

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.

Please note: this story contains details of an inquest report which some readers may find upsetting.

Eleanor Lewington's Story

Family background

Eleanor's parents, James Lewington (1823-1887) and Caroline, nee Brown (1823-1879) married on 4 January 1845 in Odiham parish church, Hampshire.¹ The marriage had clearly been planned, because it took place after banns had been read. What may have been unplanned, however, was that they had their first child shortly before they married. The GRO digital image of the birth registration for James Lewington shows he was born on 19 December 1844.²

¹ Hampshire Archives and Local Studies; Winchester, England, UK; Anglican Bishops' Transcripts; Reference: 81047/1/20. Accessed via Ancestry on 8 November 2024.

² Birth record for James Lewington, Hartley Wintney, 1845 Q1, volume 7 page 89. © General Register Office

The baptism register, however, indicates that he was baptised on 4 December 1844.³ It also states that he was the “illegitimate child of James Lewington and Caroline Brown” so the vicar clearly knew what was happening. My suspicion is that the baptism date is correct, and James was both either 1-3 December, or in late November. The dates given on the birth registration may have been fudged in order to avoid a potential penalty for late registration. And, of course, registering James’ birth after the marriage makes him appear as a legitimate child.

Sadly, James died just a few months later, on 9 February 1845. The cause of death was given as ‘decline’, which was so heart-breaking to read.⁴ The Lewington family had a further nine children, with three others – William James, another James and Elizabeth – dying before they reached the age of three. Eleanor was the ninth child to be born, in 1861.

In the 1851 Census Eleanor’s grandparents, James and Pleasant Lewington, were enumerated at Roke Cottage, two miles outside of the village of Odiham.⁵ Her parents James and Caroline were the next entry on the Census return; Roke Cottage was again written in but subsequently struck through. James was a labourer and Caroline did ‘outdoor work’.

By the 1861 Census the family had moved into the village, and were living in King’s Arms Lane.⁶ Eleanor first appears in the 1871 Census, when the family were living in Stroud Lane, Crondall – about five miles from Odiham.⁷ The baptism⁸ and burial⁹ of Eleanor’s sister Elizabeth showed that the family had

³ Hampshire Archives and Local Studies; Winchester, England, UK; Anglican Parish Registers; Reference: 47M81/PR12. Accessed via Ancestry on 4 January 2025.

⁴ Death record for James Lewington, Hartley Wintney, 1845 Q1, volume 7 page 80. © General Register Office

⁵ England Census 1851: HO107, Piece 1680, Folio 141, Page 11. © The National Archives. Accessed via Ancestry on 8 November 2024.

⁶ England Census 1861: RG9, Piece 706, Folio 21, Page 35. © The National Archives. Accessed via Ancestry on 8 November 2024.

⁷ England Census 1871: RG10, Piece 1230, Folio 68, Page 3. © The National Archives. Accessed via Ancestry on 8 November 2024.

⁸ Hampshire Archives and Local Studies; Winchester, England, UK; Anglican Parish Registers; Reference: 47M81/PR13. Accessed via Ancestry on 16 November 2024.

⁹ Surrey History Centre; Woking, Surrey, England; Surrey Church of England Parish Registers; Reference: CRK/3/1. Accessed via Ancestry on 16 November 2024.

also lived in Dogmersfield and Crookham between the two Censuses, so they certainly moved about.

Death of Eleanor's mother, Caroline

Caroline died in 1879, aged 58.¹⁰ An inquest was held into her death, which was extensively reported in the local newspaper:¹¹

Death accelerated by want of nourishment

For some time a woman, named Caroline Lewington, has been lying ill, first as a lodger at the White Hart, and subsequently at a cottage in West Street. As certain alimentary remedies ordered by Dr. Pound, the medical officer for the district, were not supplied to the woman, and there were other irregularities connected with the case, the surgeon declined to give the customary certificate. The husband of the woman had not means wherewith to buy a coffin, and the relieving officer refusing to give an order for one, the corpse remained uncoffined from Sunday, the 10th, till Wednesday evening following, and as that happened to be the hottest day we have had this year the effluvia was so offensive that the other occupants of the cottage went to a neighbour's house every night. A coffin was at last supplied on condition that the husband repays the parish by instalments.

The article continues by describing the circumstances of the family. Caroline had been ill for a long time and her husband James "got all that he could" for his wife. His wages were 13 shillings a week. It mentions his 18-year old daughter – Eleanor – who didn't earn anything. Other children were away and helped a little. Eleanor's care for her mother was called into question by the doctor:

Ellen Lewington, daughter of the deceased, said she was present at the death. Mr Pound: Did you keep your mother clean and properly combed? – Yes. – When you lived at the White Hart? – Yes. – Are you not in the habit of going out at night? – I always looked after mother. – Did you go away to Basingstoke fetes? – Yes, but I got Mrs Hutton and Mrs Mariner to come and look after mother.

