

# *This is A Few Forgotten Women Story*



*This story was written, in April 2025, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who can be found as prisoners or staff in Dorchester Prison in the census returns, or who appear in the prison's admission and discharge registers.*

## **Mary Maria BURDEN's Story**

On April 21st 1851, in the Parish Church Studland, Dorset, England, William Longford BURDEN married Elizabeth PITCHER. William was aged 20 and Elizabeth was listed as being of full age ( she was 31 ).<sup>1</sup> Their first and only child was Mary Maria and she was baptised in Swanage Dorset in April 1852.<sup>2</sup> Her mother Elizabeth BURDEN dies in May 1854 and is buried in the Parish of Langton Matravers, Dorset.<sup>3</sup> Mary Maria's father, William Langford BURDEN remarries in 1855 to Sarah BOWER.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dorset, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1813-1921. Parish of Studland, Dorset. Page 49

<sup>2</sup> Dorset, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1906. Parish of Swanage, Dorset. Page 16.

<sup>3</sup> Dorset, England, Church of England Deaths and Burials, 1813-2010. Parish of Langton Matravers, Dorset. Page 34.

<sup>4</sup> England and Wales Civil Registration Marriage Index 1837-1915

On the 1861 Census we find Mary Maria a scholar aged 9, in Langton Herring Dorset with her grandparents Robert and Mary PITCHER, her uncle John PITCHER, his wife Hannah and their son James.<sup>5</sup>

The first mention of Mary Maria's crime appears in the newspapers in December of 1870. Reports state that she was brought before E. PEARCE Esq on remand from Weymouth, charged with forging two cheques belonging to her master Mr PEACH from Langton Herring Dorset.<sup>6</sup>

Mary Maria BURDEN was charged with forgery on two occasions - firstly 14th November 1870 in Langton Herring, a banker's cheque for 4 pound 10 shillings, offering said cheque to John WHITTLE on 16th November 1870 with intent to defraud; and secondly 2nd December 1870 a banker's cheque for 9 pound 10 shillings, and offering said cheque to John Edward RUSSELL of Melcombe Regis on that same day , with intent to defraud.<sup>7</sup>

Newspaper reports of the 9th March 1871 state that Mary Maria BURDEN, a servant, pleaded guilty to forgery of two cheques worth 4 pound 10 shillings and 9 pound 10 shillings. The prosecution recommended mercy on account of her good character. Later that same day, during the Second Court, after advice from the judge, Mary Maria withdrew her guilty plea, unfortunately the verdict of guilty was upheld during the second hearing. Sentence to be decided.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 1861 England Census Dorset Langton Herring, 1352/55/1

<sup>6</sup> Dorset County Express and Agricultural Gazette Dorchester, Dorset, England, Tuesday 13th December 1870. Page 4, column c.

<sup>7</sup> UK Calendar of Prisoners 1868-1929. Page 644

<sup>8</sup> The Wiltshire County Mirror, Tuesday 7th March 1871. Page 5, column f ( two mentions )

One newspaper reported that the cheques were forged because Mary Maria BURDEN owed a considerable sum of money to a travelling draper.<sup>9</sup>

Another reported that Mary Maria BURDEN should be shown leniency in her sentence as she was an orphan, also that evidence provided by both Ann TETT and Elizabeth PEACH ( her employer ) showed her to be of good character and that she had good reason to resort to the course she did.<sup>10</sup> Once again sentence was deferred.

She was eventually sentenced to six months in prison with hard labour starting March 3rd 1871 and was released 2nd September 1871.<sup>11</sup> As such, Mary Maria was listed as on the 1871 Census as M.M.B. an unmarried prisoner aged 19, a Housemaid Domestic Servant born Langton Herring Dorset.<sup>12</sup>

There is a notation on Mary Maria's Prison Record that mentions the Female Prisoners Aid Society, Nine Elms House, 6 Upper Belmont Terrace, Wandsworth Road, Surrey. Further research reveals this was an institution established by Mrs Susanna MEREDITH to help female prisoners re-integrate after their release. It was essentially a laundry which paid the women daily and allowed them to reside either within the institution or with a local family. Payment for this was deducted from their daily allowance. There are several very informative articles online about both Mrs MEREDITH and Nine Elms House.

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<sup>9</sup> The Western Gazette and Flying Post, Friday 10th March 1871. Page 8, column c.

<sup>10</sup> Bridport News Etc, Friday 10th March 1871. Page 3, column e.

<sup>11</sup> Dorset, England, Dorchester Prison Admission and Discharge Registers, 1782-1901. Page 94.

