

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.

Ida Muriel Elizabeth Johnstone 's Story

Ida Muriel Elizabeth Johnstone was the firstborn daughter of Ronald Johnstone and Amy Lucy McLaren. She was born on September 29, 1890, in Tirumalagiri (also known as Trimulgherry), Secunderabad, India, and was christened on October 8, 1890, at the Parish in the Presidency of Madras. Ida was born deaf, the only member of her family classified as Deaf and Dumb.

Her younger brother, Lionel Roy Beevor Johnstone, was born on December 14, 1896, in Bombay (Mumbai), India, and baptized on January 13, 1897. Their sister, Maud Beryl Doris Johnstone, was born on February 19, 1899, and

baptized on March 19, 1899, in Woolwich, Kent, England, completing their small family.

Records from the Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Children of the Poor¹ show that Ida was elected for admission in July 1897 and entered the facility on January 28, 1898, on Old Kent Road, London, at just 7 years and 4 months old. By that time, she had already suffered from measles and whooping cough². During her initial examination, it was noted that her "voice was weak"³ but her "apparent intellect was pretty fair." On August 24, 1899, she was transferred to the new Margate Asylum, where she was still residing during the 1901 Census.

Her father, Ronald Johnstone, was born on November 27, 1867, in Dungannon, Tyrone, Ireland, the second youngest of 13 children to Ronald Johnston and Sarah Emily Ewing. The 'e' at the end of the surname seems to have been added during the family's move from Ireland to England. Ronald received the India Medal in 1895 with multiple clasps in 1898. At the time, he held the position of Store Sergeant in the Ordnance Department and was a member of the United Grand Lodge of England Freemasons from March 28, 1902, until his resignation on April 7, 1904, while still in India. He passed away on April 26, 1906, at the Royal Victoria Hospital at the age of 38, listed as a Conductor in the Indian Ordnance Department. His cause of death was recorded as kala-azar, a slowly progressing disease caused by a protozoan parasite, compounded by pneumonia.

JOHNSTON—April 26, at Netley, of late age,
Ronald Johnston, Indian Ordnance Department,
second son of the late Ronald Johnston, Donagh-
more, Tyrone.—Indian papers please copy.

Belfast, Northern Ireland, The Belfast Newsletter (Birth, Marriage and Death Notices) 30 April 1906

Ida's mother, Amy Lucy McLaren, was born on July 2, 1870, to Charles McLaren, Bandmaster of the 108th Foot, and Elizabeth Kenny in Sheerness, Kent. She was baptized on July 23, 1868, and married Ronald at the age of 19 on October 24, 1887, in Aldershot, Surrey.

The 1911 Census shows that Ida was living with her mother, Amy, who had become a widow, in Itchen, Hampshire. Amy's occupation was listed as "Private means," while Ida had no occupation noted. By 1921, at age 30, Ida was still living with her mother, with her occupation recorded as "Home duties."

Her brother Lionel, now 24 years old and working as a bank clerk for the Bank of England Ltd, was living with them. He had attended The Duke of York's School in Guston, near Dover, according to the 1911 Census.

Ida's younger sister, Maud Beryl Doris, was also residing with them, aged 22 in the 1921 Census. Born on February 19, 1899, and baptized on March 19, 1899, in Woolwich, her occupation was listed as a nursery governess. In the 1911 Census, she appeared as an "inmate" of the London Orphan Asylum in Watford, Hertfordshire. It can be inferred that her admission was due to their father's death in 1906, leading her to be considered an orphan despite having a living mother. The charity aimed to maintain, clothe, and educate respectable fatherless children without adequate means for support.

Maud appears in the UK & Ireland Nursing registers, where she completed her nursing qualifications at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London between 1922 and 1925. By 1928, she was in Cardiff, Wales, and in 1931, she moved to Montreal, Canada. From 1934 to 1946, she returned to Southampton, now going by the name Maud Beryl Doris Smith.

In the 1939 Census, Ida was 49 years old and still living in Southampton. Both she and her mother were listed as engaged in "Home duties," with Amy also noted as doing part-time First Aid. Lionel, now married, resided with them, still employed as a bank cashier and serving as a reserve officer in the Territorial Army, although his wife did not appear in the census. Maud was also living with them, now a private nursing sister, with her surname hyphenated to Mason-Smith.

Amy Lucy Johnstone, née McLaren, passed away in Hampshire in 1950 at the age of 82. Lionel Roy Beevor followed her seven years later, dying in February 1957 in Southampton at the age of 54. Ida Muriel Elizabeth passed away in 1964 at the age of 74 in Middlesex. Maud Beryl Doris Mason-Smith, formerly Johnstone, died in June 1973 in Truro, Cornwall, at the age of 73.

Sources :

Wikipedia

FindmyPast.co.uk

Ancestry.com

FamilySearch.org

www.herfordshire-genealogy.co.uk

Freebmd

GRO

www.childreshomes.org.uk

¹ Ch192/R1/1/1 Entry 5441 Admission Records Application for Admission 4325-7615 (1880-1925) First Page / Ch192/R1/1/1 Entry 5460 Admission Records Application for Admission 4325-7615 (1880-1925) Cont'd Second entry from bottom

² Ch192/R2/1/6 Entry 298 Register of Children Old Kent Road [1-369] with transfers to Margate

³ Ch192/R2/2/2 Page 94 Headmaster's Register of Children: Old Kent Road (1891-1904)