

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in April 2024, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women staff and female patients associated with the Fleming Memorial Children's Hospital, Jesmond, Northumberland.

Jessie Russell

The Few Forgotten Women project on the Fleming Memorial Hospital, Burdon Terrace, Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne, provides an opportunity to look into the life of Jessie Russell who was a Head Nurse in 1891 when the hospital was also known as the Fleming Children's Hospital.

The Fleming Memorial Hospital

The map below [1] shows the size of Newcastle in 1858 and the proximity to the large and important River Tyne. The Fleming Hospital had not been built at this time, it was built thirty years later, but it is clear to see that the site was out of the city centre in the village of Brandling, circled in yellow; this was near the Great North Road and the hospital address was previously North Road. The

Great North Road was a coaching route between London and Edinburgh; the last coach from London to Newcastle left in 1842 and the last coach from Newcastle to Edinburgh left in July 1847. [2]



By 1895, only thirty years later, it can be seen how developed the area was becoming and the Fleming Memorial Hospital is shown on the map below. [3] It is interesting to see that the orphanage is next door and next to that is the Northern Counties Deaf and Dumb Institute; it is likely that some of the children from the hospital also spent time at the orphanage or the institute. The large city hospital, the Royal Victoria Infirmary, was built later than the children's hospital in 1906 replacing the old infirmary which was on the banks of the River Tyne.



Jessie Russell

Only three years after the Fleming Memorial Hospital had been built, in 1888, Jessie was working there as a nurse. Using the 1891 census as a starting point enables the research of her life before nursing and to follow her career in the future years.

The 1891 census provides information to begin the research; Jessie was 26 years old, unmarried and her place of birth is given as Cobham, Kent; therefore, she was born about 1865. [4]

A matching civil registration record for Jessie's birth is for Q2, April-June, 1865; the registration took place at North Aylesford, Kent which is the registration district that includes Cobham. [5] [6] To date it has not been possible to locate a baptism record in parish registers or non-conformist records.

The next logical step to find out more about Jessie is the 1871 census when she would be about six years old. The census record shows that Jessie was aged five years at the time the census was taken and was living at 54 Waterside, Dartford, Kent, this is a reliable record for Jessie as it states that she was born in Cobham about 1866 but as the census was taken on 2nd April Jessie will have been nearing her 6th birthday. She was living with her parents Edward

and Ester Russell and two younger sisters, Minnie aged four and Rosa was a one-year-old baby; they were both born in Dartford. [7] In some records Edward is also known as Edmund. Now it is possible to start to learn more about Jessie's family. There were also three lodgers living with them in 1871, two paper makers from Bedfordshire and a nineteen-year old miller named Geo Russell. It is probable that Geo and Jessie's father, Edward, are brothers as they were both born in Ash, Kent.

Waterside was possibly near the Mill Pond, this would be a good location for Edward as he worked as a railway carrier, the railway station is located next to the Mill Pond and the adjacent wharfs; seen on the map below. [8]

Dartford 1898



According to the 1871 census **Edward**, Jessie's father, was born about 1840 in the village of Ash in Kent, which is east of Canterbury and north of Dover.

Jessie's mother, **Ester**, was born about 1843 in Luddesdown, Kent.

Before looking into Jessie's life following 1871 it is helpful to learn more about her parents and their lives, this will have had an influence on Jessie growing up.

Edward and Ester married in the spring of 1864 in the registration district of Dartford; Ester's maiden name was Cogger and Edward was referred to, and documented as, Edmund. [9]

Prior to her marriage Ester was working as a servant for the Eley family and living with them at Cobhambury Farm in Cobham. [10] Ten years earlier, in 1851, Ester was living with her family, Jessie's maternal grandparents; John and Frances and Ester's two brothers in Luddesdon; her uncle and cousins lived next door; [11] the families worked in agriculture and possibly worked on the same farm together.

Jessie's paternal grandfather was also an agricultural labourer, he was Richard Russell and was married to Maria, Edmund's parents; Edmund had at least six siblings and they lived in Ash. [12]

When Ester (written as Hester) was 7 years old she was living with her parents John and Frances Cogger, Jessie's maternal grandparents, and her older sister Roder and younger brother Joseph, she was born in Luddesdown. From the 1851 census it would appear that John's brother, William, and his five children were also living in the house. [13]

Both Jessie's parents and grandparents appear to have had close contact with their relatives living in close-knit communities, it is doubtful that Jessie will have had this type of family life following the move to Dartford where she grew up.

Jessie's parents had grown up in working agricultural families but Edmund / Edward did not follow this occupation. By 1871, when Jessie was five years old, he was a railway carrier; this would have been a more stable form of employment as the railway industry continued to grow.

To make the railways competitive for the transportation of goods the Rail and Canal Traffic Act of 1854 was passed and railways were expected to carry any goods offered to them that could be realistically transported. [14] It is not known which goods Edmund was a carrier of but it is very likely that it would have involved coal for the growing industries.

