This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in April 2025, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who can be found as prisoners or staff in Dorchester Prison in the census returns, or who appear in the prison's admission and discharge registers.

Catherine Crate's Story

Catherine Crate was born around 1833 in Dublin, Ireland, the eldest daughter of five children born to John Crate, a British Army soldier who later worked as a labourer and his wife Margaret Quigley.

Her Life in England

By 1841, the Crate family had relocated to England. The England census for that year places them on Mill Street in Fordington, Dorset, where Catherine still an 8 year old child lived with her family.

Census Transcript							
1841 Census: HO 107/284/26/9 ¹ Residence: Mill Street, Fordington, Dorchester							
Name and Surname	Age	Profession	Where Born in Same County				
John CRATE	35	Labourer	Yes				
Margaret CRATE	35		Ireland				
Micheal CRATE	11		Ireland				
Katherine CRATE	8		Ireland				
Mary Ann CRATE	5		Ireland				
John CRATE	2		Yes				

The Loss of her Father

Martin Crate was born in 1842 and just a year later, tragedy struck the family, when on 9th August 1843, Catherine's father, John, died from inflammation on the brain. The death certificate records he was only 35.² Ann Tilley was present at his death and sign his certificate with her mark. His burial took place two days later at St George's Church in Fordington.³ The tragedy left Margaret widowed with five young children to care for. Catherine was just ten years old.

Years of Poverty and Petty Crime

As Catherine grew life remained difficult. The late 1840s and early 1850s were a period of immense hardship for the Crate family, marked by frequent encounters with the law possibly driven by poverty and hunger.

 On 6th January 1849, Catherine's brother Michael, aged 15, was imprisoned in Dorchester for stealing turnips. He was committed by Herbert Williams, Esq., the Borough Magistrate, and released on 26th January.^{4 5}

Committed to Dorchester Goal: Michael Crate for stealing turnips at West Stafford three weeks.

- On 14th July 1849, Michael was again arrested, this time for robbing a garden. He received six months in prison and was released on 12th January 1850.⁶ Michael would continue to struggle with the law throughout his life mainly for poaching.
- On 20th December 1849, Catherine herself, then aged 16, was also imprisoned for stealing turnips, ⁷ committed again by Herbert Williams, Esq. She received one calendar month of hard labour. A harsh penalty for a petty crime. The exact date of her release is unknown due to missing record pages, but it likely occurred around 20th January 1850. ⁸

Committed to Dorchester Goal: Catherine Crate for stealing turnips at Froome hard labour 1 calendar month.

Margaret Crate's Conviction

The family's troubles continued when, on 3rd October 1850, Margaret Crate (Catherine's mother), aged 44, was committed to Dorchester Prison for knowingly receiving stolen timber.⁹ She appeared before the Dorset Michaelmas Sessions on 15th October, where she pleaded guilty to receiving stolen goods and her co-defendant William Legg (aged 17) was found guilty of stealing, they were returned to prison.

The Quarter Sessions Order Books for Dorset states: 10

Michaelmas Sessions 1850

Whereas Margaret Crate was convicted before this court of Felony for which offence she was sentenced to be transported beyond the seas for the Term of seven years It is therefore in pursuance of an Act of Parliament made and passed in the fifth year of the Reign of His Majesty King George the Fourth intituled "An Act for the Transportation of Offenders from Great Britain" ordered and adjourned by the Court that the said Margaret Crate be transported beyond the sea accordingly for the Term of seven years to such place or places as Her Majesty-by- and with the advice of her Privy Council may-order and dired.

An account of this session was recorded in The Western Flying Post,
Sherbourne and Yeovil Mercury¹¹

Dorest Michaelmas Sessions before Rev. H.F. Yeatman

William Legg Jnr and Margaret Crate were indicted for stealing a piece of timber at Dorchester. The prisoner pleaded guilty to the charge of receiving. The jury found Legg guilty of stealing; but acquitted the female prisoner of the charge of stealing. Margaret Crate being a well known receiver of stolen goods was sentenced to seven years' transportation; William Legg to be imprisoned for 1 month, and to be privately whipped.

On 7th December 1850, Margaret was transferred to Millbank Prison in London to await transportation to the colonies. Her prison record reads: ¹²

Millbank Prison Register

Margaret Crate, aged 44, Widow of 5 children, Can Read, Labourer. Convicted 15th October 1850, Dorchester. Description of Crime – Felony. Sentence: Seven Years. Information received respecting prisoner: 'Has borne a very bad character in her neighbourhood.'

Catherine's Continued Struggles

The 1851 England Census (30th March) places Catherine Crate, now 18, back in Dorchester Prison. The reason for her imprisonment at that time is unclear but could be related to the following crime.

