

## More Than Oliver Twist: Biography

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Name: Ann Fenton

B. 1832, d. 1885

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Author: Dot Moss

Ann Fenton was born in about 1832 in Leeds, Yorkshire (1). It is likely that her maiden name was Ann Clarkson and that she married William Fenton, a labourer, at St Peter's Church, Leeds, on 3 June 1853 (2). Ann's father was recorded as John Clarkson, a farmer. Two years before the marriage, in 1851, Ann Clarkson had been a pauper inmate in North Street Workhouse, North Leeds, recorded as a domestic servant (3).

By the 1861 census, Ann and William Fenton had a baby girl, aged 5 months. They lived at Skelton's Yard, North Leeds (4). The baby was born on 9 November 1860. She was baptized Ann Elizabeth Fenton a year later, on 19 December 1861 (5). The couple's second child, Sarah, was born on 7 May 1865 and baptized on 18 October the same year (6).

By 1871, Ann and her family had moved to 40 Ward's Fold, North Leeds. Ann's husband, William worked as a labourer for the Board of Works (7). William, died at the age of 55, he was buried on 30 January 1876, in Beckett Street Cemetery, Leeds (8).

Two years later, in 1878, Ann Fenton, was convicted of stealing a pair of boots and was sentenced to 15 months in Leeds Prison (9). She was transferred to Wakefield Prison on 3 May 1879 and discharged from there on 30 January 1880 (10).

According to the Wakefield Prison record, Ann was 46 years old, 5' 1", with sandy hair, a charwoman by occupation. The record also states that although Ann had been sentenced at Leeds with no previous convictions, she had in fact been in prison nineteen times under an alias of 'Ellen Watson' (11). A record for 'Ellen Watson' was also created at Wakefield prison so that this 'deception' could not recur (12). 'Ellen' was also described as 46, a widow, and 5'1". Ann Fenton's name was written on the record, as well as the name Clarkson (which was Ann Fenton's maiden name). This indicates that Ann Fenton may well have used the alias before she married William Fenton (13).

Whether Ann Fenton committed offences whilst married to William is not known. However, an 'Ellen Watson', a single woman, was charged with stealing seventeen yards of silk and 17 silk purses on the 15 October 1860 from Eliza Crabtree in Leeds (14). If this was Ann Fenton, using her alias, she would have been very pregnant when she committed the offence. Her first child was born 9 November 1860, 24 days after the offence (15). On 7 January 1861, 'Ellen Watson' was sentenced to six months in prison for this offence (16).

William Fenton's death and Ann's imprisonment would have broken the family up. By 1881 both their daughters lived independently as domestic servants. The oldest girl, went by the

name Elizabeth Fenton (Elizabeth was her middle name) and worked in South East Leeds, at the Temperance Hotel (17). The younger daughter, Sarah, worked with the Wright family in West Leeds, on Victoria Terrace (18).

In 1881, their mother, Ann Fenton was an inmate in Leeds Union Workhouse (19), she had probably lived there since her discharge from Wakefield prison (20). She is described as a charwoman, and a widow on the Workhouse record. Ann Fenton died in 1885 and was buried from the Union Infirmary, on 13 July that year in Beckett Street Cemetery, an Anglican (21).

It is not certain that the Ann Fenton who married William Fenton, is the same Ann Fenton who was allegedly imprisoned on several occasions under the alias of 'Ellen Watson'. But the fact that the names 'Clarkson' (Ann Fenton's maiden names) and 'Ann Fenton' appear on 'Ellen Watson's' prison record, and Ellen Watson is recorded as an alias Ann Fenton used is evidence that they are the same person (22).

## References

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