

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.

Isabella Garnham 's Story

Isabella Garnham's life, spanning from 1875 to 1967, mirrors the social and industrial transformations that England underwent during her lifetime. Born on January 31, 1875, in Pelton, Chester-le-Street, Durham, Isabella was the daughter of Philip Garnham, a coal miner from Suffolk, and Margaret Garnham, a native of Durham.

Isabella spent her early years at 28 Newfield Double Row in Pelton. The 1881 Census records her living with her parents, where she was listed as a scholar at the age of six. This period was characterized by stability and familial unity, but this stability was short-lived.

In December 1895, Isabella's mother passed away, leaving her and her father to navigate life without their maternal anchor. Philip remarried, and in August 1897, Isabella's half-brother was born. The loss of her mother and the arrival of a new sibling undoubtedly marked significant changes in her domestic life.

By 1901, Isabella had left her father's home. The census of that year records her at the Fleming Hospital in Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne, where she was working as a dressmaker domestic. This move likely represented a quest for independence and a new beginning. In January 1907, Isabella married Harry Collison, who was born on June 26, 1875, in Newcastle upon Tyne. The couple started their family with the birth of twins, Arthur and Margaret, on April 10, 1909. Tragically, Margaret died shortly after birth from asthenia, a condition marked by physical weakness, on April 12, 1909. This loss was a devastating blow to the young family.



Phillip Garnham

Age:	62
Died:	6 th Jan 1911
Accident:	6 th Jan 1911 3 a.m.
Year Born:	abt. 1849
Colliery:	West Pelton
Company:	James Joicey and Co., Ltd.
Occupation:	Shifter
Notes:	explosion of firedamp from naked light
Buried:	[not known]
Category:	Explosions of Fire-damp or Coal Dust

Another tragedy struck the Garnham family in the early hours of January 6, 1911. A firedamp explosion caused by a naked light at the colliery in West Pelton claimed the life of Isabella's father. This incident highlighted the dangerous working conditions that coal miners faced and underscored the perils of industrial labour during that era.

By 1911, Isabella and Harry had relocated to Elswick. The census of that year shows Harry working as a blacksmith farrier for the Co-operative Society. The couple lived with their surviving son, Arthur, at 215 Stanton Street. Despite their personal losses, they continued to build their lives together in this working-class community.

The 1939 Register, taken at the outset of World War II, provides another snapshot of Isabella's life. She and Harry were living at 222 Stanton Street. Harry was recorded as a shoeing smith, while Isabella was listed as performing unpaid domestic duties. Their son Arthur, now a salesman, was also living with them, noted as married, though his wife was not present on the census.

Harry Collison died in December 1951, leaving Isabella a widow. The subsequent years brought more sorrow. Isabella's half-brother, Philip, passed away in January 1953. Tragedy struck again when Arthur, now a Police and Fire Security Officer at an aircraft factory, was fatally injured by a motorcar while on duty at Woodford Aerodrome. He died on December 25, 1954, in Stockport Infirmary, Cheshire. Arthur and his wife, Laura Foster, whom he

						195	Registrar
178	1954	Arthur COLLISON	Male 45 years	of 39 Bingley Gardens North Bankam Newcastle-upon-Tyne Police and Fire Security Officer at an Aircraft Factory	eye and forehead and laceration of brain due to striking of base of skull resulting from deceased being knocked down by a motor car while on duty on the perimeter track at Woodford Aerodrome, Woodford on 26 December 1954 Accidental death P.M.	Body sent received from J. A. R. Ferns Funeral for family of deceased (Rev. District) Inquest held Thurs. Dec. 23rd 1954	1955 Registrar

Isabella Garnham lived out her remaining years in Northumberland South, passing away in July 1967. Her life, marked by personal losses and societal changes, reflects the resilience of a woman who navigated the challenges of her time with strength and determination. Isabella's life spanned a period of significant industrial and social change in England. Born in the Victorian era, she witnessed the transition into the Edwardian age and lived through both World Wars. The mining industry, which claimed her father's life, was a backbone of England's economy during her early years, though fraught with dangers. The societal roles and expectations of women also evolved during her lifetime, from the rigid structures of the late 19th century to the more dynamic roles they began to occupy in the mid-20th century. Isabella's story is one of personal resilience amidst the backdrop of England's industrial prowess and its associated perils. Her journey from a coal miner's daughter to a dressmaker, wife, and mother reflects the broader narrative of countless women whose lives, though often marked by hardship, contributed to the fabric of their communities and the country at large.

Sources

www.findmypast.co.uk

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[GRO](#)

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