 1891 James and Rachel moved into Foxley Brow Farm², where Dora was born, followed by Annie Ruth in 1894 and Thomas in 1898. The children attended school in Antrobus, which was close to the farm. Dora and Thomas both excelled, going on to further education, while Annie left school at 14⁸.

We cannot know now what Dora, Annie and Thomas did to pass their time as children in Antrobus, but it's likely they took part in traditional celebrations. Perhaps, for example, they went souling at the end of October or beginning of November. Souling involved a group of people visiting local farms and cottages to sing a "traditional request for apples, ale, and soul cakes". By the late 1800s it was usually children who went souling around All Hallow's Eve⁹. Traditional in the north and west of England, by the 1920s it had all but died out, though Antrobus is one of the few places where it survives, taking the form of a mummer's play at The Antrobus Arms¹⁰. The pub used to be called The Wheatsheaf Inn and for a time it was home to the Bradbury family.

They moved there in 1909, after James sold up and left Foxley Brow Farm¹¹.



The Wheatsheaf Inn was close to the farm, indeed they used to be part of the same estate. It had been a staging post at one time and was still central to village life. James became innkeeper and Rachel assisted in the business⁴.

It's likely Dora didn't live there much though, because after attending Northwich High School for Girls for four years, she was granted a place at Cheshire Country Training College, Crewe (CCTCC). She started there in September 1909, in the second year after it was founded. The entry requirements were to "pass the Preliminary Certificate Examination of the Board of Education, or an examination approved as equivalent", which included "a Matriculation Examination"¹². She obtained a Northern University Matriculation 1909, with a Distinction in English¹³.

To attend CCTCC Dora had to move from her home in Antrobus some 19 miles south to Crewe. In 1911¹⁴, she lived in a hostel with other CCTCC students, a cook, a housemaid, as well as Harriett Carson, the vice-principal and lecturer in English, and Emily Ward, who lectured in Kindergarten, Handwork and Junior Education¹².

CCTCC aimed to give students a rounded education, as well as passing a quarter of the time visiting local schools to observe and later practice teaching. They studied Theory of Teaching, Handwork, which for the women students, included needlework, Physical Exercises, English, History, Geography, Maths, Biology and Nature Study, Rural Science and Scripture¹².

But it wasn't all academic work and there were clubs the students could join. Dora was involved in at least one dramatic performance while she was there¹⁵.

Perhaps it brought back memories of the celebrations in her home village, when people used to sing or play for Soul Cakes?



Dora left CCTCC after her Final Exam, in 1911. Tragically on 15 June that year her father died¹⁶, leaving her mother Rachel to run the Wheatsheaf Inn. Perhaps her sister Annie, who still lived at home, helped her mother carry on for a while though by 1915 the Wheatsheaf Inn had a new proprietor².

There is no evidence where Dora started working once she left CCTCC, though it's likely she did start work immediately. Indeed, the College's Prospectus of 1914 explained that students who had "already been trained were all at work in the term following their final examination". Women leaving CCTCC were expected to work in Elementary (or secondary) schools for five years.

At that time, women who married had to give up teaching, though they could return to work if widowed. Dora must have worked for the time allotted, then in 1917 she married William Baxter Barber¹⁷. William was born in 1885, and was a farmer from Higher Whitley, which is only a couple of miles from Antrobus. The couple had a son William soon afterwards¹⁹, followed by Annie Gertrude in 1919²⁰.

By 1921 Dora was living with her husband and their two children in Bentley Farm, where William's family had lived for decades²¹. His uncle lived with them and worked on the farm and Dora's brother Thomas was visiting them. The 1921 census shows he was a teacher at St John Deane's Grammar School in Northwich²².

It seems Thomas wasn't the only member of the family away from home. Dora's mother and sister were in Abergele when the 1921 census was taken. Rachel gave her employer's address as Lower Whitley and job as "House duties".

Annie's entry said she was working as a governess in Stretton, near Warrington²³.

Sadly, the next few years saw some deaths in the family. Dora's brother Thomas died in 1922²⁴, her mother Rachel in 1925²⁵ and her young daughter Rosemary, who was born in 1924²⁶, died less than 2 years later²⁷. A decade after that, William Barber, Dora's son died when he was just 19²⁸.

By 1939 Dora and William were living with their daughter Annie, son James Blackshaw and another child. Dora's sister Annie, a nursery governess, lived next door to them²⁹.

The couple lived out the rest of their lives at Bentley Farm. Dora died in The General Hospital, Warrington on 30 November 1965³⁰. Her husband William died 14 November 1971³¹. Her unmarried sister Annie died in Whitley in 1968³².

Narrative by Isobel Hoy

Sources

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