Sadly, when Jessie was only 8 years old Ester, her mother, died in 1874. [15] Four years later Edmund remarried to Elizabeth Powell at Crayford on 10th November 1878 and Elizabeth became Jessie's step-mother. From the marriage record Edmund's father was Richard Russell. [16]

Between 1871 and 1881 Jessie had been living with her mother and father in Dartford, her mother had died and her father had remarried, major changes in a young girl's life. In 1871 Jessie was described as a scholar and it is assumed that she attended school; The Elementary Education Act of 1880 made school attendance compulsory until the age of ten years, this was only increased to eleven in 1893. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to locate any records relating to Jessie's school years, therefore, it is not known how old she was when she left school; it is probable that she was about thirteen years of age. It is unknown what Jessie did when she actually left school but in 1881, when she was sixteen years old, she was living at 8 Torrington Terrace in Lee which is between Lewisham and Greenwich in London. Jessie was living with the Ritherdon family, Albert Ritherdon was an accountant and the neighbours were also professional, a dentist, an auctioneer, solicitor's clerk and a retired doctor; it would appear that this was an affluent address. Jessie was employed

to care for the son of Mr & Mrs Ritherdon, two year old Albert; there was also a cook living in the house with Jessie, 22 year old Annie Phillips from Sussex.

[17]

At this time there was no nurse training to become a qualified nurse as known today. Training to be a nurse started in 1860 at the Nightingale Training School at St Thomas's in London; at sixteen Jessie would have been too young to have become qualified. Or, it is possible that Jessie had attended training through the Queen's Nurses organisation where a qualification could be gained after a year for a hospital nurse or six months for a district nurse. [18]

Caring for Albert will have provided Jessie with the skills for caring and perhaps given her the opportunity to decide that this was an area of work she would like to progress a career in children's nursing. It has not been possible to locate any documentation referring to Jessie having completed any training.

It is known that within the following ten years Jessie had progressed from caring for a young child in his parent's home to being a Head Nurse at the Fleming Hospital for sick children, she had a matron above her in seniority and she was in charge of nine nurses; this was a significant senior role in a newly built hospital. As expected for the time, Jessie lived at the hospital and no doubt all the nurses lived there in an area for their accommodation, having left home as a teenager she will have been quite accustomed to living with other people. By the turn of the 20th century hospitals were starting to establish training schools where the nurses trained for two to three years, perhaps Jessie assisted in the training of nurses at the hospital. The nurse register was not set up until 1919 by the General Nursing Council.

Jessie left Newcastle and probably moved to a role in Birmingham, on 16th June 1900 she married widower Robert Foster Burrow and at the time she was

living next door but one to him on Stratford Street in an area of Birmingham called Sparkhill; Robert was a Clerk in Holy Orders. [19]

Robert Foster Burrow had been a curate in Lincolnshire 1875-1877, he then was at St Cuthbert's in Darlington for a year, in Bath from 1878-1880 before moving to St Andrew's in Droitwich for seven years and to Birmingham in 1887. According to Kelly's Directory of Birmingham Rev Burrow was at St Andrew's Birmingham in 1892. [20] [21]

Jessie's marriage was short lived, the next documentation for her is 27th May 1903 when she filed a petition for divorce, the final decree was granted on 24th August 1904, on the grounds of her husband's impotency and the marriage had not been consummated.

The comprehensive documents in the divorce case provide a great deal of detail regarding where Jessie lived following her marriage in Birmingham. After the marriage Jessie and Robert lived at Fernlea, Victoria Road, Southwick, Brighton; then Delmeny, West Nead Road, Carshalton; followed by Melrose, Paduea Road, Penge, Kent.

In 1901 Jessie had been living with Robert on Sole Street, Southwick and in her affidavit of May 1903 she was living at 46 Finsborough Road, South Kensington. Jessie had at least six addresses in three years, this would have made it difficult for her to work as a nurse even if it was allowed for a married woman. [22]

[23]

It is probable that Jessie was not practising as a nurse in the three years she was married; hospitals and nursing institutions did not accept nurses marrying until the mid-1900s, most nurses would live on the premises with strict visitor rules and curfews.

All seemed to change for Jessie following her divorce when she returned to her career in nursing. In 1911, when she was 45 years old, Jessie was a Matron at

Avery Hill College in Eltham, London and now giving her marital status as 'single'. She was living at the college with the Assistant Matron, twenty-six years old Mary Ann Elizabeth Biddle. [24]

Avery Hill will have provided Jessie with a beautiful location after her years of upheaval; the house, with one of the most extensive gardens of a private house in England and a Victorian glass house being the second largest after Kew Gardens, was bought by London County Council in 1902 and became Avery Hill College of Education in 1906. As the matron Jessie will have been in charge of the welfare of the trainee teachers at the college, her role included hiring domestic staff as seen in newspaper adverts. The Eltham & District Times, 5th August 1910, stated that applications for the roles of cook and maids to be addressed to the matron. [25] [26]

