

Hannah Wade

(b. 1803, d.1900)

Pat Wilson

On Tuesday 17th July 1900, the following report appeared in the York Herald entitled "Death of a Nonagenarian" (1):

"On Saturday Hannah Wade died in the Ripon Union Workhouse, at the age of 95. Deceased was an interesting personage, as she had been over 60 years in the Workhouse, and had experienced all the varied changes that have taken place in the Poor Law Administration during that long period. She was for 17 years an inmate of the old Ripon Poor House, which was pulled down to make room for the present Workhouse, erected in 1854 and where she has since – with the exception of a few months - resided. She had a retentive memory, and being bright and cheerful, was always ready to entertain visitors with old stories of Ripon. She leaves one daughter several grandchildren, and great grandchildren."

In researching Hannah's life, her date of birth and reported age remain a puzzle. A child named Hannah Wade was christened in Ripon Cathedral on 18th November 1799, the third child of Jane, an unmarried mother (2). Some three years later, another child named Ann, also the daughter of Jane, was baptised in the Cathedral on December 1st 1803 (3). Considering the age given in the above newspaper report, her age as recorded in subsequent censuses, and the age at which she would have given birth to her children, it seems likely that the nonagenarian in question in the above report was the child baptised 'Ann', her old sister perhaps having died in infancy. However we use the name 'Hannah' here, as it would appear that this name was the one used throughout her life.

Hannah bore two male children both called John. The first child, born in 1834, died aged 3 months, and the second, born in 1837, died aged 8 months (4,5,6,7). According to the above newspaper report, Hannah was resident in the former Ripon Poor House from about 1837, however in the 1841 census, Hannah is recorded in North Street, Ripon with her mother Jane and brother John, both described as agricultural labourers, with no occupation given for Hannah (8).

At a relatively advanced age, in 1842, Hannah had a daughter, Mary, who was not baptised until 1850 (9). Mary's birth does not appear to have been registered on the Civil Registration Index, but her baptismal record shows her date of birth as March 3rd 1842 (9). Jane, Hannah's mother, died in 1843 at the age of 78 (10). It seems probable that Hannah then moved permanently to the Workhouse.

The 1851 census shows Hannah living in the Workhouse as a single lodger with her daughter Mary aged 9, a scholar (11). Interestingly, Hannah is not recorded in the Workhouse in the 1861 census, but a record has been found of a Hannah Wade, aged 50, along with Mary Wade, aged 20, and Louisa Wade, aged 1, all natives of Ripon, lodging in Skircoat, a parish within Halifax (12). Hannah and Mary are recorded as working in a Worsted Mill. Baby Louisa was born in 1859 in Ripon to an unmarried mother named Wade, but a baptism record has not been found (13). The newspaper report quoted above mentions that Hannah was resident at the new Workhouse from 1854, '*apart from a few months*'. If this is the same family – and the names, ages and birthplace are evidence for this – perhaps Hannah and her daughter were sent to the mill for a period of employment.

By 1864, Hannah was again resident in Ripon Workhouse, as shown in the annual return of lunatics (as then termed), made to the North Riding Quarter Sessions (14). Hannah is described as:

“aged 56 years, chargeable to Ripon parish and living in the workhouse. Her weekly cost of maintenance is 3s; she is an idiot, not dangerous to herself or others, not of dirty habits, and has been of unsound mind from birth.”

In 1864, the weekly cost of her keep was 3/-s (15p), and this fluctuates over the next 25 years between 1864 and 1889 from 2/11d to 3/4d (15p - 17p). Her age of 56 years as given in 1864 would have put her date of birth at 1808; the return of 1889 gives her age as 83 years, thus with a date of birth of 1806 (15). It is probable that nobody, including Hannah, knew the correct year of birth for sure, however a date within the first decade of the 19th century seems most likely, hence giving further evidence for her baptism as 'Ann Wade' (3).

From 1871 and in the two following censuses, Hannah is resident in the Workhouse, described as a domestic servant and is noted as being an imbecile (16,17,18). Thankfully, the newspaper report published on her death tells more of her true character and reveals something beyond the stark categorization recorded in official documents (1, 19).

The Master's Report for 30th July 1890 notes (20):

"30 July 1890 Mrs Beck asks to take out her mother Hannah Wade who is a certified lunatic. Request granted."

This record has allowed us to locate Hannah's daughter Mary, (the 'Mrs Beck' of the above note), who is found from 1871 living in Leeds with William Beck, a quarryman (21). Louisa, Mary's daughter is living with them and In addition, Mary and William were to have 8 children in total, three of whom died in infancy. Mary's husband William died in 1900, and the following year, Mary is living with her sons Arthur, a steam engine driver, and Ernest Wilfred, a tailor's cutter (22,23).

Ten years on, in 1911, Ernest is married with two children, and Mary lives with him in Burley, as does one of her married daughters (24). Here, then, in one household, are representatives of the three generations descended from Hannah Wade.

References

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