

# *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.*

## **Ellen White's Story**

Ellen was born in approximately 1863 in Birmingham, Warwickshire, England.

There is only one Ellen White, born in Birmingham, in 1863 (searched +/- 1yr) on the 1871 census. She is 8 years old and living with her parents, Thomas White (37) a Silversmith and Martha White (36), and 2 brothers George Thomas White (17) a Silversmith and Frank White (6) a Scholar, at 28 Ingleby Street, Ladywood, Birmingham. All were born in Birmingham.

Birth and Baptism Registrations for the children:

George Thomas White, birth registered Q4 1854 at Birmingham: Mother = Brown. Vol 6D, Pg 185. Baptised Birmingham 29<sup>th</sup> October 1854. Mother = Martha, Father = Thomas White.

Ellen Elizabeth White, birth registered Q1 1863 at Birmingham. Mother = Brown. Vol 6D, Pg 226. Baptised Birmingham 1<sup>st</sup> March 1863. Mother = Martha, Father = Thomas White.

Frank White, birth registered Q3 1864 at Birmingham: Mother = Brown. Vol 6D, Pg 204.

There is a marriage index for Thomas White and Martha Brown in Q1 1854, Kings Norton, Worcestershire. Vol 6C, Pg 486.

In 1881 the family were living at 98 Park Road, Birmingham but George and Ellen aren't with them. At the address are Thomas White (46) a Silversmith; Martha White his wife (46); Thomas Brown (74) father-in-law, a widower and Milkman, born in Clent, Worcs; Frank White (16) single and a Silversmith; and Thomas White (4) a scholar and their grandson. A search of the civil registration birth indexes shows 5 people named Thomas White registered in Birmingham in 1877 (searched +/- 1yr). A further search of marriage records would help determine who Thomas' parents might be (possibly Ellen's brother George who is now approx. 27 years old?)

I can't accurately locate George or Ellen in this census (Ellen noted on her admission to Farmfield that she had left her parents at the age of 16).

I can't accurately locate any of the family in the 1891 census.

Since Ellen was prosecuted at Southwark Court, I tried to find her in the Southwark area. There is a record of an Ellen White, born in 1863, being admitted to the St George's Mint Street workhouse in Southwark on March 9<sup>th</sup> 1880. The notes look as if they say she was in labour, and an 'infant' is listed under her name. There is a partial address, but I can't make it out. She was discharged, with her child, still being referred to as 'infant', on March 24<sup>th</sup> 1880, at her own request. She is shown as 17 years old and the infant is 14 days old. I can't locate a birth registration for the infant. There are too many babies registered with White as both their surname and the mother's surname but none of them are for St Olave's, Southwark, or St Saviour's, Southwark registration district. Of course, this may not be our Ellen, and she may have registered the baby elsewhere or under the father's surname.

Ellen entered Farmfield Reformatory for a 1-year term on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1900 at the age of 37, having previously lived at 43 Halfield Street, Blackfriars. She was committed at Southwark Court for "whilst drunk being guilty of riotous behaviour". On entry to Farmfield she was healthy, weighed 129lbs, was 5ft tall with hazel eyes, light brown hair, and a fresh complexion. She was dirty and "very glad to be made clean" and her behaviour on admission was "very nice and good". There were no signs of Smallpox, Syphilis or Scrofula, though she had a vaccination mark and a scar on the top of her head. She was respectably born and brought up, could read and write fairly well, and had been privately educated. She left her parents at the age of 16 and had taken to drink at the age of 34 as a result of immorality and the man she had been living with, as his wife, for many years, having left her and married another woman. She was single, living alone and had birthed one child which had died. She didn't have a history of insanity, or tobacco or drug abuse though she was

continuously and regularly cheerfully drunk on beer when not in prison. She had 5 convictions for drunkenness and 1 for other misdemeanours and had served 2 imprisonments and 4 other sentences. Her conduct whilst at Farmfield was excellent and she had no punishments during her stay there.

The 1901 census records Ellen at Farmfield. She was 38 years old, born approximately 1863, in Birmingham. She had no occupation noted and from her admittance record it seems she had never had one.

Ellen was discharged from Farmfield on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1901. This was 1 week before her sentence was complete as she had a position to take, as a general servant, in Manchester. She was reported as doing well at 3 months and at 6 months after her discharge.

There is a Habitual Criminal record for an Ellen White, age 46, of no fixed abode, convicted at Greenwich on 23rd November 1908 for prostitution and drunkenness but as she is said to have very light hair and grey eyes it doesn't sound like our Ellen (light brown hair and hazel eyes). However, she was 5ft tall and committed to an inebriate's reformatory for 3 years so who knows (see below)?

The 1911 census shows that Ellen is back at Farmfield. She is 49 years old and a general domestic servant. Her admission and discharge records for this stay would hopefully shed some light on what happened to her.

I can't reliably trace Ellen in the 1921 Census or the 1939 Register.

There are many court, legal, prison and workhouse records in the name of Ellen White but none that I can specifically tie to our Ellen. There are newspaper references to an Ellen White being drunk and disorderly in Wigan, but I can't tie the this to our Ellen either.

**© Polly Lewis March 2023**

## Sources

- 1871 Census 28 Ingleby Street, Birmingham, Warwickshire RG10 3093 folio 48, via <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC/1871/0019901416>
- 1901 Census Farmfield Reformatory for Inebriate Women, Horley, Surrey RG13 629 folios 151-152.
- 1911 Census The Farmfield Reformatory of The London County Council for Inebriates, Horley, Surrey RG14 3243, via <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC/1911/RG14/03243/0010/11>
- England Births & Baptisms 1538-1975 via [https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=R\\_954815072](https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=R_954815072) for George T White [https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=R\\_954812958](https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=R_954812958) for Ellen E White
- Farmfield admission report 1900 – provided by the Few Forgotten Women team
- General Register Office via <https://www.gov.uk/general-register-office>
- Habitual Criminals and Police Gazettes, 1834-1934 via [https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/61812/images/mepo6\\_082\\_00118?pid=235714](https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/61812/images/mepo6_082_00118?pid=235714)
- Saint George's Workhouse, Mint Street, Southwark Register, 1879-1880 (Admission) via <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/discoveryui-content/view/7694983:60391?ssrc=pt&tid=190113189&pid=232472924194>
- Saint George's Workhouse, Mint Street Register, Southwark 1879-1880 (Discharge) via <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/discoveryui-content/view/7695264:60391?ssrc=pt&tid=190113189&pid=232472924194>