

# *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.*

## **Alice Spear's Story**

On the 1891 Census Amelia is show as an inmate of Exeter Home for Fallen Women. She is 18 years old, giving her a year of birth of around 1872 and her place of birth is given as Stonehouse, Plymouth<sup>i</sup>. At this point in time Exeter Home for Fallen Women came under the care of the Exeter Diocesan Association for the Care of Girls with the specific aim to “(i) prevent girls from ‘going astray’ by training them for domestic service (ii) to give temporary accommodation in a Refuge Home and (iii) to provide a temporary home for those already “fallen.” “<sup>iii</sup> Women and girls came to the home in several ways, from their own homes, from the streets, from prison or the workhouse or they could be sent there by a magistrate. We do not have information as to how Alice came to be there but there is a newspaper report dated 21 June 1889

where Alice (referred to here as Amelia) in a theft trial. Alice was a witness for the prosecution<sup>iii</sup>.

Alice Amelia SPEAR was born on the 27 August 1872 at 8 Water Lane to William and Isabelle SPEAR (nee McDowell)<sup>iv</sup> Her father's occupation is given as a Navel Pensioner. Her mother registered her birth and gave her mark in lieu of a signature. The birth was registered on 10 September 1872.

The first census record Alice appears on is in 1881 aged 9. Her parents are given as William and Isabella and the family live at 13 Water Lane. Her father is aged 43 and her mother's 33. William's occupation again is that of Navel Pensioner. Alice has two brothers John aged 5, and Joseph aged 53 and a sister Mary who is just 1 month old.<sup>v</sup>

When we move forward to the 1901 census<sup>vi</sup> we find Alice working at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital. She's 27 years old and working as a parlour maid. We can see from this document that she didn't fall by the wayside after her time in the home for "fallen women" but in fact is working and supporting herself. In fact, just four years after being in the home Alice marries Francis Benjamin Sambell in 1895 at All Hallows on the Walls in Exeter. Although her middle name is given as Mildred rather than Amelia later records will prove this is the same person. Francis is listed as a postman and is 25 years old. The Wedding took place on 16 February 1895<sup>vii</sup>.

By 1911 Alice and her husband Henry have been married for over 16 years. They have had 5 children in total of which 2 are still living. Sons Francis aged 15 and Henry aged 12. Henry is working as a tailor and Alice is a housewife. The

oldest son Frances is working as an apprentice tailor. The family live at Parnell Road, Bristol <sup>viii</sup>.

The 1921 shows Alice is now 45 years old. Her husband Henry is working as a woollen manager in tailoring and is employed by M Bertish and Co who are given as a London based firm. The family are now living at 40 Victoria Park, Fishponds, Bristol. The census was completed by their son Henry who is given as working as a tailor from home for himself <sup>ix</sup>. This is the first census taken after the First World War.

In 1939 a register was taken to assist with the supply of identity cards during World War Two.<sup>x</sup> This shows that on 29 September Alice was living in Bristol with Henry. Henry is working in a garment factory and Alice is shown as being a housewife (Unpaid Domestic Duties). This register shows Alice's date of birth as 27 August 1872 confirming we have followed the correct person through her life so far.

In 1954 we find a probate record dated 22 December 1954 for Alice.<sup>xi</sup> This shows that she died on 27 November 1954. This record also gives Alice's name as Alice Amelia also known as Alice Mildred which conclusively ties all the documents we have found together confirming Alice's identity. The record shows that Alice was a widow, and her address was 24 Severn Road, Western-Super-Mare. In her will Alice bequeathed her estate to Frances William James Sambell, a commercial clerk, and Lesley William Duck, a company secretary. Her estate totalled £1,318 16s and 6d which is a very long way from the woman who in 1891 we first met in The Exeter Home For Fallen Women.

What I really love about this research is that whatever the reason Alice found herself in the home at the end of the 1890s, it didn't define her. She left there, she worked in a hospital, she had a family and children. From the records it seems she lived a good life.

## Sources

- 
- <sup>i</sup> Census. England. All Hallows on the Walls, Exeter, Devon. 05 April 1891. SPEAR, Alice. RG 12. ED 10. Piece 1629. Folio 8. p. 9 Collection: 1891 England Census. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk>
- <sup>ii</sup> Admissions Registers. England, Bristol, Exeter Archives. 1879-1972. Alice SPEAR. Ref 74/15. Exeter Archives [St Olave's Home](https://www.exeterarchives.org.uk) <https://devon-cat.swheritage.org.uk/records/74/15> .
- <sup>iii</sup> Court Report. England. Bristol. 1889. Western Daily Press. Friday 21 June. Amelia SPEAR. Page 6. Column 3. Collection: Newspaper Articles. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk>
- <sup>iv</sup> Birth. England, Exeter. 10 September 1872. Alice Amelia SPEAR. Original Document.
- <sup>v</sup> Census England, Devon, East Stonehouse. 03 April 1881. SPEAR, Alice. RG11. ED 1. Piece 2203. Folio 13. p. 19. Collection: 1991 England Census. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk>
- <sup>vi</sup> Census. England, Devon, Exeter. 31<sup>st</sup> March 1901. Alice Mildred SPEAR.
- <sup>vii</sup> PR. Marriage. England, Devon, Exeter 16 February 1895. Francis Benjamin SAMBELL and Alice Mildred SPEAR. Collection: Devon Marriages and Banns. <https://www.findmypast.co.uk>
- <sup>viii</sup> Census. England, Bristol. 02 April 1911. LAMBELL, Henry Alfred. RG 319. ED 15. Piece 15054. Collection 1911 England Census. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk>
- <sup>ix</sup> Census. England. Bristol. 24 April 1921. SAMBELL Alice. RG 319. ED 10. Schedule. 3337. Collection: 1921 England Census. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk>
- <sup>x</sup> 1939 Register. England, Bristol. RD 319/5 Schedule Number 500. Collection: 1939 England and Wales Register. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk>
- <sup>xi</sup> Testamentary Record. England, Bristol. 22 December 1954. Alice Amelia Sambell. Collection: England & Wales, Nation Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1995. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk>