



A Few Forgotten Women

and some there be that have no memorial

The Girls in the Cripples' Hospital

One of the categories for our Forgotten Women is “Disability” and I came across a connection to it in my own research when looking for a Great Aunt. One of my favourite ancestors is my Great Grandmother, Mary Yale. To say the least she led a colourful life. From the 1911 census I discovered she had a daughter, Mary Elizabeth, born 3 years after her husband had died. (From later research I think that Mary Elizabeth is more likely to be the daughter of my Great Grandmother’s eldest daughter, also Mary Elizabeth) however at the time I believed her to be my Great Grandmother’s daughter. I was eager to find several people in the 1921 census and Mary Elizabeth, born 1902 was one of them. I found her as a kitchen maid at the Cripples’ Hospital in Hartshill, Stoke on Trent.

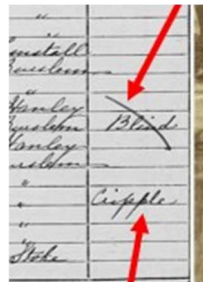
16	Sonnie Williams	32	F	W	Widow	Widow	Widow	Widow	Widow
17	Mary Yale	19	F	W	Widow	Widow	Widow	Widow	Widow
18	Annabelle King	24	F	W	Widow	Widow	Widow	Widow	Widow

Before I go any further it is important to point out at this point that many things change over time and how people referred to disability is one of them. The words and language used in the past are often felt to be offensive today. However I will be using the words used in the past, even though today we would not use them. The reason being you cannot change the past and if you do so, history is sanitized and lessons not learned.

Not only the words used were offensive but many of the attitudes. Even as late as the 1930s John Huxley expressed these opinions when he wrote "What are we going to do? Every defective man, woman and child is a burden. Every defective is an extra body for the nation to feed and clothe, but produces little or nothing in return". This however was the attitude which those with disability had to face.

There was the converse, as there were those wishing to change things, albeit slowly. All the records we use for family history were compiled at the time for certain purposes, certainly not for future family historians and it is important to understand why and by whom they were composed. Those compiling the censuses from 1841 for several decades had a medical background and from 1851 questions began to be included

regarding disability, however the terms employed, to our ears left a lot to be desired; lunatic, imbecile, idiot, including deaf and dumb and words connected to incarceration such as asylum and inmate.



So what was 19 year old Mary Elizabeth doing at the Cripples Hospital? Had she answered this advert for a kitchen maid in the Staffordshire Sentinel of 11th Oct 1920 I hadn't come across the Cripples' Hospital before and decided it might be an interesting rabbit hole to explore.

KITCHENMAID Wanted.—Apply, Matron, Cripples' Hospital, Hartshill.

What better way to start than with the evidence in front of me, the 1921 census? There were 4 pages of people registered as staying in the establishment on census night, 19th June 1921. (The census had been delayed due to strikes) There were 54 in total, 14 were medical staff, including the Matron, Miss

Denman and 3 probationers. There were just 5 domestic staff, which included Mary Elizabeth and there were 32 patients. Miss Denman was aged 41 and came locally from Oakamore, however the medical staff had been drawn from all over the country and the outpatient's sister was from the Bahamas. Her title indicated that there were not only resident patients but also those who lived in their own homes who came in for treatment. Newspaper reports also confirmed this that during the General Strike of 1926 local people had volunteered their cars to take patients from their homes to the hospital as the trams and buses were on strike.

They appeared to have the most up to date equipment with a radiographer so they had an X ray machine. There were 4 masseurs who were all female. From this it may be reasonable to deduce that although there were only 5 live in domestic staff there were probably also those who came in daily

Looking at the in-patient children it was fairly evenly split between boys, 17 and girls, 15, all being youngsters. The boys aged between 2 and 15, the girls 2 to 16. From the numbers it is obvious that there was no discrimination between girls and boys to be admitted to Longfields. Longfields being the name

of the original house. All except one boy, who was from Glastonbury, were from the surrounding areas.

