

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in March 2023, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who appear in the 1901 census for St. Joseph's Inebriate Reformatory, Ashford, Middlesex and Farmfield Reformatory for Inebriate Women, Horley, Surrey.

Louisa Mason's Story

Louisa Mason is enumerated in the 1901 Census as a patient in the Farmfield Inebriate's Home, Charlwood, Surrey. She is apparently 30 years old and works as a domestic servant, having been born in Ilford, Essex (mistranscribed on Ancestry as Alford)¹.

According to the Farmfield ledger, Louisa arrived on 5th October 1900, having been committed for 3 years from Thames court. I've been unable to trace any further details of her offences, but the description page of the Farmfield record lists 14 previous convictions for drunkenness, one for prostitution and nine for other misdemeanours – but none that count as crime. She has been

¹ [Ancestry.co.uk - 1901 England Census](https://www.ancestry.co.uk)

imprisoned seven times before and had 17 'other sentences' passed. The present conviction is for 'Drunk and riotous behaviour' and she is described as miserable, dirty and ragged on admission, but healthy and quietly behaved. Dr Williamson has examined her and given her a clean bill of health; her 'Intemperate habits' are apparently frequent periods of a few days, she is quiet under intoxication and 'not violent as a rule' and her liquor of choice is whiskey & malt liquor (sic).

So, how did Louisa come to such a pass? The notes in the section of the register for the history of her case says that she is a prostitute, one of three illegitimate children brought up by her grandmother – sent to service, situation not kept – refused admission to her house by an uncle – taken up by the police and sent to a refuge – a situation found for her, but not kept – was taken home by some girls & an immoral life started leading to drink. This is obviously Louisa's version of her history, condensed by whoever was taking the notes.

I have traced Louisa's birth on 8th April 1868²; her mother was Ann Mason, who was around fifteen years old, and there is no father named. She was born in Barkingside, Ilford, Essex and baptised in the Holy Trinity Church there on 6th September 1868³. In the 1871 census, Ann and Louisa are both living with Ann's parents, Thomas and Sarah Mason in Fairlop Place, Barkingside⁴. By the time of the 1881 census, Louisa is still there but her mother had married Lennard Hersom⁵ in Holborn in the Apr/May/Jun quarter of 1872 and given birth to a son, Leonard Hersom in 1873 and another, William, in 1875. I

² [England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837-1915 - Ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk)

³ [Essex, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1921 - Ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk)

⁴ [Ancestry.co.uk - 1871 England Census](https://www.ancestry.co.uk)

⁵ [Ancestry.co.uk - England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837-1915](https://www.ancestry.co.uk)

haven't found anything to indicate whether or not Louisa went to live with her mother and stepfather, but in December 1880 Ann died of typhoid aged just 27⁶ and in the 1881 census the two boys are with their father⁷ but Louisa is with her grandparents⁸.

There clearly was some kind of relationship between the half-siblings, though, because Leonard Hurzon (sic) is recorded as Louisa's brother in Farmfield's register some twenty years later, at the address he is living at in the 1901 census⁹. I can't find Louisa in the 1891 census. She is recorded in Farmfield's register as a domestic servant so she may have moved around; somewhere along the line, she tells them that she fell into bad company and acquired a couple of dozen convictions for drunkenness and other misdemeanours so she may well not have been anxious to attract official notice.

The Farmfield register says that Louisa was licensed as a kitchen maid first on 5th February 1902, but could not get on with the cook in that household and asked to be brought back to Farmfield and another situation found. On 16th August 1902 she went to Mrs Humphreys in Brynhyfryd, an area of Swansea – Farmfield appears to have spread their net wide in trying to settle their inmates into a more regular lifestyle. The register tells us that Louisa's general conduct while at Farmfield was excellent and updates at 3, 6 and 9 months all say 'Doing well'. She was discharged on 4th October 1903 and the last entries in the register simply say 'No news of her' and are dated 1907 and 1909.

⁶ [England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837-1915 - Ancestry.co.uk](#)

⁷ [Ancestry.co.uk - 1881 England Census](#)

⁸ [Ancestry.co.uk - 1881 England Census](#)

⁹ [Ancestry.co.uk - 1901 England Census](#)

After leaving Farmfield, we don't see Louisa in the official record until the 1911 census¹⁰. At that time she is living at 2 Garden St, Stepney and described as a visitor in the household of Frederick Stout, who is nine years her junior and described as married, though his wife is not in the household. Louisa is described as a laundress; Frederick is a china and glass dealer born in Whitechapel.

Ten years later, Frederick and Louisa are still living together¹¹ and now she is described as Frederick's wife, though I haven't been able to trace a marriage. They are living at 5 Reform Place and Louisa is described as working at home duties, so perhaps it is not unreasonable to think that Louisa now has a more settled life. Frederick is a dealer in sundries and a street vendor – there probably isn't very much money. However, in 1912 Louisa spent some time in Bromley House workhouse in Stepney¹², where she is described as temporarily disabled and a lunatic – she was admitted on 3rd June and was discharged on 3rd September 1912 to Bushby Home, Hastings¹³. Bushby Home seems to have been a convalescent home¹⁴ and I haven't yet been able to find any records for Louisa's stay there.

Louisa died in December 1925¹⁵; her death was registered in the name of Mason in the GRO records and her burial is recorded on 31st December as

¹⁰ [Ancestry.co.uk - 1911 England Census](https://www.ancestry.co.uk/census/1911-england-wales)

¹¹ [1921 Census of England & Wales Image | findmypast.co.uk](https://www.findmypast.co.uk/census/1921-england-wales)

¹² [Ancestry.co.uk - London, England, Workhouse Admission and Discharge Records, 1764-1921](https://www.ancestry.co.uk/census/1912-england-wales)

¹³ [Ancestry.co.uk - London, England, Workhouse Admission and Discharge Records, 1764-1921](https://www.ancestry.co.uk/census/1912-england-wales)

¹⁴ [When schools and hospitals populated Holmesdale Gardens | SussexWorld \(sussexexpress.co.uk\)](https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk/news/when-schools-and-hospitals-populated-holmesdale-gardens)

¹⁵ [Ancestry.co.uk - England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916-2007](https://www.ancestry.co.uk/census/1925-england-wales)

Louisa Mason otherwise Stout¹⁶; her last address is Bancroft Lodge, Bancroft Road, Mile End, which was a workhouse. The workhouse records are held at London Metropolitan Archive so there is a chance of a little more information to come in the future.

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Sources

Farmfield Reformatory for Inebriate Women, Horley, Surrey RG13 629 folios 151-152

¹⁶ [Ancestry.co.uk - London, England, City of London and Tower Hamlets Cemetery Registers, 1841-1966](https://www.ancestry.co.uk/collections/london-england-city-of-london-and-tower-hamlets-cemetery-registers-1841-1966)