

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.

Rose Punnett 's Story

The Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Poor took pupils from far and wide, but it is likely that none had travelled so far as Rose Punnett.

Rose's story really begins with her mother, Margaret Jane Punnett. Margaret was born 25 December 1868 to parents James Punnett and Mary Ann White in Guildhall Street, Folkestone, Kent. Her father James Punnett was a harbour porter.¹ Margaret had one elder sister Mary Ann (born 1867)² and four younger siblings: Francis James (born 1870)³, Emily Maud (born 1873)^{4,5}, Arthur Robert (born 1878)⁶ and Rose Ethel (born 1883)⁷.

In the 1881 census Margaret was recorded as a scholar living with her parents and younger siblings at 2 Gun Cottages, Guildhall Street, Folkestone. Her father was a general labourer, and her mother was a laundress.⁸ By 1884, Margaret, was also employed as a laundress, living at 18 Pavilion Road, Folkestone.⁹

Four years later, Margaret, aged 19, left her family behind and sailed from Gravesend, London on 2 May 1888 bound for Townsville, Queensland, Australia on the *Dorunda*.¹⁰ Margaret was a Free Passenger, either being granted free passage, or paying only a nominal amount for her ticket, under a government scheme.¹¹ The colony of Queensland had been founded on 6 June 1859, when it separated from New South Wales¹² and the government was keen to attract much-needed workers, such as domestic servants, to continue to build the colony.

For someone who had lived her whole life within a few streets in Folkestone, the voyage and a new life in Australia must have been a courageous undertaking for Margaret. The *Dorunda* stopped off in Port Said, Egypt around 10 May, arrived in Aden, Yemen on 22 May, and left the port of Batavia, Indonesia (now Jakarta) on 7 June. By 18 June, the vessel passed Thursday Island, just off Cape York, the northernmost tip of Queensland, Australia. After an overnight stop at Cooktown on 20 June, the *Dorunda* arrived at Margaret's destination, Townsville, on 21 June 1888, before ending its voyage in Brisbane on 27 June 1888.¹³

Margaret probably would have needed all her courage on her arrival, as, while she may not have known she was in the early stages of pregnancy with Rose when she set out on her voyage, after two months at sea it would very likely

have been evident to her. It must have been a daunting prospect for her being so far from home, among strangers and without any family support. It is also possible that her pregnancy may have impacted any employment arrangements that had been made for her prior to her departure. At least she was experienced as a laundress and would have had a way to make a living for herself.

Rose Ethel Punnett was born on 27 December 1888 in Flinders Street, Townsville, named for her mother's youngest sister who was just five years old when Margaret left England.¹⁴ No father was recorded on Rose's birth registration, only the word 'illegitimate' written diagonally across the space for the father's details in bold handwriting.

On 21 August 1890 Rose's mother, Margaret Jane Punnett, married Charles Ah Sing in Townsville¹⁵. They went on to have at least three children together Emily Maud (born 1891)¹⁶, William Francis (born 1894)¹⁷ and Margaret Violet (born 1898)¹⁸. Thus Rose spent her childhood as part of a family, although things were about to change significantly for Rose.

On 16 August 1899, Mrs Sing, housewife, with a female infant (Margaret Violet) arrived in London from Townsville, Queensland on the *Duke of Buckingham*. It is presumed that Rose also accompanied her mother although no record has been found that lists Rose Punnett as a passenger. The passenger summary for the *Duke of Buckingham* indicates that there were 18 male and 19 female children aged 1-12 years on board, but the accompanying passenger list accounts for only a handful of these. It is possible

that not all the children were listed by name, or that part of the record is missing.¹⁹

On 8 January 1900, the Committee of the Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Poor elected to admit Rose. Interestingly, her name is recorded as Rose Ethel *Williams Punnett* in contrast to her birth registration, possibly giving a clue to the identity of her father*. There is a remark that she is 'overage' given that she was eleven years old, whereas the usual age of entry was nine years. The record indicates that her father is dead, and her mother is a domestic servant with four children, of whom only Rose was deaf and dumb. Their address is recorded as 13 Pavilion Road, Folkestone.²⁰

