

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in September 2024, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of pupils at the Royal Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Poor (later The Royal School for the Deaf), Margate, Kent and The West of England Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Exeter, Devon.

Alice Maria Bourn's Story

According to the record of her application to the Royal Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Poor, Alice Maria Bourn was born in Stockwell, South London, on 4 April 1891^{1,2}.

Alice and her parents were enumerated in the 1891 census³, living at 3 Moat Place, Stockwell. Alice was born just one day before the 1891 census, and is duly mentioned as being “under 1 month” old. The census shows that her father Peter was from Buckland, Surrey, and her mother, Mahalath, was originally from Meesden, Hertfordshire.

Alice's parents married in Royston, Hertfordshire around a year before her birth, her mother's maiden surname being "Tofts"⁴. A sister, Rose Frederica, was born in 1894⁵. It does not appear that Alice and Rose had any other siblings.

Alice applied to the Royal Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Poor in 1898. The records show that she was one of 2 girls who were elected in July 1898. Her father is described a decorator, and it is stated that the family has 2 children, one of whom is "D&D" (meaning deaf and dumb). The family's address is 3 Moat Place, Stockwell, where they were living when Alice was born¹.

Alice is entered on the register for the Old Kent Road site of the Asylum starting in September 1898. She would have been 7 years old. All the particulars concerning her family remain the same as at her application. The record notes that Alice was born deaf, and had had measles, and cow pox (which may well be chicken pox). She had luckily not suffered from smallpox, whooping cough or scarlet fever. Alice transferred to Margate on 8 August 1900⁶.

The entry for Alice in the headmaster's records of the Old Kent Road site for the years 1891 to 1904 contain the information that her mother's brother and cousin were both deaf and dumb⁷. Indeed the 1891 census revealed that Alice's Uncle, John Tofts, born in 1871, was deaf and dumb⁸. The headmaster's records also show that Alice had been absent "in London" an astonishing 233 times. No reason is given for her absences. There are obviously many possibilities, including ill health. This large number of absences must have had an adverse impact on Alice's education.

According to the headmaster's register from 1895 to 1913, Alice left the school in July 1907, when she would have been 16 and had spent almost 9 years there. The school had kept a record of the family's address, showing the family moved

out of London to Hertfordshire (where Alice's mother was born) in 1904, and moved again, to The Limes, Nursery Road, Hailey, Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire in 1905⁸.

Alice's school reports have survived and provide a glimpse of her life and progress at school. The first report relates to examinations in 1899, stating that Alice "shows good capability" and at her second examination, in 1900, she had made "good progress". She won prizes for conduct in 1900 and 1901. However, her report also states, in 1899, that Alice was "still backward owing to long absences". There is still no indication of why she was absent¹⁰.

The programme for the Prizegiving of the Royal Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Poor, in December 1901, shows that Alice won a prize for good conduct in Oral classes.

The last record of Alice's school days is the report produced when she left school on 2 July 1907¹¹. This report finds Alice's intellectual capability to be "fair, but very slow" and Miss Stevens, (class teacher), remarked that Alice was "rather inert". One wonders what Alice and her family made of this remark! Alice attained marks ranging from 63% (General Knowledge) to 90% (bible reading to the level of Class iii) in her final exams. Alice had also taken part in Cookery, Dressmaking and Housecraft and was commended as having "done well in each".

With Alice's schooldays over, she returned to her family, and is enumerated in the 1911 Census with her parents and sister at Nursery Road, Hailey, near Hertford¹². Both Alice and her sister are stated to be dressmakers. Thus it appears that Alice was able to contribute to her family's income due to the skills she learnt at school.

Alice is not enumerated with her family in the 1921 census. Her mother and father, and her sister, (now married to Alec Young, with a one year old son), were still living in Nursery Road¹³.

Sadly, after the 1911 Census entry, no further records were found which could definitively confirm either a marriage for Alice, or her death. Her school records, along with the census records appear to be the only sources which document her life.

Sources

- 1 Ch192/R1/1/1 Entry 5447 Admission Records Application for Admission 4325-7615 (1880-1925)
- 2 Alice Maria Bourn GRO Birth Index: 1891 J Quarter LAMBETH Volume 01D Page 518 MMS Tofts
- 3 The National Archives of the UK Kew, Surrey, England; Census Returns of England and Wales, 1891; RG12/407/67/29 Accessed on [Ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk)
- 4 England & Wales Civil Registration Marriage Index 1837-1915, 1890, JQ, Royston 3a 623 accessed on [FreeBMD](https://www.freebmd.org.uk)
- 5 Rose Frederica Bourn GRO Birth Index:1893 JQuarter LAMBETH Volume 01D Page 507 MMS Tofts
- 6 Ch192/R2/1/6 Entry 215 Register of Children Old Kent Road [1-369] with transfers to Margate
- 7 Ch192/R2/2/2 Page 90 Headmaster's Register of Children: Old Kent Road (1891-1904)
- 8 The National Archives of the UK Kew, Surrey, England; Census Returns of England and Wales, 1881, RG11/1409/14/22 accessed on [Ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk)
- 9 Ch192/R2/3/1 Page 17 Headmaster's Register of Children 1895-1913
- 10 Ch192/R2/1/5 Entry 5445 Register of children: Old Kent Road [5256-5670] (with transfers to Margate)
- 11 Ch192/R8/1/3 Entry 204 Leavers Records: Registers of Children Leaving School (1902-1912)
- 12 The National Archives of the UK Kew, Surrey, England; Census Returns of England and Wales, 1911 RG14/7465 Sch 18 accessed on [Ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk)
- 13 The National Archives of the UK Kew, Surrey, England; Census Returns of England and Wales, 1921, RG15/07016 ED2,3 Sch 96 accessed on [FindMyPast](https://www.findmypast.com)