<sup>12</sup> 1871 England Census, Dorset, Dorchester, St Peter. 2010/27/34

Nine Elms House most likely had a positive effect on Mary Maria, as she married in Lambeth, Surrey in 1878 to Edmund AUSTIN.<sup>13</sup> Their children were as follows - Edmund William 1879<sup>14</sup>, Henry Tyler 1881,<sup>15</sup> Eleanor Mary 1883,<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Ann 1886<sup>17</sup> and Thomas John 1891<sup>18</sup>

On the 1881 Census the family were living in Griggs Cottages on Walter Road Lambeth Surrey. Edmund aged 30 was a Corn Porter, Mary Maria aged 29, Edmund W aged 2 and Henry aged 2 months.<sup>19</sup>

By the 1891 Census they were in Cunic Street East Battersea, an area which has now been demolished. Edmund aged 42 a general labourer, Mary Maria aged 39 a laundry woman ( wash ), Edmund W aged 12 a scholar, Henry T aged 10 as scholar, Eleanor M aged 7 a scholar and Elizabeth A aged 4 a scholar.<sup>20</sup>

1901 finds the family at 15 Nursery Street, Clapham - Edmund aged 50 a labourer in the gas works, Mary Maria aged 49, Edmund aged 22 a Private Soldier 2nd Queens Regiment, Elinor ( sic ) aged 17 charring, and Thomas aged 9.<sup>21</sup> ( Note - Elizabeth Ann was in service in the household of Edward W WYATT Northcote Road Battersea.)

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<sup>13</sup> London, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1902, Parish of St Mary the Less, Black Prince Road, Lambeth, Surrey. Page 291.

<sup>14</sup> London, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms 1813-1924, Parish of St Mark Kennington, Kennington Park Road, Kennington, Lambeth, Surrey. Page 627.

<sup>15</sup> England and Wales Civil Registration Births Index, 1837-1915, Lambeth, M Qtr 1881, Vol 01D, Page 482. MMN BURDEN

<sup>16</sup> England and Wales Civil Registration Birth Index 1837-1915, Lambeth, J Qtr, 1883, Vol 01D, Page 480, MMN BURDEN

<sup>17</sup> England and Wales Civil Registration Birth Index 1837-1915, Wandsworth, Vol 01D, Page 610, MMN BURDEN

<sup>18</sup> England and Wales Civil Registration Birth Index 1837-1915, Wandsworth, Vol 01D, Page 569, MMN BURDEN

<sup>19</sup> 1881 England Census London, Lambeth, Kennington First, 605/60/49

<sup>20</sup> 1891 England Census London, Battersea, East Battersea, 425/119/27

<sup>21</sup> 1901 England Census London, Clapham, 461/122/13&14

By 1911 Mary Maria is aged 60, widowed and living at 97 St Phillip Street Battersea with her son Edmund aged 32 a Coal Porter, his wife Gertrude aged 32 and their children Catherine aged 13 and Elizabeth aged 5.<sup>22</sup> ( Note - Elizabeth Ann is still in service to the same family ). Edmund AUSTIN died in 1911.<sup>23</sup> Mary Maria AUSTIN also died in 1911.<sup>24</sup>

Edmund William AUSTIN and Gertrude LOCKYER in 1903, Hartley Wintney, Hampshire.<sup>25</sup> He was killed in 9th January 1919 in Cologne Germany during WW1 and is buried in Cologne Southern Cemetery. He was 40 yrs of age and serving with The Queens ( Royal West Surrey ) Regiment, 1st Batt. Husband of Mrs G AUSTIN, 21 Wycliffe Road, Battersea, London.<sup>26</sup> Henry Tyler AUSTIN died 1950 in Greenwich London.<sup>27</sup>

Eleanor Mary AUSTIN and Henry Richard MCMANUS married in St Pauls Clapham in 1906.<sup>28</sup> Their children were Eleanor Mary 1907 Wandsworth, Henry Thomas Edmund 1908 Wandsworth. The family moved to Wales where Eleanor Mary died aged 33 in 1916.<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Ann AUSTIN is not definitely traced after 1911.

Thomas John AUSTIN in 1911 is a Signaller with the rank of Private in the 1st Batt Welsh Regiment stationed in Egypt.<sup>30</sup> He appears on the 1921 Census.

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<sup>22</sup> 1911 England Census London, Battersea, East Battersea, 31/2174/148

<sup>23</sup> England and Wales Civil Registration Death Index 1837-1915, Wandsworth, Vol 01D, Page 315. Aged 60 yrs.

<sup>24</sup> England and Wales Civil Registration Death Index 1837-1915, Lambeth, Vol 01D. Page 201. Aged 60yrs.

<sup>25</sup> England and Wales Civil Registration Marriage Index 1837-1915, Hampshire, Vol 2c, Page 279.

<sup>26</sup> UK Soldiers Died in The Great War 1914-1918. Find a Grave Germany.

<sup>27</sup> England and Wales Civil Registration Death Index 1837-1915, Greenwich, Vol 5c, Page 597

<sup>28</sup> London, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1940, St Pauls Clapham, Rectory Grove, Lambeth, 23rd Sept 1906. Page 112.

<sup>29</sup> England and Wales Civil Registration Birth Index 1837-1915. England and Wales Civil Registration Death Index 1916-2007.

<sup>30</sup> 1911 Census Military Egypt, 34994 Page 159.

It seems that despite her one transgression, Mary Maria BURDEN went on to have a full life and with luck, there are still some descendants of hers alive today.