

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 at The Grange School of Housewifery in Street, Somerset.

Gladys Annie Vincent's Story

The starting point for researching Gladys Annie Vincent are two records provided by The Few Forgotten Women Group. The first is the 1911 census where she is listed as a pupil student of housewifery at the The Lodge, Grange Road, Street in Somerset; she was fifteen years old at the time and was born in Somerton in Somerset. [1]

The second record is from the Minutes 1897 – 1916 of the Somerset School of Cookery and Housewifery held at the South West Heritage Trust, Somerset Heritage Centre. [2] This informs us that a meeting held on 12th April 1910 states that 'Gladys A Vincent of Kingsdon is first reserve for when a place at the school becomes available.' Two months later on 17th June 1910 it was confirmed that 'Gladys A Vincent of Kingsdon had been offered a studentship'; she would begin her studies after the summer holidays.

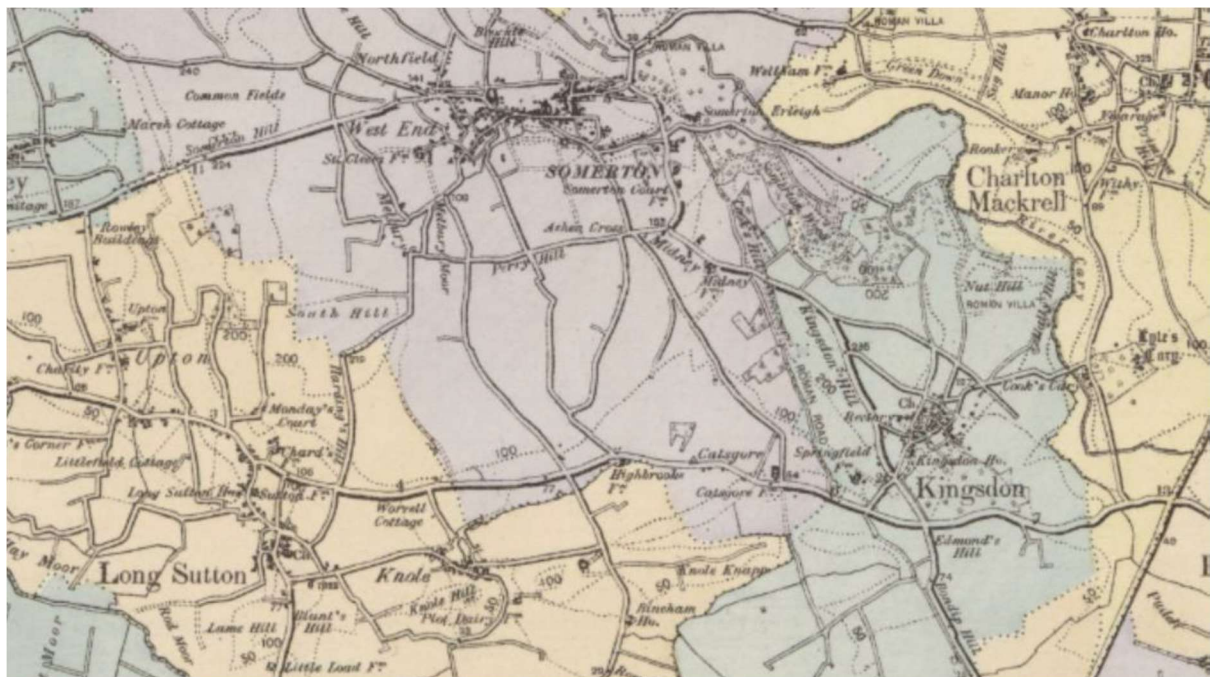
The 1911 census has been completed with the name 'Glady', however, further research confirms that her name was actually Gladys Annie Vincent.

This census provides basic information to research into the life of Gladys, she was born about 1896 in Somerton which was a parish and market town in Somerset, south west England; the town was in the civil registration district of Langport. [3]

The previous census of 1901 gives a good match to the Gladys of this research. According to the census Gladys was five years old in 1901 and her parents were Henry and Emily Vincent. The family lived in Kingsdon, though Gladys and her mother were born in neighbouring Somerton; her father and younger sister, Dorothy Maud, were born in Kingsdon. It would appear that her father Henry Vincent was from a Kingsdon family as his mother, Sarah, and his brother, listed on the census with the family, were also born in Kingsdon. Sarah is enumerated as the widowed mother of Henry and a Frederick John Vincent the brother of Henry; therefore, Gladys also lived with her paternal grandmother and uncle.

