

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in September 2024, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of pupils at the Royal Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Poor (later The Royal School for the Deaf), Margate, Kent and The West of England Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Exeter, Devon.

Annie Emma Spratt's Story

Annie Emma Spratt was born on 18th February 1892 in Walworth, Newington parish, London¹ to William Henry Albert Spratt and Emma Elena Spratt nee Spratt. William had been born in Kentish Town, Middlesex around 1867 while Emma Elena (baptised Emma Helena) was born in St Martin-in-the-Fields, Westminster on 01 July 1865². They were married on 08 February 1891 at St Mark's Parish Church, in Kennington, London³. He was a bachelor aged 24, a porter, the son of William Richard Spratt, coal merchant; she was a spinster, aged 25, the daughter of Henry John James Spratt, professor of music and brother of William Richard Spratt⁴. This made Annie Emma's parents first cousins, a fact later noted regularly in school records.

Annie Emma, their first child, was baptised on 22nd May 1892 at Walworth St Paul, Lorrimore Square, an Anglo-Catholic church in the parish of Newington⁵; the family's address at that time noted as Barrett Road in Newington and confirmed in the 1891 census⁶. On 10 November 1896 a brother for Annie Emma, named Walter William Herbert Spratt was born. He was baptised on 28th February at St Augustine's Church in Kilburn⁷, another Anglo-Catholic church. The family were at this time living at 27 Oxford Road, Kilburn, and the children's father was no longer a porter but a house painter. Both children were born Deaf⁸.

On 9th January 1899, Annie Emma was elected to the Old Kent Road Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Children of the Poor⁹ and admitted there on 19th January the same year⁸. Here the younger pupils, and later at Margate Asylum in Kent (following its opening in 1875) the older pupils, were boarded, clothed, and educated until 16 years of age. On entry they had to be 'between 7 and 10 years of age, unless specially exempted, vaccinated and not imbecile of deficient in intellect'¹⁰. Annie Emma did not stay at Old Kent Road Asylum for long as she was transferred to the Margate Asylum on 8th August 1900. It was noted on the school register⁸ that she had suffered from Whooping Cough but not Small Pox, Measles, Scarlet Fever or Cow Pox. At her first examination she was deemed to be 'very backward', as 'she has been away ill for over 3 months' and that her 'voice [was] inclined to be nasal'. Of her 'apparent intellect' she 'seems to be bright.'

The 1901 census¹¹, taken on 31st March that year, places her at the District Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Children of the Poor in Victoria Road, Margate, Kent. At the same time¹², her father was part of the returning troops on board

'The Harlech Castle', a steamship berthed at Hound, South Stoneham in Hampshire, having served his time as a sergeant in the 2nd Battalion, the Buffs (East Kent Regiment) fighting in the second Boer War in South Africa. For that service, he gained the South Africa Medal (1901)¹³ and clasps for service in Cape Colony, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal¹⁴; he was discharged from service on 12th April 1901. This left her mother alone¹⁵ to cope with her small deaf son Walter, then aged 4 years who were at the time living in Willesden in Middlesex, visited by a 'monthly nurse'¹⁶, a position similar to a midwife, although no baby is enumerated. The circumstances around this situation are, at present, unknown.

The latter half of 1901 proved to be catastrophic for Annie Emma, her brother Walter and mother Emma. According to the Kilburn Times, Hampstead and North-Western Press newspaper of Friday 30th August¹⁷ an inquest was held on:

'William Henry Spratt, aged 34 years, a house painter, and lately living at 27, Oxford-road, Kilburn...enjoyed very good health and was of steady and regular habits. On Sunday evening last, they [he and his wife Emma] left home about quarter to six to pay a visit to his sister at 75 Cleveland-street, Marylebone. About eight o'clock he was sitting in a chair and was about to play the piano when she heard a noise, and on looking round found her husband had fallen sideways and was unconscious. She at once gave him brandy and bathed his face with water, believing him to be faint. Death, however, took place a few minutes later...Death was due to heart failure.'