So why was this a separate hospital? In past centuries provision for disabled people, of all types, had been cruel and frightening. Those with deaf and blind disabilities were some of the first to be acknowledged. Then in the 19th century buildings for the disabled “boomed”. Historic England describes it as, “Outside many towns and cities the high walls and chimneys of new county pauper lunatic asylums began to dominate the view. The asylum was something distant to marvel at, but not somewhere many 19th century people would ever want to live”. By 1900 more than 100,000 people termed idiots and lunatics were incarcerated in 120 county pauper asylums. 10,000 more were in workhouses. Cripple was a term used to describe physically disabled people until the 2nd half of the 20th century (creple was used in the medieval period).

The treatment in the 19th century of all types of disability was regarded as a financial drain on society. Those who were mentally ill slowly began to be segregated from those with other disabilities who often stayed in the community or some even begged on the streets still. On the other hand there were

those who fought for better conditions and a group called the Guild of Brave Poor Things was formed who described themselves as a group to “make life sweet for the blind and crippled folk of all ages. They had a coat of arms which was a sword crossed with a crutch and a motto “Happy in my lot”.

Some people were beginning to recognise disability. In 1848 a religious advice pamphlet observed “Some boys laugh at poor cripples when they see them in the street. Sometimes we meet a man with only one eye or one arm or one leg, or who has a humpback. How ought we to feel when we see them? We ought to pity them”. Historic England describes the Victorian attitude to disability as “a combination of fear, pity and discomfort”

The blind and deaf had for some time been regarded differently from those with other disabilities and in 1838 the London Society for Teaching the Blind to Read was formed and in 1866 provision for further education of the blind was introduced and Worcester College for the Blind was opened. In the 1890s local authorities were empowered to set up day schools for blind, deaf and defective (a person described today as a person with

learning disability) and epileptic children. By 1899 there were 43 schools in London alone teaching 2000 children.

The Victorian era saw a rise in charitable activity and by the end of the century there were many organizations providing community or institutional services to disabled people.

Provision was beginning to be made for all kinds of disability which received further demands with returning soldiers from the 1st WW who had dreadful injuries for which plastic surgery and physical aids, prosthetics, were rapidly developed. There were new exercises and fitness approaches. Once the person had received treatment they may have been aided in finding employment some in “sheltered” employment but some in the main stream.

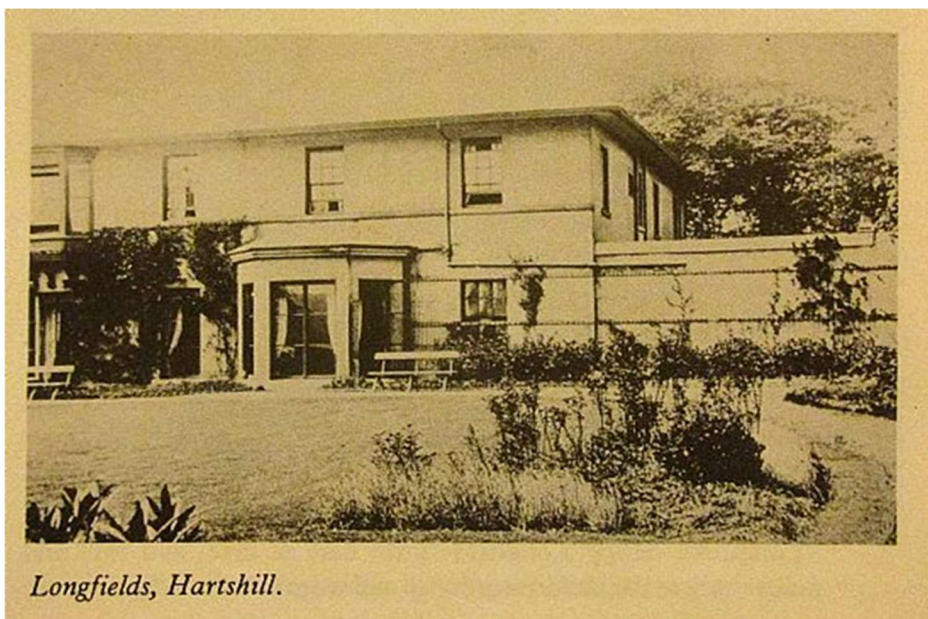
Between 1900 and 1945 up to half a million children had physical disability or sensory impairment mainly due to poverty and disease. From 1907 compulsory examinations in schools highlighted the extent of physical disability and sensory impairment particularly among working class children. Many disabilities were caused by such diseases as poliomyelitis, rickets, marasmus and TB. There were no vaccinations and many working class families could not afford