Rose was admitted to the school in London a couple of weeks later on 25 January 1900. The Register states that she was born deaf and had a weak voice. Healthwise, she has had measles, but not small pox, cow pox, scarlet fever or whooping cough. It is observed that she '*seems intelligent*'.²¹ Rose spent her first year at the school in London where she would have been taught the oral approach of lip-reading and vocalisation. An examination in June 1900 comments that she '*was very dull for some time, but now doing fairly well*'.²²

Rose was transferred to Margate, Kent on 17 January 1901 and is recorded there in the 1901 census²³. She does not appear to have done very well in school. In June 1901 she is described as '*very slow and stupid and quite childish, learns very little*'. In November 1901 it is noted that she has been '*placed in defective class for silent teaching. Memory exceedingly defective. Has learnt more or less correctly about 10 elementary lessons in language, about 70 or 80 names and can count to and add to 100. I do not anticipate that*

*she will ever be able to attain to anything like normal progress in any intellectual direction.*²⁴

Rose's learning challenges may have been due to her age, the fact that she had had no prior education, and her late start at the school. Other factors may also have contributed. Nowadays there is considerable awareness of the impact trauma has on the brain, affecting development and the ability to learn. Rose had been removed from the family she grew up with and likely missed them, she had undertaken a 2-month journey to a strange country, and been placed in an institution. Given her deafness, it may have been difficult for her mother to convey to her what was to happen. Then, finally, she must have felt abandoned by her mother who sailed from London on 22 September 1900 aboard the *Jumna* to return to Queensland.²⁵ No passenger records have been found that suggest that Margaret ever returned to England, and she died in Queensland in 1962²⁶.

Rose finished at the school on 27 June 1905 being placed eleventh in a class of fourteen. Ironically, perhaps, her best mark in her final examinations was for the Geography of England and Wales where she achieved 60%. Other results included Language (51%), Arithmetic (50%), General Knowledge (48%), and Religious Knowledge (47%). She achieved only 36% for lip-reading and her articulation was described as 'none'. Her final report indicates that she was able to do plain needlework and knitting and that her conduct was good.²⁷

Following the end of her education, Rose was retained as a member of staff at the school, being employed as a laundress, following in the footsteps of her mother and grandmother before her. In the 1911 census she is one of six

laundry maids all aged 16-25 including one named Daisy Christie who is close to her in age.²⁸ In the 1921 census, she is one of five laundresses, one of these again being Daisy.²⁹

Sadly, Rose died of breast cancer at the relatively young age of 41 years on 17 August 1930 in Hill House Minster (formerly the workhouse infirmary).³⁰ Rose had experienced some difficult times in her life, but in the Royal School for the Deaf, Margate, she was provided with not just an education but also a place of safety and security in adulthood, and hopefully friendship among the young women of the laundry.

***A possible father for Rose Ethel Punnett**

The addition of the surname 'Williams' into Rose's name on Margaret's return to England may provide a clue to the identity of Rose's father. As previously mentioned, in 1884 Margaret Jane Punnett was working as a laundress living at 18 Pavilion Road, Folkestone. In the 1881 census, the household of Mary Ann Williams, widow, and three of her children William (aged 23) laundryman, Kate (aged 19) laundress, and Jack (aged 17), labourer, were living at 14 Pavilion Road³¹. It is possible that Margaret was working alongside William and Kate Williams but would certainly have known them as neighbours. Thus William or Jack Williams could be potential candidates to be the father of Rose.

Further evidence may be provided by the names of Margaret's children. Margaret's first two daughters Rose Ethel and Emily Maud were named for her sisters. Her eldest son with husband Charles Ah Sing was named William Francis. Francis is the name of her eldest brother, but there is no William in her family. In the 1900s, Margaret entered into a relationship with James Rostron,

with whom she had three children. Her eldest son was named William Henry Punnett/Rostron. Thus she seems to have a particular fondness for the name William. It is hypothesised that Rose's father was William Williams, born ~1858, Folkestone, Kent to parents John Williams and Mary Ann Prebble.

Sources

¹ "England and Wales, Register of Births", General Register Office, Southport, England, registration of birth (digital image) for Margaret Jane PUNNETT, born 25 December 1868; Registered: 1869, Quarter: Mar, Registration District: Elham, Vol: 02A, p.922.

² "England and Wales, Civil Registration Online Birth Index", database, *General Register Office* (www.gro.gov.uk : accessed 30 August 2024), entry for Mary Ann PUNNETT; citing Register of Births, General Register Office, Southport, England, Registered: 1867, Quarter: Mar, Registration District: Elham, Vol: 02A, p.879 mmn WHITE.