¹⁰ Death record for Caroline Lewington, Hartley Wintney, 1879 Q1, volume 2c page 89. © General Register Office

¹¹ The Hampshire County Advertiser, 23 August 1879, page 7. © British Newspaper Archive and accessed via FindMyPast on 8 November 2024.

A dispute then ensued between the doctor and the relieving officer. The doctor had first attended Caroline on 29 May and had ordered 3 pounds of meat for her, which he believed had been supplied. The relieving officer was then questioned:

He received a “recommendation” from Dr Pound for some meat for the deceased. He did not supply it, but reported it to the [Board of] Guardians, who refused to grant the relief. On the 5th August he received another recommendation for nourishments, which he refused to supply, and intended reporting it, but the woman died before the Board met. He did not consider Lewington to be in a state of destitution, as his wages were 13s a week.

The Coroner said that while Caroline Lewington had died from natural causes, there had been an “error of judgment” in refusing her the nourishments prescribed for her by Dr Pound. The verdict given was that the death was produced by natural causes, but the jury regretted that the recommendations of the doctor were not attended to and acted upon.

What next for Lewington family?

The death of Caroline seems to have been a catalyst for Eleanor and her father James to fall on hard times. By the 1881 Census Eleanor was at the St Thomas Home for the Friendless and Fallen, in Basingstoke.¹² Meanwhile James was in the workhouse at Hartley Wintney.¹³ James died in 1887 and was buried in Odiham.¹⁴ His last place of residence, given in the burial register, was Winchfield Union; James ended his days in the workhouse.

Looking at some of Eleanor’s siblings:

- George married Mary Ann Schofield in 1873.¹⁵ They appear to have had no children. While Manry Ann’s mother lived with the couple in 1891 and 1901, there is no sign of Eleanor.

¹² 1881 England Census: RG11, Piece 1255, Folio 8, Page: 13. © The National Archives. Accessed via Ancestry on 8 November 2024.

¹³ 1881 England Census: RG11, Piece 1253, Folio 68, Page: 12. © The National Archives. Accessed via Ancestry on 8 November 2024.

¹⁴ Hampshire Archives and Local Studies; Winchester, England, UK; Reference: Anglican Bishops' Transcripts. Accessed via Ancestry on 8 November 2024.

¹⁵ Hampshire Archives and Local Studies; Winchester, England, UK; Anglican Bishops' Transcripts; Reference: 82094/1/7. Accessed via Ancestry on 16 November 2024.

- Charlotte may have died in Fareham, Hampshire, in 1893.
- Charles married Jemima Baigent on 22 December 1877 at Chertsey in Surrey.¹⁶ Together they had six children. They can be found in the 1881, 1891 and 1901 Censuses but there is no sign of Eleanor in the later two.
- John has not been located with any degree of certainty after the 1871 Census. The John Lewington appearing on the 1891 Census at Cavalry Barracks in Sandhurst is not the same person, as the attestation record John names John's father as Thomas, not James.

Was Eleanor a 'fallen woman'?

The rest of Eleanor's life remains a mystery. No obvious marriage or death records have been located, and online family trees featuring Eleanor have not provided any potential avenues to explore. It seems that no records from her time at the St Thomas Home survive.¹⁷ In any case, stays at the home were usually limited to just two years. No firm evidence of Eleanor being a 'fallen woman' has been located. At the inquest Dr Pound had insinuated about her having questionable morals, asking if she was "in the habit of going out at night" and whether she went "away to Basingstoke fetes". Newspaper searches have not yielded any indications of dubious behaviour at Basingstoke fetes.

The only other clue from newspapers are reports of the annual meeting of the St Thomas Home.¹⁸ This notes that "in 1880 as many as 61 [women] were admitted. These may be divided into 12 friendless and 49 fallen". While this relates to the Portsmouth Home and not Basingstoke, and the odds are not stacked in her favour, Eleanor may simply have had nowhere else to go and was 'friendless' rather than 'fallen'.

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¹⁶ Surrey History Centre; Woking, Surrey, England; Surrey Church of England Parish Registers; Reference Number: Add/2/2. Accessed via Ancestry on 4 January 2025.

¹⁷ Peter Higginbotham's website *Children's Homes* indicates that the earliest surviving records date from 1908. <https://www.childrenshomes.org.uk/BasingstokeStThomas/>

¹⁸ See, for example, the Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle, 9 March 1881, page 3. © British Newspaper Archive and accessed via FindMyPast on 19 January 2025.