specialist equipment or treatment. Provision for education was somewhat mixed. The 1918 education act required education for disabled children meaning everyone had a right to education. Some of the schools already established were harsh but new approaches were being found with “Sunshine Homes” which looked after the blind and “open air schools” were believed to improve children’s health. The Hartshill Cripples’ Hospital followed this principle.

Several events and people fortuitously came together to initiate this new venture. The Potters’ Cripples’ Guild was founded in 1900 by the Dutchess of Sutherland (from Trentham Hall). Unlike many institutions where women and girls were excluded, the workshops for the Cripples Guild were established in a central position in the Potteries where crippled boys *and* girls were taught and employed in metal work, printing and flower making so girls were taught the same skills as the boys. The Dutchess did not want the idea of supporting the disabled to be regarded as charity and so in 1907 she floated a limited company, “The Dutchess of Sutherland’s Crippled Guild”. It was so successful that a percentage was paid to shareholders every year. Work produced by the disabled

pupils was sold in a shop in New Bond Street in London. The workers also shared in the bonuses and profits of the company.

In a report 6 years after the setting up of the company the emphasis, it must be said, was on the boys. The girls report was limited to one paragraph where they had mostly been found employment in local factories, they were probably less inclined to set up their own businesses and women were still thought of being the home-maker, not the breadwinner. There was a convalescent home with connection to the North Staffordshire Infirmary but severe cases were referred to the Salop Convalescent Surgical Home in Baschurch. The age limit for the society was 16 and there was a waiting list. Details of how the organization was supported were listed in the report.



Longfields, Hartshill.

Longfield Cottage, which was situated opposite the Noah's Ark public House in Hartshill, had been built about 1800. The owner, Mrs Craik, sold the cottage in 1831 to Herbert Minton (famous pottery manufacturer) who expanded it by the purchase of nearby Longfield House. This estate was in turn sold to the Cripples' Aid Society in 1918. Besides the house there were extensive grounds and gardens, both vegetable and flower gardens, exactly as advocated by the supporters of the open air cure, it overlooked the valley and was beautifully shaded by a screen of trees. There was a lawn and annexes for future expansion.

At this time support for those who were disabled was growing and was accelerated by all the soldiers returning from the 1st World War who had received such life changing injuries. The work at Baschurch initiated a national scheme of specialist establishments of which Biddulph Grange and Hartshill became part. Baschurch had been set up by a nurse, who herself was disabled because of a tubercular hip, name Agnes Hunt. It had initially been just a "collection of farm sheds". Agnes had trained at a hospital in Rhyl, North Wales where a pioneering surgeon, Sir Robert Jones was the leading teacher and surgeon. Sir Robert was a very go ahead pioneer who was

