

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.

Olive Wood's Story

Olive Wood was born in 1859 in Stafford, Staffordshire, England, the sixth child born to Thomas and Agnes Wood.

Thomas Wood and Agnes Wright were married on the 14th December 1844 at St Mary's Church, Stafford. Agnes was about 19 years old, and Thomas was about 20. They both resided at Sash Street, Stafford.ⁱ

At the time of the 1851 and the 1861 census, Thomas and Agnes lived at Snows Yard, off Foregate Street, Stafford, with their children. The 1851 census recorded that Thomas was a shoe maker, and Agnes a char woman.ⁱⁱ The 1861 the census describes Thomas as a cordwainer, Agnes a shoe-binder, and their 15 year old son was a shoe-fitter.ⁱⁱⁱ

A cordwainer is a shoemaker who makes new shoes from new leather.

Olive was part of a large family. Her parents had six boys and three girls, one of whom passed away as an infant.

By the 1871 census Thomas lived at Middle Row (near Gaol Road), Stafford, and was a widower. He was still a shoe maker. The youngest 5 children were living with him, ranging in age from 5 year old Samuel James, to 14 year old Martha Ann. Martha Ann's occupation was 'nurse girl'. Olive was next in age at 11 years old, and along with the other children was recorded as being a scholar.^{iv} Sadly, their mother Agnes had died in 1865 when Olive was only about 5 years old.

In March 1872 Thomas Wood remarried to widow Eliza Finney (nee Duff or Dovey). Both resided in Brook Street, Stafford.^v She had 5 children from her first previous marriage who ranged in age from around 3 to 12 years old.

Olive's new step-mother, Eliza, was born in Dudley, Worcestershire, around 1839. Eliza married her first husband, Thomas Finney, in Sedgley in 1859. On the 1861 census they were living at Dudley, and at Common Road, Marston in April 1871. Thomas was a cordwainer/shoemaker.

Newspaper reports from the very next month following the 1871 census describe a shocking incident:

Kibworth: Desperate Suicide

"The rumour that a man of Stafford, named Finney, had committed suicide in Leicestershire, is unfortunately too true. It appears that Thomas Finney came up to Leicester, from Stafford, about a fortnight ago, to his sister who lives at No. 26 Jones Street Leicester. He is stated to be a shoe-finisher, out of work."

It was reported that his looks and manner appeared very strange, and he was seen to have put himself in the way of a train.

"John Hawkins [brother-in-law of the deceased] recalled, said since deceased had been at my house he had frequently said how queer and low spirited he felt. I have said to him "You are perhaps thinking about your wife and family" but he seemed to evade talking about them. He had a wife and five children living at Stafford, where he had been several years, and seemed to think that he should be unable to maintain them. He left them to come to Leicester for the purpose of getting better wages, and it had

been arranged that they were to come up from Stafford to Leicester this day week, which he seemed very anxious should be the case. Deceased had been in much better circumstances, but he had become much reduced in the last two or three years. Deceased knew nothing whatever of Leicester or the neighbourhood...”

The verdict of the inquest was ‘insanity’.^{vi}

By the 1881 census Olive’s father Thomas had moved his family to Bellasis Street, Stafford, where he remained until at least the 1901 census. His occupation was ‘pressman in the boot trade’.^{vii} Thomas and Eliza had gone on to have another 6 children together.

I imagine that their home might have been very full, with the older children needing to find work to support themselves and help their family.

At the same time, the 1881 census shows that Olive was at the County Refuge, Sandon Road, Stafford. It gives her age as 20, but she was actually aged around 22. Relation to the head of the household - Inmate. Occupation - Laundry work. Born - Stafford.^{viii}

I have not been able to find the reason that Olive was at the institution. Possibly she had been in prison, committed a crime, or become pregnant outside of marriage?

It seems that the 1891 census shows that Olive was staying with her married Aunt, Esther Bodley (nee Wood) and husband William Bodley, at 96 Northgate, Wakefield.