They lived at 'Farm House', Kingsdon where Henry was a farmer and carpenter and probably Frederick worked for him, he was an agricultural labourer. It is not clear which farm house the family lived in, there are a number of named farms in and around Kingsdon. The neighbouring properties to the farm house on the enumerator's list of the 1901 census included the Post Office which provides an approximate location of where the family lived; [4] Gladys and Dorothy were both attending school and the map below shows a possible route they would have walked. [5]

Kingsdon is about two miles south east of Somerton and an ancient parish in the hundred of Somerton and also under the civil registration district of Langport. [6]



Map showing the locations of Somerton and Kingsdon, Somerset [7]

A matching birth record for Gladys shows she was born in the summer of 1895 and registered in Langford, Somerset, this is consistent with her being born about 1896 on the census returns which were completed in springtime, before Gladys's birthday. [8] Gladys's mother, Emily, is recorded for the birth and her maiden name was Cox.

Gladys's parents

There is one matching marriage record for a Henry Vincent of Somerset and Emily Cox, the Banns for the marriage were published in Kingsdon and surprisingly in Hammersmith, London, where Emily was living; though she was born in Somerton. The banns were read in both parishes in 19th and 26th January and 2nd February 1890; the marriage took place at St Peter's Church in Hammersmith on February 10th 1890. One of the witnesses, Sarah Ann Cox, was likely to be a relative of Emily's, and therefore of Gladys.

Emily was a twenty-five year old spinster with no occupation given, it could have been assumed that she was living in Hammersmith due to being in domestic service, perhaps she did and left her job in preparation for her marriage. Her address was 4, Beaver Lane which had a long terrace of large houses. Henry was a twenty-eight year old bachelor and a carpenter and wheelwright in Kingsdon. [9] [10]

According to the 1871 census Emily had a sister Sarah Ann who was eleven years older, perhaps she was working in service and Emily had joined her. However, according to the Booth's Poverty Map Beaver Lane was a mix of comfortable and poor people, with the surrounding streets of well to do people. [11] [12]

Childhood

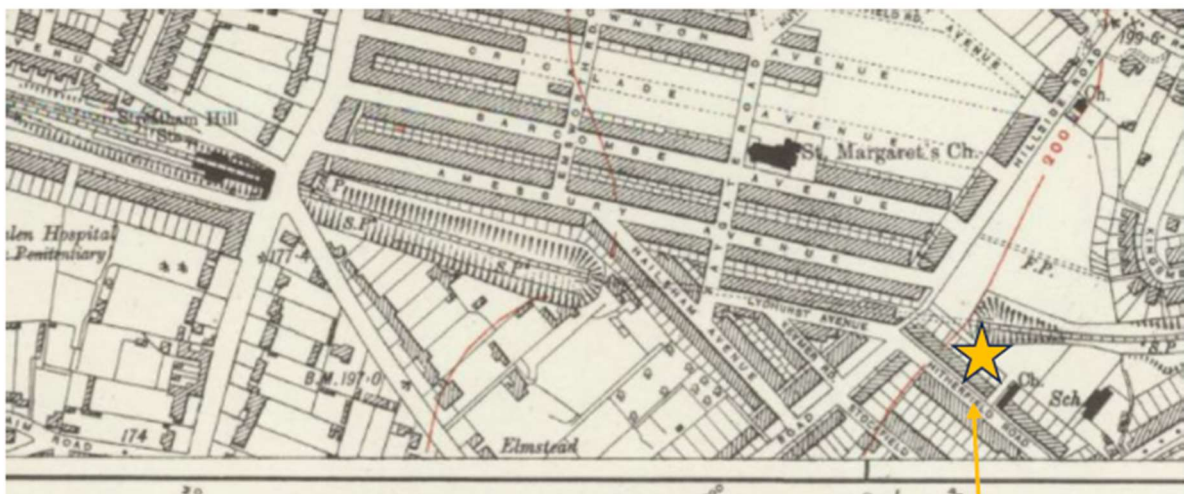
It is probable that Gladys spent all her childhood in Kingsdon with her family, attending the local school with her younger sister Dorothy; Gladys also had a younger brother, Harold Percival Thomas Vincent born about 1904.