Census Transcript 1851 Census: HO 107/1858/40/6 ¹³ Residence: Dorchester Goal, St Peter's Parish, Dorchester						
Name and Surname	Relation to Head of Family	Condition of Marriage	Age	Profession or Occupation	Where Born	
Catherine CRATE	Prisoner	Unmarried	18	Labourer	Dublin	

On 12th June 1851, Catherine was again committed by Herbert Williams, this time with her younger sister Mary Ann and several friends, for stealing flowers from a garden. Catherine and her co-accused, Angelo and William Stanley were sentenced to three calendar months, while Mary Ann and the others were released after two months on 11th August 1851.¹⁴

Dorchester

12.—William County Hall, June Stanley, Angelo Stanley, Catherine Crate, Mary Ann Crate, Edward Hyde, Maria Bonnell, and James Simmonds, all of Fordington, were brought before H. Williams, Esq. by Superintendents Pouncey and Curtis, charged with stealing and damaging a quantity of rhododendrons, geraniums, shrubs, &c., the property of F P. B. Martin, Esq. at Kingston. It appeared that the defendants, who were all well known to the officers of justice, had been revelling at the different village beerhouses during the day, in consequence of the liberation from gaol of Angelo Stanley and Catherine Crate, and on their returning home in the evening they got over the palings of Mr. Martin's pleasure grounds and stole and damaged a great quantity of flowers, shrubs, &c. Wm Stanley, Angelo Stanley, Catherine Crate, were sentenced to three calendar months' imprisonment, and Mary Ann Crate, Edward Hyde, Maria Bonnell, and James Simmonds to two calendar months, with hard labour.

A New Chapter of Hope

After their release from prison on 11th September 1851, Catherine married William Napoleon Stanley on 24th November 1851 in Christ Church, in the parish of Fordington, Dorset.¹⁵ She was just 19 years old. It is conceivable that the theft of flowers had been an attempt to gather decorations for her upcoming wedding.

The young couple's life was filled with hope, after settling down in Pease Lane:

- In 1853, Catherine gave birth to their first daughter, Sarah Stanley.
- In 1854, her mother Margaret Crate was released on license from Millbank Prison, having never been transported to Van Diemen's Land as originally sentenced. Her license of release was signed by Henry John Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerston.

Margaret's letter of License reads as follows. ¹⁶ Margaret was discharged from Millbank Prison on the 4th May 1854.

Order of License to a convict made under the Statute 16 & 17 Vict: c. 99. s. 9

> Whitehall 24th day of April 1854

Her Majesty is graciously pleased to grant to **Margaret Crate** — who was convicted of Receiving Stolen Goods at the Quarter Sessions of the Peace holden for the County of Dorset at Dorchester on the 15th day of October 1850, and was then and there sentenced to be transported beyond the Seas for the term of seven years, and is now confined in the Millbank Prison, Her Royal License to be at large in the United Kingdom from the day of her liberation under this Order, during 9061 Margaret Crate the

the remaining portion of her said Term of Transportation unless it

shall please Her Majesty sooner to revoke or alter such License.

License to be at large

And Her Majesty

hereby orders that the said

Margaret Crate be set

at liberty within thirty days from
the date of this Order.

Given under my hand and seal.

Palmerston

 In 1855, Catherine and William welcomed another daughter, Mary Ann Stanley

A Sudden and Tragic Loss

Joy and hope turned to sorrow when on the 1st July 1856, William Napoleon Stanley a 27 year old chimney sweep died at the Dorset County Hospital. The cause of death was recorded as a blow in the abdomen,¹⁷ the details of which were serious enough to be reported in the newspaper.¹⁸

Dorchester

FATAL ACCIDENT – We regret to have to record a fatal termination to the accident which occurred on Monday evening on the Poundbury. The unfortunate deceased, William Stanley, was wheeling a barrow blindfolded, when he ran against a stake. The force of the concussion threw him upon the barrow, inflicting severe injuries in the region of the abdomen. He was immediately conveyed to the county hospital, where he received every attention. The poor fellow, however, lingered till the following noon, when he expired. He leaves a wife and two children to deplore his death.

This tragic event left Catherine a widow at the age of 23, with two young daughters to care for, echoing the fate of her own mother a decade earlier.

Despite the heartbreak Catherine continued by baptising Mary Ann at the Holy Trinity Church, Dorchester on the 11th February 1857.

Catherine's New life in Jersey.

Catherine and her family emigrated to the Island of Jersey, likely seeking a fresh start and perhaps to reunite with some of her siblings who had already settled there. Catherine marries Thomas James Luen a 27 year old sailor on the 20th August 1857 in the St Saviour's parish. She signs the marriage certificate with her mark and she is recorded as Catherine Crate widow Stanley. Thomas

Luen is originally from Colchester, Essex and they are both residing in St Helier.¹⁹

Catherine and her family do not appear in the 1861 censuses returns (7th April) and she was not listed aboard Thomas's ship, The Commodore, which was stationed off Falmouth at the time.²⁰

The 1871 Channel Islands Census (2nd April) places Catherine Luen, now recorded as 34 years old, in St Helier with her girls.

