

Martha Thackwray

(b.1868, d.1912)

Nicola Bradbury

Martha Thackwray was born in Sharow, a village near Ripon, to Joseph and Jane Thackwray and was baptised there on 21st June 1868 (1,2). Her parents, Joseph and Jane (née Pickersgill) had been married in Baldersby in 1860 (3). Their marriage record shows that Joseph was a blacksmith, and was able to sign his own name, whilst Jane was not. Jane is recorded as being 18 years old, although she was born in Ripon in 1843, so she was aged 17 at the time of her marriage (4). The following year, in the 1861 census, Jane was living in Rainton, close to Ripon, with her mother Elizabeth and stepfather, William Longcaster (5). Jane is recorded as being a blacksmith's wife, but her husband Joseph is not resident with the family.

By the time of the 1871 census, Jane and Joseph were resident in Sharow, with Martha, then 3 years old, and her four siblings, their ages ranging from 9 years to 7 months (6). Just a few months later, Joseph died at the age of 31 years, and a notice of his death was published in the Knaresborough Post (7,8).

Jane Thackwray remarried in April 1872 (9). Her new husband, Mark Beckwith, was also a blacksmith. Jane gave birth to two more children – Ethel Mary in 1876, and Fred in 1878 – but was to die a year later (10,11,12). She was buried in Baldersby in September 1879, her burial record noting that she was a resident of Sawley. In 1881, we find Mark Beckwith, now a widower, living there with his two young children, and his unmarried sister Mary resident with the family as a housekeeper (13).

What became of Martha Thackwray?

A disturbing newspaper account from 1880 reports the indictment of James Pickersgill, aged 44, for *“an aggravated assault upon Martha Thackwray, a girl under the age of 12 years, at Bishop Monckton”* (14). James Pickersgill was found guilty of this offence. As noted above, ‘Pickersgill’ was Martha's mother's maiden name, so James may have been a relative. The report goes on to say that the prisoner had also been found guilty of burglary and was sentenced for both offences – six months' imprisonment for the assault and seven years' penal servitude for the burglary. From our perspective, the imbalance in these sentences is striking.

As we know, about a year later, Martha was resident in Ripon Workhouse at the time of the 1881 census (15). Also at that time, we find her younger

brother William living with his grandmother, Elizabeth Lancaster, and her husband William, a farm labourer, in Bishop Monkton (16). It seems likely that Elizabeth was unable to support both her grandchildren, hence Martha had been admitted to the Workhouse.

In May 1882, we learn from the workhouse Discharge Registers that Martha was 'gone on trial to a situation' with Mr Bickerdike, a farmer in Sawley (17), and from the 1881 census, we know that this Francis Bickerdike was a farmer of 9 acres, married with 2 young children (18).

At the age of 18, in the last quarter of 1884, Martha married Christopher Smith in Ripon (19). Their first child, Richard, was baptised in Bishop Monkton at the beginning of 1886, Christopher's profession being given as 'Labourer' (20). Their second child, a daughter named Jane Elizabeth was born in 1890 (21). A year later, in 1891, the family were living in Markington, where Christopher was a bricklayer's labourer (22). The family remained in Markington over the next 20 years (23,24). By 1911, their son, Richard, had followed the family tradition in becoming a blacksmith, perhaps having been helped in gaining this profession through his mother's stepfather. Shortly after this census, their daughter Jane married Robert Arthur Close, a cab proprietor (25).

Martha herself died the following year in 1912 at the age of 44, and was buried in Markington (26).

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