Avery Hill Winter Garden[27]



It is not known how long Jessie stayed at Avery Hill, but she had moved by 1921. Having become experienced in being the Matron at Avery Hill College she went on to be the Matron at St Oswald's School, Ellesmere, Shropshire where she was a Certified Nurse Matron indicating that she had gained a nursing qualification. However, there is not a record on the digital UK & Ireland, Nursing Registers, 1898-1968 on the Ancestry database. [28]

Jessie enumerated her name as Jessie Burrow Russell, using Burrow as a second forename; her place of work was St Oswald's School employed by the Society of SS Mary & John of Lichfield; this was a guild founded in 1387. [29]

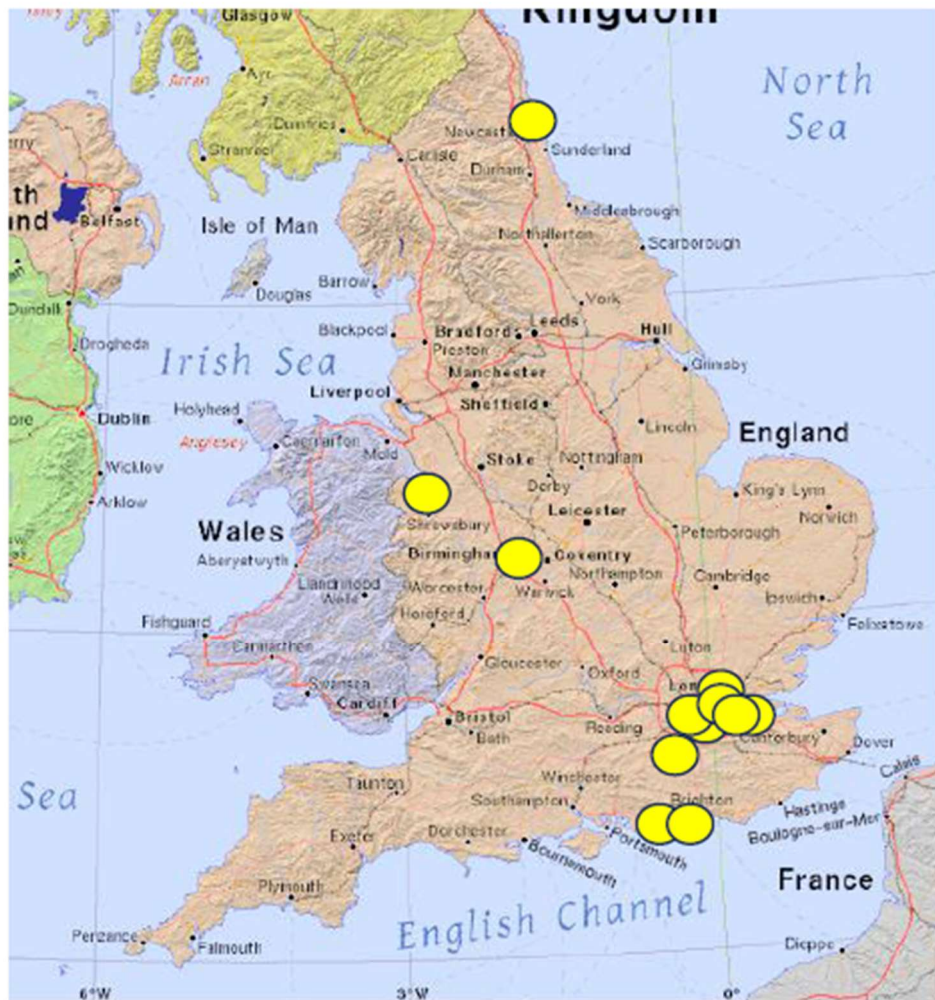
Jessie was living at the school in Ellesmere with Elizabeth Jane Hannaby, aged 15 and born in Wrexham, Denbighshire, who was a Dormitory Maid.

St Oswald's School opened in 1884 for boys of poor families and for boys who helped in the domestic work in exchange for an education; this progressed to where the school trained former pupils of 17 – 20 years of age in the Training School with a guarantee to serve the college as Masters for at least two years. [30]

It is unknown what Jessie's role in WWI was, a search of the Nursing Service Records, First World War in The National Archives catalogue WO 399 did not produce a matching digital record. It is most probable that Jessie will have been working as a nurse during the war, she may not have joined a territorial force but continued in a nursing role in England.

What happened to Jessie after 1921 is a mystery, she cannot be located on the 1939 register, there is no digital death record or in passenger lists in case she emigrated in later life. It is possible that Jessie re-married but there is no confirmed record that this happened.

Places Jessie lived - ●



[31]

Jessie's life was migratory, moving from place to place through her short marriage and for her career as a nurse. Even though she did not find a fulfilled life with her husband and did not have children she became successful as a nurse and helped others during their education to become teachers.

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