Census Transcript 1871 Census: RG10/5756/28/12 ²¹ Residence: 60 Colombrie, St Helier, Jersey						
Name and Surname	Relation to Head of Family	Condition of Marriage	Age	Profession or Occupation	Where Born	
Catherine Luen Sarah Luen Mary Ann Luen	Head Daughter Daughter	Married Unmarried Unmarried	34 18 16	Ship Owner Dressmaker Dressmaker	England England England	

Notably recorded as a Ship Owner. A rare occupation for a woman of her time, suggesting she was involved in her husband's maritime business. At this time, her husband, Thomas James Luen was not present in the household. He was recorded aboard the vessel Thomas & Kate, which was docked at Cotton's Wharf on the River Thames, London. ²²

At the end of 1874 Catherine's mother Margaret passes away at the age of 73, in Fordington, Dorchester, Dorset²³

By the 1881 Channel Islands Census (3rd April), Catherine Luen is absent from the official records. She does not appear in the household returns in the Channel Islands, nor was she listed among the crew of her husband Thomas's

vessel, Escape (of Jersey), which was recorded in Barnstaple at the time. Her precise whereabouts during this period remain unknown. However, a glimpse of her continued presence in family life in Jersey emerges two years later, where on 12th August 1883, Catherine is listed alongside her husband as godparents at the baptism of her granddaughter Alice Maud King.²⁴

After a brief stay in hospital in Jersey,²⁵ Thomas James Luen passes away on the 6th August 1887 at the age of 52 and was buried on the 9th August at Mont à L'Abbé New Cemetery Block P Plot 41 Grave s2 (at 9 feet)²⁶

Catherine's Later Life

The 1891 Channel Islands Census (5 April), Catherine, again a widow, had moved in with her youngest daughter, Mary Ann King (née Stanley), and her growing family at 38 Columbus Street, St Helier. Mary Ann's husband appears to be away as his occupation was also a sailor. Both Mary Ann and Catherine are living on their own means.

Census Transcript 1891 Census: RG12/4695/174/16 ²⁷ Residence: 38 Colombus Street, St Helier, Jersey						
Name and Surname	Relation to Head of Family	Condition of Marriage	Age	Profession or Occupation	Where Born	
Mary Ann KING	Head	Married	35	Lives on own means	England	
Kate KING	Daughter		13	Scholar	Jersey St Helier	
Charles George KING	Son		8	Scholar	Jersey St Helier	
Alice M KING	Daughter		7	Scholar	Jersey St Helier	
Thomas J KING	Son		5	Scholar	Jersey St Helier	
Lillie KING	Daughter		4	Scholar	Jersey St Helier	
Catherine LUEN	Mother	Widow	60	Living on own means	England	
Mary Ann KING	Daughter		1		Jersey St Helier	

Catherine remained with Mary Ann's family for the remainder of her life. In the 1901 Census (31 March), she was listed again at Mary Ann's home, then at 12 Parade Place, Payn Street, St Helier.

Census Transcript 1901 Census: RG13/5311/33/4 ²⁸ Residence: Parade Place 12, Payn Street, St Helier, Jersey, Channel Islands					
Name and Surname	Relation to Head of Family	Condition of Marriage	Age	Profession or Occupation	Where Born
Mary Ann KING Charles George KING	Head Son	Married Single	45 18	Cabinet maker	England, Dorchester Jersey St Helier
Alice M KING Lily KING Mary Ann KING George KING Gladys E KING	Daughter Daughter Daughter Son Daughter	Single	17 14 10 7 3	Dress maker Dress maker Scholar Scholar Scholar	Jersey St Helier Jersey St Helier Jersey St Helier Jersey St Helier Jersey St Helier
Catherine LUEN	Grandmother	Widow	62		England, Dorchester

By 1911, the family had moved once more, residing at 20 Charing Cross, St Helier. Catherine, now 74 years old, was noted as being paralysed and deaf, conditions believed to have begun following a possible stroke.

Census Transcript 1911 Census: RG14/34884/39/06 ²⁹ Residence: 20 Charing Cross, St Helier, Jersey, Channel Islands					
Name and Surname	Relation to Head of Family	Condition of Marriage	Age	Profession or Occupation	Where Born
Mary Ann KING Lillie KING Gladys Edna KING Catherine LUEN	Head Daughter Daughter Mother	Married Widow	56 24 18 74	At Home School	Dorchester, Dorset St Helier, Jersey St Helier, Jersey Dublin

Catherine Luen passed away on 7th May 1914, aged 77 years and 4 months.

She was laid to rest on 11th May 1914 in the same gave as her husband Thomas in Mont à L'Abbé New Cemetery Block P Plot 41 Grave s2 (at 6 feet),³⁰ reuniting the couple after many years apart.

Catherine's life journey stretched from a childhood in Ireland to the eve of the First World War. Marked early by the loss of her father and the hardship of poverty, her youth was shaped by instability and encounters with the British criminal justice system. She sought a different path with her family as its focus. In her final years, despite serious health challenges, (paralysis and deafness) she remained surrounded by family and was reunited in death with her Thomas.

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Three Surnames Genealogy

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