³ "England and Wales, Civil Registration Online Birth Index", database, *General Register Office* (www.gro.gov.uk : accessed 30 August 2024), entry for Francis James PUNNETT; citing Register of Births, General Register Office, Southport, England, Registered: 1871, Quarter: Jun, Registration District: Elham, Vol: 02A, p.865 mmn WHITE.

⁴ "England and Wales, Civil Registration Online Birth Index", database, *General Register Office* (www.gro.gov.uk : accessed 30 August 2024), entry for unnamed female PUNNETT; citing Register of Births, General Register Office, Southport, England, Registered: 1873, Quarter: Jun, Registration District: Elham, Vol: 02A, p.828 mmn WHITE.

⁵ "Kent Baptisms", database with images, *FindMyPast* (www.findmypast.com.au : accessed 31 October 2024), entry for Emily Maud PUNNETT, baptised 3 August 1873; citing Canterbury Cathedral Archives, Folkestone Christ Church Parish Baptisms Register 1870-1878, Reference Number: U3/217/1/3

⁶ "England and Wales, Civil Registration Online Birth Index", database, *General Register Office* (www.gro.gov.uk : accessed 30 August 2024), entry for Arthur Robert PUNNETT; citing Register of Births, General Register Office, Southport, England, Registered: 1878, Quarter: Mar, Registration District: Elham, Vol: 02A, p.963 mmn WHITE.

⁷ "England and Wales, Civil Registration Online Birth Index", database, *General Register Office* (www.gro.gov.uk : accessed 30 August 2024), entry for Rose Ethel PUNNETT; citing Register of Births, General Register Office, Southport, England, Registered: 1883, Quarter: Sep, Registration District: Elham, Vol: 02A, p.974 mmn WHITE.

⁸ "1881 England Census", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed 30 August 2024), entry for the household of James PUNNETT, Folkestone, Kent; citing The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England, Class: RG11; Piece: 1010; Folio: 17; Page: 27; Registration District: Elham, Sub-district: Folkestone, Enumeration District: 7, Schedule: 156.

⁹ "British Newspapers", digital images, *FindMyPast* (www.findmypast.com.au : accessed 30 August 2024); citing *Folkestone Express*, 10 May 1884, page 7, column 1, Borough Police Court, John William Gumridge, Private, Beds. Regt, charged with theft of two pictures.

¹⁰ "Assisted Immigration 1848-1912 – Surnames beginning with P", online database, *Queensland State Archives* (<https://www.data.qld.gov.au/dataset/assisted-immigration-1848-to-1912/resource/b165131c-7eea-4e38-9486-85508ebe7cf5> : accessed September 2024), entry for Margaret J PINNET, age 19, entry no. 7813.

¹¹ Mackay Family History Society, *Immigration Terminology*, <https://www.mackayfamilyhistory.org.au/immigration-terminology/> : accessed 30 Aug 2024.

