

Ellen Ingle

(b. c. 1840, d 1882)

6 January 2020, Lesley Collins

Ellen Ingle was an inmate of the Leeds Union Workhouse on the night of the 1881 census (1) but nothing is known of her life prior to 1870.

In March 1870, Ellen Ingle, aged 30, was admitted to the Workhouse in Newington St Mary, Southwark, with her children James, born 1861, Ellen, born 1863, and Thomas, born 1865(2). Ellen was recorded as the Widow of an Optician, and all 4 were stated to be from the parish of St Mary Newington. All were discharged at the end of March 1870 at Ellen's request.

3 days later, on 2 April 1870, the family were again admitted to Newington Workhouse and discharged at the end of April. They were re-admitted in August and this time, the 3 children were sent onto the City of London District School at Hanwell in West London.

On 24 Sept 1870, Ellen gave birth in the Workhouse to a baby girl, Caroline Matilda Ingle, the only 1 of her children whose birth was registered. The mother's maiden name given as Inglis (4). On Census night, 1871, Ellen and baby Caroline still were inmates of the Newington Workhouse whilst the other children were at Hanwell (3). Ellen was noted as being the 'wife of an Optician', born in Gloucester(shire), whereas the earlier registers recorded her as a Widow.

After nearly a year in the Workhouse, the children were sent back from Hanwell School and the family discharged in July 1871. The Discharge register noted that both Ellen and her son James were 'insane', the first indication of Ellen's mental state.

Sadly, in Feb 1872, the baby born in Newington Workhouse, Caroline Matilda, died in the neighbouring Workhouse of St George the Martyr, in Mint St, Southwark. She was noted as the daughter of Ellen Ingle. Shortly after, in April 1872, the Ingle family were again admitted to Newington Workhouse from St George's parish, and, by this time, Ellen had given birth to another baby girl also, surprisingly, called Caroline! Shortly after, the older children were sent back to the school at Hanwell.

Ellen and the baby Caroline were discharged from Newington Workhouse in Nov 1872, and Ellen does not appear again in the Workhouse records in Southwark although it appears she was still an inmate, at least until 1876. The children Thomas and Caroline were found wandering in Newington High St and taken into the neighbouring workhouse of St George the Martyr before being sent onto the Hanwell School where they stayed for another 2 years before being discharged to their mother in 1878.

The following year, in 1879, Ellen's daughters Ellen and Caroline were admitted to the City of London Bow Road Infirmary. Caroline was removed 'by her mother' in Jan 1880, leaving Ellen aged 17 there until May 1880 when she discharged herself (5).

By April 1881, Ellen Ingle, aged 40, was an inmate of the Leeds Union Workhouse, her place of birth noted as Bristol, Gloucs, and her previous occupation as 'Butcher' (6). How long she had been in Leeds is not clear and there is no reference to her in the surviving correspondence for both Leeds and Southwark Unions (17, 18). However, another inmate from Southwark was being cared for in the Leeds Workhouse at the end of 1881 so it looks as though Ellen was not the only one to be transferred from Southwark (17). 4 months after the Census night, Ellen was transferred to the West Yorkshire Lunatic Asylum at Wakefield (7).

The Magistrate's Order for the Reception of a Pauper Lunatic (no. 76077) confirmed the admission of Ellen Ingle, a 40-year-old widow, a 'person of unsound mind', from the Workhouse, Leeds, on 23 July 1881 (8). The Medical report by G. F. Cooke accompanying the Order described her as 'very excited, unable to sleep at night because 'the Lord God and his mother were teasing her', wanders about incoherently and tries to undress herself, unable to remember anything she does or says'. Mr Cooke noted that Ellen was 38 when she suffered her first attack and that she had been previously treated at the Infirmary. Her family history on the Reception order was blank.

The Medical report case book for Ellen Ingle makes grim reading (9). It was noted that she had been admitted into the Leeds Workhouse several times during the last 2-3 years and was thought to have suffered a stroke in the Infirmary. On admission, she weighed 120 lbs, was 5' ½" tall with brown hair and blue eyes. She was certified as suicidal, with defective memory and speech. Her family history was 'wholly unknown' and she was regarded as very unreliable in her statements.

There followed an extensive treatment history, describing how she had pulled out all her hair, was very restless and troublesome and had to be put in a padded cell from time to time. She also had ice bags applied to her spine and later her head to 'cool her symptoms' but by mid-January 1882, her condition had worsened and on 1 February 1882, she suffered a 'syncopal' attack and died at 12.15am.

Dr B Lewis carried out a Post Mortem and confirmed the causes of death as 1) Pneumonia, 2) Pulmonary Gangrene and 3) Pleurisy with effusion (10). Her age at death was also given as 40 and her death was registered in Wakefield (11).

Although a great deal is known about Ellen Ingle's life in Southwark and her sad end in the Wakefield Asylum, her earlier life is a complete mystery. The 1841 Census for Southwark records 2 Ingle families, both in Pontipool Place, headed by John and William Ingle, both of whom are from outside the County and both are recorded as 'Blind' (12). Whilst there is no Ellen shown in these families, it is a possibility that there is a connection with our lady, but neither family appears on later census returns. Nor is there any trace of an Ellen Ingle of the right age in the Gloucestershire area.

On the 1861 census, at the Middlesex County Asylum at Colney Hatch, there is a 20 year old female Patient recorded as 'E.I', place of birth 'N/K' but there is no matching entry in any of the Colney Hatch records (13, 14, 15).

Extensive searching of the Civil Registration and Parish Register Marriage indexes on-line have failed to identify any likely marriage of a male Ingle/Inglis to a female Ellen anywhere in Gt Britain, nor is there any likely death registration for her 'husband'. Local Trade Directories have also been unable to shed any light on possible Ingle families in Southwark in the late 1860's or a relevant Opticians business in the area (16, 17). Given her apparent mental instability, Ellen's 'married' status and place of birth remains unconfirmed.

Ellen's children have also proved difficult to trace, none of them can found on the 1881 or later Census returns. James Inglis was admitted to Islington Workhouse in 1905 several times before being discharged in 1917, he was noted as 'infirm' but his brother Thomas and sister Caroline have proved even more elusive. Ellen Ingles was admitted for having 'no home' to the City Road Workhouse in Holborn in 1899, together with her daughter, Nellie, born in 1892, but after their discharge in April 1899, there is no further trace of them (19).

References:

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