

# *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.*

## **Ella Constance Hay's Story**

Ella Constance Hay<sup>1</sup> was one of eighteen nurses working at the Fleming Memorial Hospital for Sick Children, Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne, when the 1901 census was taken. The women's ages ranged from twenty to thirty years old, Ella being twenty five.

Ella was born on 9 November 1876 in Chester-le-Street, Durham and was baptised on the 27 December of the same year.<sup>2</sup> She was the eldest child of John Edwin Hay and Isabella Helena Vietch nee Buckham. In the 1881 census<sup>3</sup> when Ella was four years old, her father was employed as a ship broker and the family were living in Murray Terrace, Chester-le-Street. Her father, John Edwin Hay, had been born in Newcastle upon Tyne where his father, also called John, was a Master Carver and Guilder. When Ella was about seven years old the family moved twelve miles north from Chester-le-Street to Newcastle upon Tyne where four more children were born, Cecilia Frances in 1885, Agnes Mabel in 1886, John Carter in 1889 and Hugh in 1893. In the 1891 census<sup>4</sup> Ella, aged fourteen, was now living with her maternal grandmother, Isabella Buckham, her Aunt Cecilia and a cousin, Isabella Edith Knight, at 37, Hallgarth Street in Durham. Ella was described as being employed in household duties along with her aunt.

Ella's grandmother, Isabella Buckham and her husband Robert had come from the Jedburgh area in the Scottish borders, in the 1860's to Southall estate which lies to the south of

Chester-le-Street, for Robert to work as farm bailiff for the MP for Sunderland, Henry Fenwick, who owned the estate. Robert suddenly collapsed and died on 14 September 1869<sup>5</sup> leaving his wife Isabella with their three youngest children who were then aged 14, 12 and 7 years old. Isabella was allowed to stay on at the farm and was still living on the South Hall estate when both the 1871 and 1881 censuses were taken.

In 1891 the rest of Ella's family, parents John and Isabella and children Cecilia aged 11 years, Agnes, 10 years, John Carter 7 years and Hugh 3 years, were living at 28, Harrison Place, Newcastle upon Tyne with Isabella's sister Rebecca Buckham.<sup>6</sup>



House in Harrison Place Newcastle upon Tyne from Google Maps

Ella's father, John, described himself as a Fine Art Dealer, gilder and framer in the census having bought his father's company from his brother Frederick the previous year, for £600.

On 10 March 1896 when Ella was 19 years old, her father, John died at the age of 50 years of pneumonia.<sup>7</sup> Although he owned the apparently successful Fine Art business on Grainger Street in the fashionable heart of Newcastle, John died intestate and probate recorded that he left a mere £5 effects.<sup>8</sup> However, John had inherited the huge sum of £1,000 from his father on his death in 1888 and it is likely that he had bought the property in Harrison Place that the family were living in as well as buying the company from Frederick in 1890. The family were deprived of his ongoing income on his death but were not left in poverty. Perhaps it was the death of her father that prompted Ella to find a way to financially support herself by becoming a nurse.

The family stayed on at 28 Harrison Place Newcastle upon Tyne, Ella's mother, Isabella, taking in lodgers. In the 1901 census, aged 42 years, Isabella was described as a boarding house keeper. Her daughter Cecilia aged 16 was working as a showroom assistant whilst the other children, John Carter, Agnes and Hugh were at school. Their boarders were a land surveyor and an engine fitter.<sup>9</sup>

Ella Constance, now aged 25 years, was living less than a mile away at the Fleming Memorial Children's hospital, 48 Burdon Terrace working as a nurse.<sup>10</sup> Her Aunt Rebecca, who had been living with the family in the previous census, was now housekeeper for two brothers at 22 Burdon Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne in the same street as the children's hospital.<sup>11</sup>

Before the founding of the National Health Service in 1948 hospitals were not state funded but relied on donations and fundraising. The local newspaper described the various methods finances were raised for the Fleming Memorial hospital. Trade Unions and Friendly Societies raised subscriptions for example the Northumberland miners sponsored a cot to be known as the Northumberland Miners Cot.<sup>12</sup> An annual fundraising Fancy Dress ball was also held, and in February 1899 the Newcastle Daily Chronicle treated us to a long description of all the costumes and attendees, which included our own Nurse Hay.