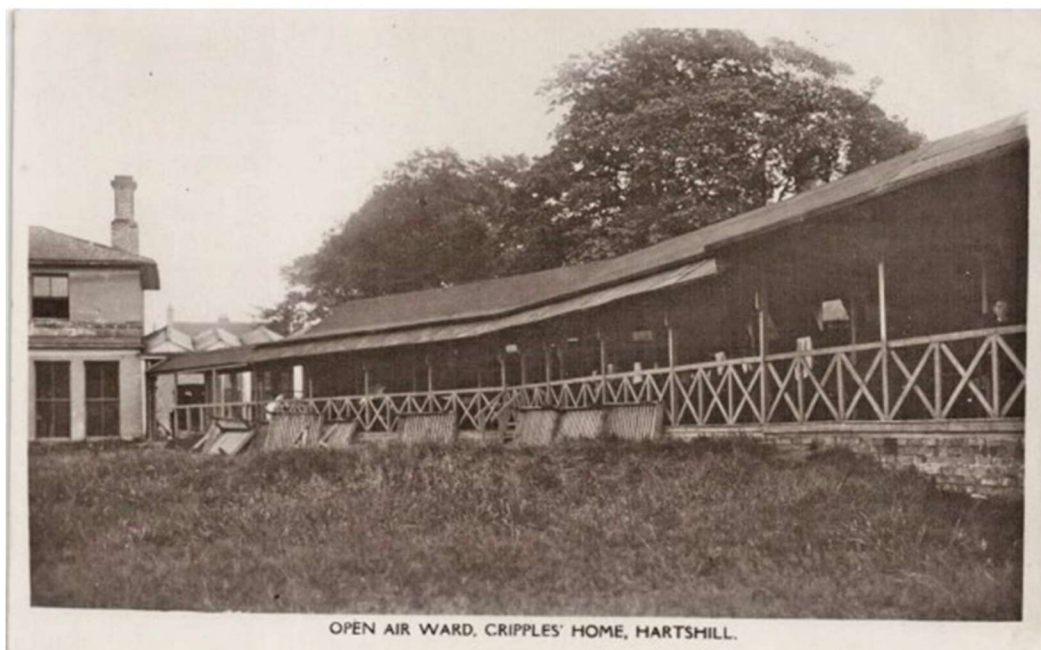
actually practising the techniques instituted by his uncle, Hugh Owen Thomas and was the leading surgeon for aiding returning soldiers who needed orthopaedic attention

Various studies from mid 19th century had shown that the diseases were more severe and less likely to be cured in the poor, as travel to obtain the recommended treatment was necessary, the travel and the treatment being beyond the reach of the poor and conditions were frequently not detected early enough. The treatment using the outdoor theories originated in Germany and although was recognized in England there was a natural antagonism to things outdoors, due to the British climate with reluctance because of causing draughts by opening windows and doors. Fresh air was the 1st component of the treatment, both by day, being outdoors and by night, with wide open windows. Initially bed rest was important but gradually exercise was introduced.

Hartshill was opened on 7th June 1918. There were fund raising activities including an annual garden party. This fund raising carried on throughout the life of the hospital and all over the district with reports of many garden parties, coffee mornings, fairs of various sorts and evening entertainments, even after

financial provisions were in place from May 1920 when the Ministry of Health gave subsidy of £180 per bed. There was a variety of types of bed for the different conditions

The girls in the hospital in Hartshill studied in outdoor classrooms, wrapped in blankets when the weather was cold, not as some institutions where clothing was not suited to the cold, some even having cotton frocks. Much of the education was craft based which was highly recommended for both physical dexterity and for mental stability. Diet was improved. Their afternoon naps were taken outside. Sir Robert regularly treated the children at Hartshill and with the participation of these influential people and the numerous activities as highlighted in many reports of fundraising the children were well cared for.



Prior to the first world war the equipment needed by those with disability was very expensive. The horrors of the war and those who had survived but with horrific injuries lead to re thinking of attitudes to disability. Artificial limbs began to be reduced in price. The families of the children in the hospital still probably could not afford to purchase the equipment. Equipment designed by Sir Robert's uncle would have been used for the girls.

Looking at some of the girls recorded in 1921 gives hints that without this organization these children would have been suffering and isolated as several did not appear to come from wealthy families who would have afforded the treatment and equipment. There was always a waiting list. Many children were also treated as out patients.

