

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in November 2024, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who were found residing or working in various homes for Fallen Women in the census returns.

Emmeline Pemberton's Story

By Shelly Matthews

On the 21st of February 1858ⁱ, a baby girl called Emmeline Pemberton was christened in the parish of St George, Birmingham, County Warwickshire. Her story is short but should at least be acknowledged.

Although not yet granted a city status, Birmingham was known for its major industrial trading and town improvements were well underway at this time which included a sewage system, clean water supplies and gas lighting. It saw huge growth and prosperity in the nineteenth century with substantial social and economical reform.

Emmeline's father, Charles Reece Pemberton lived here with his family in Summer Lane in 1861ⁱⁱ and worked as a Commercial Clerk wine worker. His wife, Ellen was originally from County Armagh in Northern Ireland and was already a mother to 3 children with a fourth child Elizabeth dying in infancy before Emmeline's birth. Ellen would go on to have 9 children in total which was not unusual at this time.

By 1871ⁱⁱⁱ, the family had moved to Aston, an inner area of Birmingham where Ellen died in 1874^{iv} when Emmeline was only 17 years old.

Two years later, Emmeline is in Solihull which is about 12 miles southeast of Birmingham, and in October 1876, Emmeline gives birth to William Pemberton with no father listed^v. It is unknown what became of William, and it would be a safe assumption that he was adopted or put in an orphanage as it is unlikely that Emmeline would have had the resources to care for a child at this time.

Her father Charles passed away in 1880^{vi} at the age of only 59 and the following year we see Emmeline in the "Birmingham Refuge for Fallen Women"^{vii}. Although it is not technically a workhouse, it is more like a shelter to provide access for women to reform their lives. Emmeline is listed as being an "Inmate of Refuge" and while we do not know how she spent her days; she would have been encouraged to pursue a life of virtuosity and rejoin the community.

Having been unable to find any marriage records for Emmeline, I did however discover her in the 1891 census^{viii}, listed as married to a John Mann. John and Emmeline were running an alehouse called "The Old Mint" at 356 Park Road in

Birmingham. Neighbours included jewellers, butchers and bicycle makers making it a popular shopping area for the local working-class people of the area. Her husband John, previously married and recently widowed would probably have provided some stability for Emmeline. At 24 years her senior, she may possibly have married him looking for guidance or as another form of “refuge”.

Unfortunately, the marriage did not last long, and Emmeline was committed to an asylum called Burntwood in Staffordshire which later became St Matthews Hospital.

She is listed as a pauper and died on the 15th of March 1898 at the age of 40.^{ix}

Sources

ⁱ Birmingham, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1813-1922 c/o Ancestry.com

ⁱⁱ 1861 England Census c/o Ancestry.com

ⁱⁱⁱ 1871 England Census c/o Ancestry.com

^{iv} England and Wales Civil Registration Death Index 1837-1915 c/o Ancestry.com

^v Warwickshire, England, Church of England Baptisms 1813-1910 c/o Ancestry

^{vi} England and Wales Civil Registration Death Index 1837-1915 c/o Ancestry.com

^{vii} 1881 England census 1881 c/o Ancestry.com

^{viii} 1891 England Census c/o Ancestry.com

^{ix} Lunacy Patients Admission Register 1846-1921 c/o Ancestry.com