As a young girl Gladys will have been aware of a tragic and brutal incident that occurred in her village. On 15th June 1909 Mr and Mrs Beel, of the post office neighbouring Gladys's home, were woken in the night by Lily Chapple who reported that she had been brutally attacked by her father. Lily was four years older than Gladys and they would have been at school together. The police and doctor were called from Somerton, Lily had multiple injuries to her head and had been hit by a hammer; Lily's uncle and residents of Kingsdon found the father had drowned himself in the water well. Gladys's father, Henry Vincent, was a member of the jury at the inquest and assisted as a bearer at the simple funeral, it would have been a huge incident in the village and even at five years of age Gladys will have been aware of the impact on her school mate, Lily. [13] (N.B. Lily married and had her own children, she died in 1979 in Henley on Thames and left probate of the equivalent of £160,000 today.) [14]

Gladys goes to London

Aged about fourteen years and perhaps influenced by her mother, Emily, who had lived in Hammersmith, Gladys left Somerset and went to London. In January 1910 a newspaper article reports that Gladys A Vincent gained a Junior Domestic Scholarship from Battersea Polytechnic and her address was given as Hitherfield Road. [15]

Hitherfield Road with Victorian terrace houses is in Streatham Hill which is about 4 miles from Battersea, it is likely that Gladys will have travelled to the polytechnic by bus or tram. There was a large electric tram depot in Streatham Hill in 1904 therefore this would be a useful means of transport for Gladys. [16] Comparing the map, below, of 1920 with a 1898 map of the area it would appear that the time Gladys lived here was a time of residential development and there were less streets of houses in 1910.



Hitherfield Road [17]

In 1894 the Battersea Training School of Domestic Economy opened as part of Battersea Polytechnic Institute, the polytechnic received a grant from London County Council for the domestic economy teacher training school. At the time of opening there were 11 students which grew to when accommodation was opened, this may have been on Hitherfield Road where Gladys lived; the year 5 Jude Rhodes

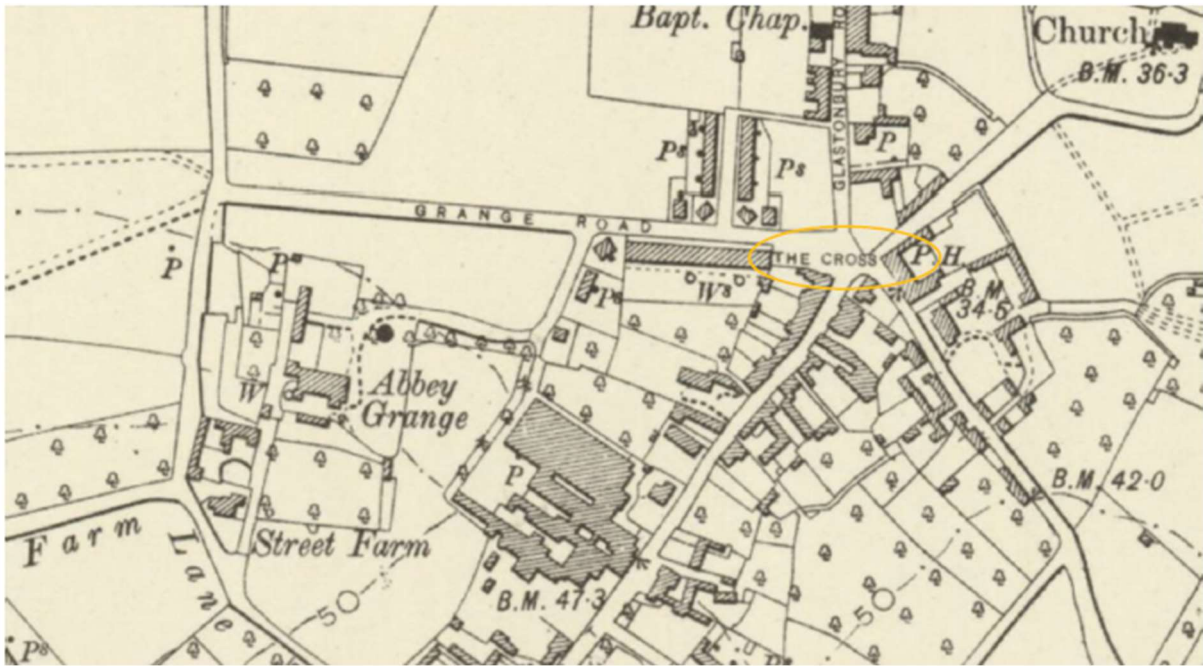
after she was at the school a hall of residence opened to accommodate the students. Records for the school from 1892 are held at London South Bank University Archives Centre, reference: GB 2110 BCE [18]

Gladys moves back to Somerset from London

As mentioned earlier, Gladys was attending The Somerset School of Cookery and Housewifery in 1911. It would appear that having received her training in Battersea that Gladys then continued her studies in Street, Somerset.