The information in the 1921 census gives their name, age and where they were born, however as it was the hospital filling in the schedule it may have been where they were living. All 15 girl patients came from the local area, within a 15 mile radius. About half were exposed to the polluted atmosphere of the Potteries in the urban environment, the rest lived in the more rural outskirts of the area. The Cripples' Guild had been

established in part to aid those from less privileged backgrounds. Looking at the girls they were from a range of family circumstances.

5 year old Joan Bell came from Stone about 9 miles distant. It was a more rural area but beginning to be developed. Joan had been born on the 1st Aug 1916, her father, William Edward, actually coming from Warwick, his occupation a bricklayer who had married Mary Catherine Harris from Stone. It is difficult to ascertain if William served in the military during the 1st WW as there are several William Edward Bells however he obviously was conscious of his civic duty by standing as a candidate in the Stone Urban District Council in March 1914. In 1921 the family were living in 72 Oulton Rd in Stone, Joan's 4 siblings being at home while she was in the hospital. All the family were still together at the same address in Stone in 1939 and Joan was now back at home and employed along with her brother William in one of the 2 main industries in Stone, shoe making, the other being brewing. Her father had been promoted to foreman of the works while brother Peter was a school teacher and Thomas a clock and watch maker.

Lizzie Griffiths was 16 when she was recorded in the 1921 census in the Cripples' Hospital. She had been born early in 1904 in Newcastle under Lyme. Her father was a coal miner underground and had married Hannah Elizabeth Betts on Christmas Day 1895. Lizzie had 4 siblings. Soon after being recorded in 1921 census Lizzie entered a secretarial career being recorded in the newspapers as passing examinations at various levels.

Hilda Farmer was 8 when the 1921 census was taken. She was recording as coming from Hanley. Her father was probably another coal miner, Fred Farmer born in 1883 and married in 1904 to Emily Parkin. Hilda was still in the Cripples' Hospital in 1926 when she was a signatory to a letter to the Sentinel newspapers

Hilda Pendleton was only 4 when her father, John, a general labourer, had died in 1909 at the early age of 37. Her mother, Jane, nee Farrington had only recently given birth to Hilda's brother, Samuel and to make ends meet was a washing woman. Jane remarried in Sept 1/4 1913 to electronic crane driver at the foundry, Edward Taylor. When Hilda was a patient in Hartshill in 1921 the family lived at 1 Pump St in Stoke, still not well off

as Jane was a char lady at the Queen's Hotel. However by 1939 Hilda had established herself in a small sweet shop business. There is no added notation by crossing out a maiden name and inserting a married name in the 1939 Register so Hilda probably did not marry. (In the 1939 Register many women's names are crossed through and another name inserted. This usually indicated her married name and in some cases a date, probably when the name was altered but usually quite near the marriage date)

Some staff and some domestic staff did fall into the category of girls. Probationer, Edith Agnes Burston was aged 19 in 1921 but was born in Worcestershire. Her father Rowland, was a widower. He worked as a gas maker. Looking at the places of birth of the children it is obvious that the family did move around, Rowland had been born in the Ipstones area, his late wife, Elizabeth had come from Knowsley in Lancashire while the children had been born in several villages around Ipstones but 2 including Agnes had been born in Worcestershire, the family returning to Cheadle where youngest son, John, had been born. Edith remained at Longfields for several years progressing from probationer to sister.

Ivy Shelley was already recorded as a nurse in the 1921 census, even though she was only 19. She came from not far away in Blythe Bridge, sadly her father, Arthur, 37, who had started his career as a solicitor's clerk and graduated to owning a firm which dealt in insurance and legal work for the local Joules Brewery, died when Ivy was just 4 on 26th Dec 1908 leaving the sum of £2,603/5/-. There was only one sibling living with Ivy and her mother in 1911 although mother, Cecilia, recorded that she had had 3 children. Life for the family had been fairly eventful with Ivy's father, Arthur, being a solicitor, being involved with various court appearances, even himself being accused of assault. There was a possible marriage for Ivy in 1925 to James D,L, Goode.