Olive Wood. Relation to head of the house - Niece. Single. Aged 30. Born - Stafford. No occupation or disability information was recorded.^{ix}

Sadly, I have not been able to find any further information about Olive. Perhaps if you know more about her you could contact this website?

Olive’s step-mother Eliza may have passed away in 1901 after the census was taken, aged 61.

The 1911 census shows widower Thomas Wood was living at 25 Corporation Street, Stafford. Boarder. Occupation - Boot maker (out of work).^x

Thomas passed away on the 2nd May 1917 at Stafford. From the Staffordshire Advertiser of 12th May 1917:

DEATH OF AN OLD SAFFORDIAN
DOING HIS 'BIT' AT 93

"It was only a few months ago that we recorded the fact that Mr. Thomas Wood, of Stafford, had returned to work at a shoe factory at the advanced age of 93. He had retired at the age of 84, but the call for men to keep business going reached him in his retirement, and, with a spirit equal to that of the men who volunteered for the Army, he went back to the factory. Possibly he could not do much, but he did what he could.



THE LATE MR. WOOD.

That is a good enough epitaph for any man, and Thomas Wood, who worked to the last of his strength, had to acknowledge that death is victor in the end. He died on the 2nd inst. at the Rockery, Sandon Road, Stafford. His father was a soldier, and, after the devastating days which ended with the battle of Waterloo, was sent on a recruiting tour through Ireland, where two of the boys were born, finally settling down in Stafford, where Tom Wood was born.

Mr. Wood started work in a shoe factory at the early age of eight. His hours were long, from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m., and his wages small. For his first week he received 2s., but money went further in those days, and Tom lived to be 94.

For the last 22 years he worked at Messrs. Scott's shoe factory, and it was to this factory that he returned last year to do his "bit," which consisted in heel-building, a work requiring expert knowledge. Last year saw the arrival in Stafford of a batch of the Irish rebels, and Wood was one of the spectators. It reminded him of the arrival of the rioters from the Potteries in 1842. About 300 prisoners were taken in these riots, and 54 were sentenced to transportation, 11 of them for life."

When Christ Church at Stafford, Staffordshire was demolished Nov 1983, the following memorial in the form of a wooden plaque was removed from inside the church:^{xi}

"THOMAS WOOD born 7 Jan 1823 died May 2 1917"

Sources

ⁱ Ancestry.com. *Staffordshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1900* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2021.

Original data: *Staffordshire Anglican Parish Registers*. Stafford, Staffordshire, England: Indexes created from Anglican Parish Registers held at Staffordshire Record Office.

ⁱⁱ 1851 Census. Class: HO107; Piece: 1999; Folio: 265; Page: 24; GSU roll: 87401

ⁱⁱⁱ 1861 Census. Class: Rg 9; Piece: 1907; Folio: 66; Page: 21; GSU roll: 542885

^{iv} 1871 Census. The National Archives; Kew, London, England; 1871 England Census; Class: RG10; Piece: 2817; Folio: 50; Page: 14; GSU roll: 836368

^v Staffordshire : Stafford : St Mary : Register of unspecified type : "Parish Register" database, FreeREG (https://www.freereg.org.uk/search_records/58187269e93790eb7fd3f32d : viewed 12 Nov 2024) marriage Thomas Wood to Eliza Finney 31 Mar 1872

^{vi} Leicester Chronicle of 13th May 1871

^{vii} 1881 Census. Class: RG11; Piece: 2690; Folio: 42; Page: 3; GSU roll: 1341644

^{viii} 1881 Census. Class: RG11; Piece: 2689; Folio: 105; Page: 44; GSU roll: 1341644

^{ix} The National Archives of the UK (TNA); Kew, Surrey, England; Census Returns of England and Wales, 1891; Class: RG12; Piece: 3748; Folio: 86; Page: 20; GSU roll: 6098858

^x The National Archives of the UK (TNA); Kew, Surrey, England; Census Returns of England and Wales, 1911

^{xi} The National Archives; Kew, London, England; Rg 37: Copies of Records of Local Authorities and Church Commissioners Relating to Burial Ground Removals; Reference: RG 37/198; Series Number: RG 37; Piece Number: 198