The Record of Deceased Soldiers Effects for W A Spratt¹⁸, notes that, on 23rd December 1901, the Postmaster General authorised the sum of £5 18s 3d 'for investment for his child Annie Emma in PO SB' [Post Office Savings Bank].

School registers from Margate Asylum¹⁹ record the circumstances of Annie's father's death and the many changes of address for her mother following this event, from Kilburn to Pirbright in Surrey (January 1902), to Welwyn in Hertfordshire (December 1902), to Paddington (12 November 1903), back to Kilburn (May 1904), Margate (June 1906), Wrotham Park, Barnet (March 1910) and back to Margate at 44 Victoria Road by 1911.

During 1903, Annie Emma had the measles and her brother, Walter was elected to the Asylum on 8th December. He was admitted to Margate Asylum on 21st January 1904 (the Old Kent Road Asylum having closed in 1902), weighing 51lb and standing 47 inches tall. He had suffered from whooping cough and measles before his admittance²⁰– maybe he caught them from Annie during one of her 32 absences from school during 1903. Walter is found in the Margate Asylum on the 1911 census²¹ and left there on 18th November 1912.

In 1907, Annie was ready to leave the Margate Asylum. Before her departure, she had been examined in a variety of subjects and her final report²² reveals:

Class on Leaving: First Oral

Place in class: Fifth

Intellectual capability: Fairly Good

Other Remarks: A well intentioned girl but erratic & excitable.

Report:

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Marks in last exam</u>	<u>Point of progress reached</u>
<i>Religious Knowledge: Grade 3</i>	<i>90%</i>	<i>Bible reading in connections with</i>
<i>Articulation</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>Intelligible. Voice high pitched</i>
<i>Lip-reading</i>	<i>98%</i>	<i>Conversation, dictation etc</i>
<i>Language</i>	<i>96%</i>	<i>To lesson 4 (Advanced language)</i>
<i>General Knowledge</i>	<i>82%</i>	<i>Daily Events & Common things</i>
<i>Geog and Hist</i>	<i>79%</i>	<i>The British Empire</i>
<i>Arithmetic</i>	<i>72%</i>	<i>To lesson 50</i>

*Manual Work
Cookery VG
Drawing or Sewing
Pupil's Signature
Conduct*

91%

*Dressmaking, Housecraft,
Dress cutting class – D Class 1
[neatly written]
Very Satisfactory*

Bank £10.6.2

Teacher of class: M Stevens

Date: Dec 1907

In that busy year, she was also confirmed on 5th December. She left on 17th December 1907²³ to be a 'Domestic Girl'.

She did not travel far. In 1911²⁴, she was still at the Asylum but was now Annie Spratt, 19, Housemaid (Dom), a member of the household staff. She is noted to be deaf and dumb, but she was evidently not dumb, as her school records (above) reveal her voice to be high pitched but intelligible. It is to be hoped that she never learned of this ignorant description of her as 'deaf **and dumb**' after all her hard work learning to communicate.

In the same year, Annie's mother Emma was boarding with Wallace Johnson, a teacher of the deaf, and his family at 'Neville', 44, Victoria Road, Margate, close to the asylum. Emma had a 'visitor' with her called Harold West, aged 4 years²⁵. In 1917, she married for a second time, to Robert Nathaniel Clifton²⁶. In 1921, the 'visitor' is enumerated as Harold Spratt, born 1906²⁷. There is no evidence to suggest that Harold was deaf.

On 3rd June 1918, Annie Emma married Dennis Shapcott²⁸. Page 4 of The Tiverton Gazette and East Devon Herald of 11th June¹⁷ tells us that the wedding took place at St John's Church, Margate and that Annie was living at 21 Addiscombe Road, Margate while Dennis came from Fordlands, Chevithorne in Devon.

One wonders if they would ever have met if Dennis had not also been born deaf and a pupil at the Asylum in Margate. Born on 28 December 1888, he had been elected on 14th January 1895²⁹. An Election Pamphlet of January 1895 shows that the election of children was held at the Cannon Street Hotel that day. He is itemised as one of the 25 children (16 boys and 9 girls) to be accepted into the school from 66 candidates. He got 233 of the votes bought from the Asylum at £5 5s for a Lifetime Subscription of 1 vote for each election, 10s 6d for an Annual Subscription of 1 vote for each election or 4 votes for a

guinea for one election only. He was admitted to Old Kent Road Asylum in February 1896.

Dennis Shapcott also had a deaf and dumb brother called James, born in 1883, who was elected to the Asylum on 12th January 1891 and who left in December 1899, on which occasion he was given a Bible and Prayer Book plus an extra gift as he had been a monitor³⁰.

The 1921 census³¹ finds Annie Emma Shapcott living with her husband Dennis, now a carpenter, her remarried mother now called Emma Clifton, (her new husband is not enumerated with them), her brother Walter and half-brother Harold Spratt (as already mentioned above). Annie and Dennis by now also had a daughter, Constance, aged nearly 2 years old, born in 1919.

On 21st March 1934, Dennis' brother and Annie Emma's brother-in-law James Shapcott, 'a deaf and dumb man aged 51', a tailor, died at King Edward 7th Hospital in Windsor following a collision with a car while cycling³². He had been married for only four years.

In 1938 Annie's husband Dennis brought a claim for compensation at Margate County Court following an accident at work on 12th November 1937 in which he fractured and dislocated his right arm, rendering it useless.

The East Kent Times³³ reports:

'Deaf and Dumb Claimant

An interpreter stood at the side of Dennis Shapcott, a deaf and dumb carpenter of Dunstan-road, Margate...when he was principal in a claim under the Workman's Compensation Act. The Judge, counsel and others in Court watched in dead silence whilst the interpreter conveyed to Shapcott by signs the various questions put, afterwards receiving his replies...for an injury to his arm, which it was contended were [sic] so severe as to cause him to become an 'odd lot' on the labour market'.

Dennis won his case and was awarded 30s a week compensation which hopefully helped the family somewhat (another child had been born in 1922), but the 1939 Register³⁴ enumerates him as 'Incapacitated: Deaf and Dumb'. The same document also reports that both of their children were deaf and dumb but that they did go on to marry. Annie Emma was their 'Daily Keep' and Charles Lee born 1895, a collector of funds for the British Association Deaf and

Dumb is living with them. He was also Deaf and Dumb and had also been a pupil at Margate Asylum and presumably knew the couple from there.

On 3rd June 1943, Annie Emma and Dennis Shapcott, now living at 32 Addiscombe-road, Margate³⁵, celebrated their Silver Wedding anniversary. Seven years later, on 7th April 1950, Annie's mother, Emma of the same address, died and administration was given to Annie Shapcott (wife of Dennis Shapcott)³⁶.

Annie Emma and Dennis lived long, full, lives and were married for fifty-three years. Dennis died in 1971 aged 82 years³⁷ while Annie Emma died in 1978 aged 86³⁸.

Walter William Herbert Spratt, Annie's brother was married at Upton Park in Essex during 1937³⁹, to another Margate Asylum resident named Mary Victoria Hawkins, born in 1901. She died in 1980⁴⁰ but Walter outlived them all, dying at the grand old age of 99 years in 1996⁴¹.