The local newspaper reports also give an insight into the work Nurse Ella Hay undertook such as caring for children recovering from surgery, or seeing the results of neglect, horrific burns or broken limbs.

In 1908, at the age of 30, Ella married Robert Strickland. Robert was born and spent his early years in Yarm near Stockton on Tees where his father, Oliver, had a chemist and druggist shop. Oliver died when Robert was only ten years old, and his mother Eliza Jane continued the successful business until her retirement in 1896. Her only son, Robert, decided he did not wish to continue in the family business but qualified as a civil engineer and went to work in Canada. Robert and Ella moved to Quebec immediately after their marriage where their son, Oliver, was born the following year. Ella returned to visit her family and was staying with her mother in law, Eliza Jane Strickland at Dunottar Avenue, Eaglescliffe, Preston on Tees, when the 1911 census was taken.<sup>13</sup> No doubt Eliza Jane was thrilled to see her first grandchild. This was her only opportunity to do so as she died the following year.

Ella returned to Canada where two more children were added to the family, Elizabeth known as Betty, in 1912 and Douglas in 1915. The 1921 Canadian census recorded the family as living at Rue Belvedere Lennoxville Sherbrooke in Quebec County and described Robert as a civil engineer who had arrived in Canada in 1897.

By 1931 the family had moved to Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Jacques-Cartier, Montreal.

Throughout this period the couple's unmarried sisters Isabella and Phyllis Strickland and Cecilia Hay made trips across the Atlantic on cruise ships to visit the family. This was the heyday of the cruise ship, the journey across the sea taking about four weeks.

On 15 July 1947, husband Robert died at their home in Montreal at the age of 72 years. On 9 January the following year his sister, Isabella also died, in Durham. Later in 1948 their remaining sister, Phyllis who was then aged 75, treated herself to a first class ticket on the Empress of Canada to visit her sister in law, niece and nephews once more in Canada.<sup>14</sup>



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### Ship Empress of Canada

Ella Constance lived to the great age of 91 years dying on 16 November 1966.

### Sources

1. In the 1901 census Ella is recorded as Ethel C Hay but checking the birth registration at GRO the only female Hay of this age born in Chester-le-Street was Ella Constance, who had the same initials as Ethel C. Hay. There were no other census entries for an Ethel C Hay born 1876 in Chester-le-Street. There was one marriage registration for an Ethel C Hay in 1915 in Morpeth Northumberland to a John Todd but this Ethel Constance was born on 21 Oct 1894 according to the 1939 register so could not be the same Ethel C Hay who was working in the Children's hospital aged 25 in 1901. I think it significant that the rest of Ella Constance Hay's family were living close to the hospital in 1901 and therefore concluded that the hospital authorities completing the census mistook Nurse Hay's first name and recorded Ethel C not Ella C. There were two other Ethel's working in the hospital to add to the confusion.
2. Baptism transcription for Chester-le-Street gives birth and baptismal date.
3. 1881 census RG11/4978 folio 117 page number 1
4. 1891 census RG 12/4099 folio 68
5. Death certificate of Robert Bucham. The coroner concluded he had died of valvular disease of the heart. Death registered Durham Sept 1869 vol 10a page 252
6. 1891 census RG 12/4205 folio 6 page 6
7. Death certificate of John Edwin Hay death registered Newcastle upon Tyne March 1896 Vol 10b page 55
8. Probate registry March 1896 Newcastle upon Tyne accessed 24/4/2024 from Ancestry.co.uk England and Wales National Probate Calendar Index and Administrations 1858-1995
9. 1901 census RG13/4781 folio 20 page 25

10. 1901 census RG13/4781 folio 154 page 55
11. 1901 census RG13/4781 folio 153 page 53
12. Newcastle Journal 29 January 1902
13. 1911 census piece 29586
14. Passenger list of Empress of Canada departure date 6 Oct 1948 accessed at Ancestry.com
15. By Canadian Photo Company - This file has been provided by the British Library from its digital collections. Catalogue entry: HS85/10/40353, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=25371685>

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