The Somerset School of Cookery and Housewifery, in Street, was established in 1897 to train young women for domestic service at Abbey Grange, also known as the Grange, which was owned by William Clark, shoe manufacturer. The Grange had been owned, until 1539, by the Glastonbury Abbey Estate which is why it was known as Abbey Grange. [19]

Grange Road led off from The Cross where Glastonbury Road, High Street, Somerton Road and Church Road also led to The Cross, this will no doubt have been a busy area of Street but Gladys was used to the streets of London. [20]



The move from London to Street brought Gladys back to her home county of Somerset and only about 5 miles from where she had grown up and where her family still lived in Kingsdon. Perhaps she enjoyed returning to Somerset or she may have found London an exciting contrast to her childhood home environment.

According to the 1911 census when Gladys was at the school there were 19 pupils, predominantly from Somerset. In 1912 the places were given to 25 girls and another 12 were put on the reserve list. Courses were originally of 6 months duration then extended to one year, from 1904 some girls studied into a second year. It is not known how long Gladys stayed at The Somerset School of Cookery and Housewifery, it closed only a few years later in 1916. [21]

The Somerset County Education Secretary wrote an article in the newspaper in March 1912 which provides a good insight into the year Gladys spent in Street:

'.....There are 30 studentships open to girls of good character and upbringing who are not under the age of 13, and each of these studentships carries with it free board and lodging and tuition for a school year at The Somerset School of Housewifery at the Grange, Street. The only expense to which parents are put is the cost of a modest outfit of clothes and any travelling expenses that may be incurred. It's object is not the training of teachers, but to give girls such practical knowledge as will make them more useful in their parents' homes, or will enable them to enter the more skilled branches of domestic service, and will also be helpful to them when, later on, they have homes of their own. The pupils at the School of Housewifery receive practical instruction from well-qualified teachers in cookery, laundry work, general housework, and dress-cutting and dressmaking of a simple kind. Every care is taken of the health of the pupils, and abundant provision is made for suitable recreation. Each pupil is required to attend regularly on Sundays at the place of worship selected by her parents or guardian.' [25]

It is not known what Gladys did after leaving the school in Street and hopefully she completed her studies and became qualified in domestic service.

While Gladys was in Street in 1911 her family were still living in Kingsdon. Kingsdon village history provides an excellent map resource which identifies the location of the farm where the family lived, this is indicated on the map below and identifies the proximity of the Post Office and home of the Beel family, referred to earlier. [22] [23] [24]

30 Kingsdon



Gladys returned to the family home in Kingsdon by 1921, it is likely that she either returned after leaving the school in Street or that she returned later to help to look after her mother and the home. Her mother, Emily, died on 15th May 1917, aged fifty-three, and the digital image of Emily's death certificate gives the cause of death as chronic nephritis, cardiac dilatation and dropsy; this means that Emily will have been quite unwell for a long time with heart failure and she will have relied on Gladys to assist her. [26] [27]

Tragically, Gladys's younger brother, Harold, died two years after their mother on 10th October 1919 due to septicaemia from wounds following a threshing machine accident in Kingsdon, he was sixteen years of age. [28] [29]

It is likely that during World War 1 Gladys was at home assisting her parents and that Henry would have stayed in his work due to farming being a necessity to feed the population.

The next information for Gladys is from the 1921 census, four years after her mother died and two years since Harold had died. She was continuing to live at home, still at 30 Kingsdon, with her father, Henry, and was recorded as the Housekeeper; the skills she learnt at Battersea and Street will have been extremely helpful as a twenty-five year old running a farmhouse. Henry was still running the farm and working as a wheelwright, there were only Henry and Gladys living at home and Gladys was unmarried. [30]

It is assumed that Gladys continued to live with her father until his death, no relevant marriage records for her have been located. Her father, Henry, died in 1937 and Gladys was present at his death; they are both recorded on the digital death certificate image as living at North Town Villa, Kingsdon, North

Town is the area of the village where they had lived on the farm. Henry died aged seventy five years from bronchitis due to influenza. [31] [32]

Gladys's sister Dorothy Maud married James Darton in 1926 and is found in 1939 with him and a child in Plymouth. [33] [34]

In 1939 Gladys was still in Kingsdon and unmarried living alone at the family home of 30 Kingsdon, she was in paid domestic work. It would appear that Gladys had devoted most of her life helping her parents and utilising her housewifery skills, she was in familiar surroundings and the Beel family continued to be her neighbours. [35]

Gladys died at her home on 1st January 1955 aged fifty nine years from heart failure and pneumonia, her nephew, Dorothy's son, recorded the death. [36] [37] There does not appear to be a will or probate record to be able to draw a conclusion to the life of Gladys.

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