

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]

Warning this story contains an account of a suicide

Florrie Hancock's Story



1. Image of CTCC student Florrie Hancock, 1910¹

Florrie Hancock was born on the 11th November, 1890, in Over, Winsford, Cheshire, the eldest child of Edward Hancock, a joiner, and Sarah, nee Stevenson². She was baptised a month later at Davenham St Paul's Methodist Church, Winsford³. By the time of the 1901 census, the family, still living in High Street, Over, had four further children, three girls and a boy. Edward was now a foreman joiner⁴.

As a child, Florrie went to Over Board School where she attained Standard VI. In 1902, as part of the celebrations for the postponed coronation of Edward VII, Florrie was one of a group of dancing girls from the school who paraded behind the silver band, dressed in pink and green frocks with matching hats, and carrying tambourines⁵.

Florrie then attended Verdin Technical School, Winsford, admitted on 15th September 1903. She is one of a group noted as "Entrance Scholars 1903". Here, she took part in school sports, winning prizes for events such as Throwing the cricket ball, Threading the needle, running 200 yards and a hockey race⁶. In 1904 she passed and was awarded a Scholarship Class 1a, allowing her to go to a Secondary School and train as a pupil teacher⁷

She left Verdin in July 1906 to transfer to Runcorn Secondary School, with her leaving annotated "C.C.P.T. Scholar"[County Council Pupil Teacher?]⁸. After two years here, and passing the Preliminary Certificate, Florrie was one of the first group to enrol at the Cheshire County Training College, Crewe⁹. Here, she would have covered the academic subjects to be taught in an elementary school along with theories of education. Sport was also important at the College, and Florrie was photographed in 1908 with the hockey team (Image 2)¹⁰. She would have also spent a quarter of her time at the college in school practice or observation¹¹. After her two years at the College, Florrie passed her final exam in 1910¹².



2. CTCC student hockey team 1908-1910, showing Florrie in the middle of the front row.

The following year, the 1911 census shows Florrie back living with her family in Winsford at 23 Siddorn Street, where they had moved at some point during Florrie's time at Verdin. Florrie's eldest sister had by now left home, but the others were still there, father Edward listed as a house joiner and his son as an apprentice joiner. Florrie, now 20, had found a post as an elementary school teacher, employed by the County Council¹³. Later reports state that she had served at Winsford Council School¹⁴. This was also known as Over Board School, the very school Florrie had attended as a child, just a short walk away from her home in Siddorn Street.

Florrie married Harold Cannon in the second quarter of 1915, in Northwich Registration District¹⁵. Harold was two years Florrie's senior, and was a plater boilermaker from Crewe, working for the London and North Western Railway¹⁶. Harold appears not to have served with the military during the First World War, as his occupation would have exempted him¹⁷. Florrie's brother, Edward, did serve with the Cheshire Regiment and was killed in July 1916 in the Battle of the Somme¹⁸.

The war would also have had an effect on Florrie's work. A shortage of teachers during and immediately after the war meant that the need for women to stop work on marriage was no longer strictly enforced¹⁹. It is probably around this time that she worked at the school in Hightown, Crewe²⁰. However, Florrie is unlikely have worked once her first child, Dorothy, was born in 1919. A second daughter followed, Joyce, born in 1927²¹.

The 1921 census found Florrie, Harold and Dorothy enumerated as visitors at the home of her married sister, Elsie (now Pimlett). Florrie had no occupation, being described as "At home"²².

On Florrie's 48th birthday, however, tragedy struck the family. Harold collapsed and died suddenly after his arrival at the LMS [London, Midland and Scottish Railway] Works, Crewe²³. Four months later, Florrie herself died in rather unusual circumstances. Now widowed, Florrie was staying in Siddorn Street, Winsford, with her mother and married sister, Dorothy Pearson. The family returned from church one Sunday evening to find Florrie "in a state of collapse" in a gas-filled room. Artificial respiration was given, but Florrie died. The coroner's verdict was that she had killed herself: she was lying on cushions in front of the gas stove with a rug over her. He could not make any ruling as to her state of mind at the time, although her mother gave evidence that she was in a

“poor state of health” and had been treated by doctors in Crewe and Winsford, but we can perhaps surmise her sense of grief and loss²⁴. A sad end for somebody that the newspaper report described as “a brilliant scholar”.

Both Harold’s and Florrie’s estates were proven in 1939. Probate each time was granted to Frank Barnett Henshall, elementary school teacher in Crewe – Harold’s brother in law²⁵.

Narrative by Ruth Wilson

¹ Image of CTCC student Florrie Hancock, 1910, CCTCC Archives, Unpublished data, under the care of the Family History Society of Cheshire, Crewe

² GRO Births 1890; 1891 census RG12/2840/34 p.23.

³ "England, Cheshire Non-conformist Records, 1671-1900," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:F3HK-PHD : 7 December 2017>), Florrie Hancock, 14 Dec 1890; citing 155, Davenham, St Paul's United Methodist Free Chapel, Winsford, Cheshire, Record Office, Chester; FHL microfilm 2,299,528.

⁴ 1901 census RG14/3343/35 p.24.

⁵ *Crewe Guardian*, 2 July 1902.

⁶ *Crewe Guardian*, 16 July 1904; 14 July 1906.

⁷ *Cheshire Daily Echo*, 9 June 1904.

⁸ "England, Cheshire, School Records, 1796-1950," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:FGQW-G2P : 9 March 2018>), Florrie Hancock, ; citing Winsford, Verdin Technical Schools, Record Office, Chester; FHL microfilm 1,894,892.

⁹ *CCTCC Student Registers [1908-1935]: CCTCC Archives, Unpublished data, under the care of the Family History Society of Cheshire, Crewe.*

¹⁰ CTCC student hockey team 1908-1910, CCTCC Archives, Under the care of the Family History Society of Cheshire, Crewe

¹¹ *Cheshire County Training College, Crewe, Prospectus 1908-1914, Unpublished data, under the care of the Family History Society of Cheshire, Crewe.*

¹² *CCTCC Student Registers [1908-1935], , Unpublished data, under the care of the Family History Society of Cheshire, Crewe.*

¹³ 1911 census RG13/21698 sch. 69.

¹⁴ *Crewe Chronicle*, 18 March 1939.

¹⁵ <http://www.cheshirebmd.org.uk/marriagesearch.php>

¹⁶ UK, Railway Employment Records, 1833-1956 [ancestry.co.uk]; 1911 census RG14/21770 sch.218.

¹⁷ The National Archives, Part 1: Books, booklets and pamphlets, 1916, List of Certified Occupations (November 1916), MH47/142/1; UK, Railway Employment Records, 1833-1956 [ancestry.co.uk];

¹⁸ Findagrave.com

¹⁹ https://archives.history.ac.uk/history-in-education/sites/history-in-education/files/attachments/teacher_training_-_up_to_the_1960s.doc

²⁰ *Crewe Chronicle*, 18 March 1939.

²¹ FreeBMD.org.uk

²² 1921 census RG15/17933 sch. 300.

²³ *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 11 November 1938.

²⁴ *Crewe Chronicle*, 18 March 1939; *Manchester Evening News*, 13 March 1939.

²⁵ <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/family-tree/tree/9315349/family?cfpid=-820755174>