Edith Agnes, the probationer, nurse Ivy Shelley and my Great Aunt, Mary Elizabeth, were all of a similar age and Edith and Ivy both came from the Cheadle area, perhaps it was one of them who introduced Mary to James Millward, a collier who also came from the Cheadle area. James worked at the Foxfield Mining company. Mary and James married on 1st Aug 1925, with witnesses, Francis William Beathy and Lizzie Millward. They had 2 children, Ivy, born 28th Sept 1927 and Katherine

born 5th Nov 1929. I have searched for DNA matches but have not been lucky - yet.

As I have mentioned there were frequent reports in the newspapers of fund raising events. However it was whilst looking for any reports of patients when I came across Hilda Farmer. It was in June 1926 and that meant the Hilda had been a patient at Longfields for at least 4 years. Hilda had put her name to a letter of thanks for an event which was given a very lengthy report in the local paper, The Staffordshire Sentinel. The letter of thanks was to the numerous ladies and gentlemen who had taken the patients to Alton Towers.

Alton Towers today is widely known as a theme park with stomach churning rides and attractions. In the 1920s it was also open to the public but it was a serene beauty spot favoured for its beautiful grounds, lake and architecture. The Sentinel recorded everything in detail that had taken place on the 26th June 1926. Nearly 200 children, girls and boys, all with disabilities and accompanied by several members of staff including Edith Agnes Burston in her capacity as sister were taken on the outing.

They were conveyed on their journey by 100 private cars. 1926 was the time of the general strike and the children who were outpatients at Longfields usually travelled from their homes by tram or bus, however these appointments would have been impossible had it not been for the generosity of many local ladies and gentlemen who owned cars and ferried the patients to and fro from home to hospital during the period of the strike. They may have been taken to their appointments in the luxury cars but they had probably never been taken out for “a country jaunt” in one. The local people had happily provided the transport.

Local businesses also had made a contribution as the cars were decorated with flags and colourful bunting provided by firms locally, as were the coloured fancy hats worn by all the children. The Sentinel declared that “North Staffordshire has probably never before known such a remarkable procession as that formed by the cars which conveyed the children to Alton”.

The cars were headed by a number of outriders on motor cycles who were members of the North Staffordshire motor club.

Police motorcyclists marshalled the route and at the rear of the convoy a motor cyclist gave warning to other road users with a

notice “ Please do not pass 100 cars in front” . The whole route was lined by cheery well wishers and a cinematographer took a film of the procession.

The sun had been shining from before the children set off and was still shining brilliantly as they arrived at The Towers which was the seat of The Earls of Shrewsbury and Talbot. The mansion had the outline described by the Sentinel as a feudal castle. The children alighted onto the lawn and activities of boating on the lake, games and exploration of the grounds were followed by a picnic tea in the Towers. A gentleman with a bowler hat, which was too small, acted as an Aunty Sally and children won coppers should they dislodge his hat. The whole was accompanied by music provided by the National Reserve Prize Band who played selections of popular programmes.

All too soon it was time for the tired children to return to Longfield. They had no difficulty in finding their own car as each car had been allocated and displayed a number, which had also been written on a card and given to each child. All arrived safely back having enjoyed a very special day.



The hospital did go on to have new extensions and in 1931 a set of wonderful railings was commissioned from Gordon Mitchell Forsythe of the Burslem School of Art. There are 11 bays set between brick pillars which are each topped by a fluted cap. There are central medallions which show girls skipping, girls playing with hoops and swimming with dolphins. There are monograms which are a memorial to Viscountess Rosemary Ednam, daughter of the Duke of Sutherland, who as president of the Orthopaedic Hospital worked tirelessly to raise money for the hospital. When she died in a plane crash there was an

outpouring of sympathy in the district. The railings were spared from being confiscated to aid the war effort during the 2nd WW because of their architectural and artistic significance, sadly these are the only memory of the Cripples' Hospital and have been granted grade 2 listed status as the buildings were demolished in 1977.



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<https://postcardsfromstoke.wordpress.com/2020/02/21/the-childrens-orthopaedic-hospital-hartshill/>

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