

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in November 2023, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who studied or taught at The Grange School of Housewifery in Street, Somerset.

Isabel Cayley's Story

Isabel was born in July 1873¹, the middle daughter and 5th child of Reginald Arthur Cayley, Rector of Scampton, Lincolnshire and his wife Mary Louisa. Her mother was the daughter of the Rector of Eprington, Derbyshire, while her father was the younger brother of the 8th Baronet Cayley. She is shown on the 1881 Census² aged 7, living with her parents and her sisters, Dora aged 9 and Hester aged 5. The Rectory must have been quite a large house as in addition to the 5 servants, there was also a Governess, living in. As the family has a governess for the girls, lessons must have been held at home, but the census does not describe the girls as scholars.

¹ Births Index (CR). England and Wales. RD Lincoln, Lincolnshire. 3rd Q, 1873. CAYLEY, Isabel, Mary. Vol. 7A. P. 230. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 30 November 2023.

² Census Records. England. Scampton, Lincolnshire. 03 April 1881. CAYLEY, Reginald, Arthur (Head). PN 3246. FL 75. P 9. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 30 November 2023.

Isabel possibly appears on the 1891 Census³, as a pupil at a Ladies' School in Eastbourne, aged 15, but the place of birth is wrong (Norwood, Surrey). However, this could have been the place where she went for the shorter holidays, possibly staying with a family member. Her mother and sister, Dora, aged 19 are staying with the Rector of Eprington, Derbyshire on Census⁴ night, possibly her grandfather.

In the 1901 Census⁵ for Norwich, Norfolk, Isabel is described as a boarder, along with 6 others, staying in the house of a Commercial Traveller and his wife, who let rooms. She is a Librarian, aged 28, single and born in Scampton Rectory, Lincolnshire. The number of lending libraries increased after the 1850 Libraries Act and the Free/Public library was built in Norwich in 1857 on the corner of Duke Street and St Andrews Road⁶ – about a 2-minute walk from Isabel's lodgings. I assume that this was an acceptable occupation for a single woman, living away from home.

In the 1911 Census⁷, we find Isabel employed as an Assistant Teacher at the School of Housewifery, The Grange, Street, Somerset. She is aged 38 years and still single. The school accounts⁸ tell us that Isabel was employed in January 1910 on a salary of £35/year.

³ Census Records. England. Eastbourne, Sussex. 05 April 1891. COOKE, Edna, G (Head). PN 771. FL 100. P 13. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 30 November 2023.

⁴ Census Records. England. Eprington, Derbyshire. 05 April 1891. BUCKNALL ESTCOURT, Edmund (Head). PN 2770. FL 8. P 8. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 30 November 2023.

⁵ Census Records. England. Norwich, Norfolk. 31 March 1901. POSTLE, Henry, Walter (Head). PN 1842. FL 15. P 20. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 30 November 2023.

⁶ Reggie Unthank (2018). Colonel Unthinks Norwich. *Norwich Knowledge (Libraries)*. <https://www.colonelunthansnorwich.com> : accessed 30 November 2023

⁷ Census Records. England. Street, Somerset. 02 April 1911. ACHESON, Louisa, Francis (Headmistress).RD 313. PN 14542. ED 9. SN 117. <https://ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 30 November 2023.

⁸ South West Heritage Trust, Somerset Heritage Centre, Brunel Way, Norton Fitzwarren, Taunton, TA2 6SF C/E/1/146; Somerset School of Cookery and Housewifery – Minutes, 1897-1916

Miss L M Cayley had been appointed to fill the vacancy caused by Miss Viberts resignation. Salary £35/year.

This is not a very large sum of money, as when she leaves 5 years later, her replacement is paid £50/year.

Miss Cayley had stayed at the school from 1 September to 15 November – new teacher Miss Davis £50/year.

The change from a librarian to a teacher, seems a huge difference to people today, but as the School of Cookery and Housewifery was chiefly concerned with training girls to look after the home when they married or to be superior servants, if looking to go into employment, then I suppose someone who has lived in a large house and dealt with servants, or looked after herself, would be a good candidate in this role. The school closed in 1916, so Isabel was one of the last teachers to be employed there. With the outbreak of the first world war, jobs in munitions and other 'war work' paid more than being a domestic and married women did not want to stay at home.

When Isabel left the school, she stayed local to the area as she lived with her parents at 53 Keyford, Frome, Somerset. This was where her father had retired to and where he died in 1918⁹, leaving his wife and Isabel as his heirs to £1758. In the 1921 Census¹⁰, Isabel and her mother are still living at the same address

⁹ Testamentary records. England and Wales. 28 October 1918. CAYLEY, Reverend Reginald, Arthur. Probate. England and Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of wills and Administrations) 1858-1995. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 30 November 2023.

¹⁰ Census Records. England and Wales. Frome, Somerset. 19 June 1921. CAYLEY, Mary, Louisa (Head). RD 311. RS 01. ED 08. SN 246. <https://www.findmypast.co.uk> : accessed 30 November 2023.

and are both 'not occupied'. Her mother died in 1924¹¹, leaving Isabel with £849.

In the 1939 Register¹², Isabel is shown as the head of the household, living with her are her 2 sisters; Dora, who worked in the Woolwich Arsenal and was made an MBE in the King's Birthday Honours in 1918¹³ and Hester, who was a typist for a firm of solicitors in London, all living on Private Means. They also had Martha Godsdon, a retired Nurse living in the house. The sisters were well off as Hester was left £4270 by one of their brothers, who died in 1935¹⁴ and Dora left £1833 when she died in 1941¹⁵. Hester, lived until 1952¹⁶ and left over £10,200 to her nephew, a squadron leader and when Isabel died in 1957¹⁷, in Worthing, Sussex, she left over £12,300 to a solicitor who was acting as executor.

¹¹ Testamentary records. England and Wales. 28 February 1924. CAYLEY, Mary, Louisa. Probate. England and Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of wills and Administrations) 1858-1995. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 30 November 2023.

¹² 1939 Register, England. Frome, Somerset. CAYLEY, Isabel, Mary. 29 September 1939. Schedule 311/1. RG101/1465/2/311/1. National Archives (Great Britain), Kew, England. Collection: 1939 Register. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 30 November 2023.

¹³ Duncan Hill. (2023). Wikipedia. *1918 Birthday Honours (MBE)*. <https://www.en.m.wikipedia.org> : accessed 30 November 2023

¹⁴ Testamentary records. England and Wales. 17 June 1935. CAYLEY, Cecil, Reginald. Probate. England and Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of wills and Administrations) 1858-1995. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 30 November 2023.

¹⁵ Testamentary records. England and Wales. 02 January 1942. CAYLEY, Dora. Probate. England and Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of wills and Administrations) 1858-1995. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 30 November 2023.

¹⁶ Testamentary records. England and Wales. 01 November 1952. CAYLEY, Hester, Charlotte. Probate. England and Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of wills and Administrations) 1858-1995. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 30 November 2023.

¹⁷ Testamentary records. England and Wales. 13 September 1957. CAYLEY, Isabel, Mary. Probate. England and Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of wills and Administrations) 1858-1995. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 30 November 2023.