Sources

- ¹ Annie Emma Spratt -Ch192/R1/1/1 Entry 5492 Admission Records Application for Admission 4325-7615 (1880-1925)
- ² Emma Helena Spratt baptism entry, St Martin-in-the-Fields 1856-1858 p439 item 276 [Westminster, London, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1919 | Ancestry®](#)
- ³ William Henry Spratt and Emma Elena Spratt marriage entry, St Mark, Kennington 1891-1896 page 3 item 5 Ancestry London, England Church of England Marriages and Banns 1754-1938 <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1623/>
- ⁴ Henry John James Spratt and William Richard Spratt, England & Wales Census 1851 HO107/1498 folio 162 page 79
- ⁵ Annie Emma Spratt baptism entry, St Paul, Lorrimore Square 1888-1907 page 198 item 1580. [London, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1923 | Ancestry®](#)
- ⁶ William A Spratt 1891 census of England and Wales RG12/365 folio 5 page 4
- ⁷ Walter William Herbert baptism entry St Augustine, Paddington 1891-1899 p225 item 1796 [London, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1923 | Ancestry®](#)
- ⁸ Annie Emma Spratt Ch192/R2/1/6 Entry 241 Register of Children Old Kent Road [1-369] with transfers to Margate
Walter William Herbert Spratt Ch192/R2/2/2 Page 128 Headmaster's Register of Children: Old Kent Road (1891-1904)
- ⁹ Annie Emma Spratt Ch192/R1/1/1 Entry 5492 Admission Records Application for Admission 4325-7615 (1880-1925)
- ¹⁰ Royal Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Poor Programme 1902 (Margate).
- ¹¹ Annie Emma Spratt 1901 census of England and Wales RG13 824 folios 30-35
- ¹² W A Spratt 1901 census of England and Wales RG/1064 folio 85
- ¹³ W A Spratt TNA WO100/167 page 144
- ¹⁴ W A Spratt TNA WO100/167 page 90
- ¹⁵ Emma Elena Spratt 1901 census of England and Wales RG13/1221 folio 172 page 19
- ¹⁶ Blog post <https://elizabethwalne.co.uk/2011/02/22/2011-2-22-the-rise-of-the-monthly-nurse-html/>
- ¹⁷ Find my Past newspapers <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/search-newspapers>
- ¹⁸ W A Spratt Record 81656 1901-1902, Ancestry UK, Army Registers of Soldier's Effects, 1901-1929 <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/60506/>
- ¹⁹ Annie Emma Spratt Ch192/R2/3/1 Page 18 Headmaster's Register of Children 1895-1913
Annie Emma Spratt Ch192/R2/1/5 Entry 5472 Register of children: Old Kent Road [5256-5670] (with transfers to Margate)
- ²⁰ Walter William Herbert Spratt Ch192/R2/1/5 Entry 5657 Register of Children: Old Kent Road [5256-5670] (with transfers to Margate)

21. Walter William Herbert Spratt 1911 Census of England & Wales RG14/4501/9999
22. Annie Emma Spratt Ch192/R8/1/3 Entry 231 Lever's Records: Registers of Children Leaving School (1902-1912)
23. Annie Emma Spratt Ch192/R2/1/5 Entry 5472 Register of children: Old Kent Road [5256-5670] (with transfers to Margate)
24. Annie Spratt, 1911 Census of England & Wales RG14/4501/9999
25. Emma Elinor Spratt, 1911 Census of England & Wales RG14/4491/471
26. Emma E Spratt and Robert N Clifton Marriage 3Q1917 Thanet vol 2a page 2320
27. Harold Spratt 2Q1906 Lambeth vol 01D page 467
28. Annie Emma Spratt and Dennis Shapcott marriage 2Q1918 Thanet vol 2a page 2184
29. Dennis Shapcott Ch192/R1/1/1 Entry 5313 Admission Records Application for Admission 4325-7615 (1880-1925)
30. James Shapcott Ch192/R2/3/1 Page 1 Headmaster's Register of Children 1895-1913
31. Annie Emma Shapcott, 1921 Census of England and Wales RG15/04442/ RD 63 ED 9
32. The Daily Mirror 23rd March 1934 (FMP) and National Probate Calendar
33. Dennis Shapcott East Kent Times and Mail 23 Nov 1938 p12
34. Annie Shapcott 1939 Register RG101/1756D/004/11 Letter code DIER
35. Tiverton Gazette, Tuesday 8th June 1943 (FMP)
36. Emma E Clifton, National Probate Calendar
37. Dennis Shapcott Civil Registration Death Index 1Q1971 Luton vol 4a page 568
38. Anna Emma Shapcott Civil Registration Death Index 3Q1978 Dunstable vol 9 page 0244
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<https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/essex-marriages-and-banns-1537-1935>
40. Mary V Spratt, Civil registration Death Index 1Q1980 Thanet vol 16 page 1795
41. Walter William H Spratt 2Q1996 Thanet with Dover Register number A18D entry number 88