-
- ¹² Queensland Government, *The Creation of a State*, <https://www.qld.gov.au/about/about-queensland/history/creation-of-state#:~:text=desire%20for%20independence.-,Independence,gave%20Queensland%20its%20own%20constitution.> : accessed September 2024
- ¹³ "British Newspapers", digital images, *FindMyPast* (www.findmypast.com.au : accessed 30 August 2024); Various: search with keyword *Dorunda*, May-Jun 1888.
- ¹⁴ Queensland Government, Birth registration for Rose Ethel PUNNETT, born 27 December 1888, digital image, <https://www.familyhistory.bdm.qld.gov.au> : accessed 30 August 2024, Reference: 1889/C/11013.
- ¹⁵ Queensland Government, Marriage registration index for Charles Ah Sing and Margaret Jane Punnett, married 21 August 1890, <https://www.familyhistory.bdm.qld.gov.au> : accessed 30 August 2024, Reference: 1890/C/2161.
- ¹⁶ Queensland Government, Birth registration index for Emily Maud Sing, born 14 June 1891, <https://www.familyhistory.bdm.qld.gov.au> : accessed 30 August 2024, Reference: 1891/C/6964.
- ¹⁷ Queensland Government, Birth registration index for William Francis Ah Sing, born 27 September 1894, <https://www.familyhistory.bdm.qld.gov.au> : accessed 30 August 2024, Reference: 1894/C/6658.
- ¹⁸ Queensland Government, Birth registration index for Margaret Violet Ah Sing, born 3 March 1898, <https://www.familyhistory.bdm.qld.gov.au> : accessed 30 August 2024, Reference: 1898/C/6121.
- ¹⁹ "UK and Ireland, Incoming Passenger Lists, 1878-1960", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed 30 August 2024), entry for Mrs Sing and infant; citing The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England, *Board of Trade: Commercial and Statistical Department and successors: Inwards Passenger Lists, 1878-1960*. Class: BT26; Piece: 146; Item: 49
- ²⁰ Kent Archives, Royal School for Deaf Children Margate, Admission Records, Applications for Admission: 4325-7615 (1880-1925), Reference: Ch192/R1/1/1 Entry 5569 for Rose Ethel Williams Punnett.
- ²¹ Kent Archives, Royal School for Deaf Children Margate, Register of Children Old Kent Road (1-369), with transfers to Margate (1894-1902), Reference: Ch192/R2/1/6, Entry 279 for Rose Ethel Williams Punnett.
- ²² Kent Archives, Royal School for Deaf Children Margate, Register of Children Old Kent Road (5256-5670), with transfers to Margate (1894-1904), Reference: Ch192/R2/1/5, Entry 5510 for Rose Ethel Williams Punnett.
- ²³ "1901 England Census", database with images, *FindMyPast* (www.findmypast.com.au : accessed 30 August 2024), entry for Rose Ethel Williams PUNNETT, scholar in the District Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Children of the Poor, Margate, Kent; citing The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England, Class: RG13, Piece: 824, Folio: 35, Page: 12; Registration District: Thanet, Sub-district: Margate.
- ²⁴ Kent Archives, Royal School for Deaf Children Margate, Register of Children Old Kent Road (5256-5670), with transfers to Margate (1894-1904), Reference: Ch192/R2/1/5, Entry 5510 for Rose Ethel Williams Punnett.
- ²⁵ "Assisted Immigration 1848-1912 – Surnames beginning with S", online database, *Queensland State Archives* (https://www.data.qld.gov.au/dataset/assisted-immigration-1848-to-1912/resource/5a65c00f-d00f-4d6d-81b7-da41c477f6ac?inner_span=True : accessed September 2024), entry for Mrs C Ah Sing, Infant Ah Sing, Violet Ah Sing, entries: 9430-9432
- ²⁶ "Queensland Death Index, 1960-1964", database, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed October 2024), entry for Margaret Jane ROSTRON, died 16 March 1962, parents James PUNNETT and Mary Ann WHITE; citing Queensland Government, Registration of Death, Page no.: 2479, Registration no.: 001439.
- ²⁷ Kent Archives, Royal School for Deaf Children Margate, Leavers Records, Registers of Children Leaving School (1902-1912): Reference: Ch192/R8/1/3 Entry 150 for Rose Ethel Punnett.
- ²⁸ "1911 England Census", database with images, *FindMyPast* (www.findmypast.com.au : accessed 30 August 2024), entry for Rose PUNNETT, scholar in the District Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Children of the Poor, Margate, Kent; citing The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England, Class: RG13, Piece: 824, Folio: 35, Page: 12; Registration District: Thanet, Sub-district: Margate.
- ²⁹ "1921 England Census", database with images, *FindMyPast* (www.findmypast.com.au : accessed 30 August 2024), entry for Rose PUNNETT, Margate, Kent; citing The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England,

Class: RG15, Piece: 04452; Registration District: Thanet, Sub-district: Margate, Enumeration District: 19, Page 27.

³⁰ "England and Wales, Register of Deaths", General Register Office, Southport, England, registration of death (digital image) for Rose Ethel Punnett, died 17 August 1930 ;Registered: 1930, Quarter: Sep, Registration District: Thanet, Vol: 02A, p.1102.

³¹ "1881 England Census", database with images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com.au : accessed October 2024), entry for the household of Mary Ann WILLIAMS, Folkestone, Kent; citing The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England, Class: RG11; Piece: 1010; Folio: 89; Page: 93; Registration District: Elham, Sub-district: Folkestone, Enumeration District: 7, Schedule: 557.