

## Mary-Ann Dawes

(b. 1814 – d. 1886)

### Marie-Anne Hintze

Mary Ann (Marianne) Dawes was baptised in Kirkby Malzeard on 24th April 1814, the daughter of Robert and Mary Dawes (1). Her parents Robert Dawes and Mary Banks had been married there on 14th October 1806 (2). Robert Dawes was a shoemaker who was born circa 1786, the same year as his wife Mary.

According to the 1841 census for Grewelthorpe, they had four children living with them at that date. Mary Ann was the eldest aged 25, her brother John, aged 20 was a shoemaker and there were also two younger children Jane and Robert, both listed as 15 years old. The household also included Robert and Mary's grandson, Edward Dawes, aged three, the illegitimate son of Mary Ann (3).

Mary Dawes died in 1847 (4). In the 1851 census, the household consists of Robert Dawes, a widower of 68, shoemaker, Mary Ann, his unmarried daughter aged 34 and Edward Thorpe Dawes, Robert's grandson aged 12, a scholar (5). Edward Dawes continued to live with his grandfather and mother in Grewelthorpe until 1864 when he married Elizabeth Gill of Shaw Mills in Ripon (6).

Mary Ann remained with her father in Grewelthorpe. In 1871 Robert was 88 years old and had retired from shoemaking. However, Mary Ann was able to make a contribution to the household by her earnings as a straw plaiter, producing plaited straw for the manufacture of straw hats and bonnets (7).

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, straw plaiting gradually became an organised cottage industry, centred mainly in the south Midlands but also spreading to more distant places such as the Orkneys and Yorkshire. From the first, straw plaiting was practiced mainly by women and children: the advantage of plaiting was that it could be practiced anywhere, in the cottage, walking down the street, watching over flocks or standing in the doorway. While the work was being made the straw had to be kept continuously damp so as to be workable, so sitting before the fire in winter was discouraged. The plaiter worked the straw in front of the hands, with the plait falling towards the body and looped over the right arm as the plait grew. Under the left arm, the plaiter held a bundle of damp, prepared straw splints and as the work progressed, she would bend her head and pull out new straws, moistening them by working them around with her tongue until they lay together sticking out of either side of the mouth. This often left a permanent scar at the right hand corner of the mouth.

Early in the 1870s, imports of plait from China and later Japan caused a sharp drop in the value of English plait and the earnings fell dramatically. Despite this plaiting did represent a source of income for women at home or the elderly who could not provide for themselves in other ways. By the 1890s the industry had declined owing

to competition from mechanisation and increased availability of cheaper supplies from abroad (8).

By 1841, as recorded in Pigott's Directory, 7 straw hat makers were in business in Ripon providing for the demand for fashionable straw hats and bonnets (9). In outlying villages such as Grewelthorpe this also provided new opportunities for employment and income. The 1851 census for Grewelthorpe lists 4 straw hat makers: William Rayner and his wife and Maria Jackson and Elizabeth Burton (5). By 1861 William Rayner is listed as a wholesale merchant in straw bonnets employing one assistant (10). In 1871, Mary Ann is one of two women listed as straw plaiters (7).

Robert Dawes's death is recorded for Ripon in 1874, he was then aged 91 (11). This may have been the trigger for the admission of Mary Ann to the workhouse, where she was living in 1881 (12). At that date, the record carries the additional information that she is classed as an 'imbecile'. In the medical classification of the day, the term referred to someone with a mental age of between 3 and 7 years, able to communicate and perform simple tasks. Her condition is further described in the 1885 and 1886 Annual Return of Lunatics, for the Ripon Union: "*she is of defective intellect, not dangerous to herself and others, of clean habits and has been of unsound mind since birth*" (13, 14). Her death is recorded as having taken place in Ripon, in the first quarter of 1886, aged 69 (15).

Despite her difficulties, it is interesting to note that Mary Ann managed to remain in her village and family community until the last years of her life. She must also have been gratified by her son Edward's progress. By 1871 he was living with his family in Ripon working at his trade of shoemaker (7). However, he must have been literate, for by 1881 he was both a shoemaker and a postman (12). By 1901, aged 62 he was described as a retired pensioner and must have died before the date of the next census as his wife is then listed as a widow living in the Newcastle area with three of her children (16). He and his wife raised 11 children, one of whom was a whitesmith, another a plumber whilst sadly their next to youngest son Percy (1886-1918) who had enlisted as a private in the Welch Guards, was killed in action on 24 August 1918 in Flanders (7).

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(2) 'Dawes, Robert' (1806) *Marriage of Robert Dawes and Mary Banks, 14 October 1806, St Andrew's Church, Kirkby Malzeard*. Yorkshire Marriages, 14 October 1806, NYCRO N-PR-KMZ-1-7. Available at: <https://Findmypast.co.uk> (Accessed 26 November 2019)

- (3) 'Dawes, Mary Ann' (1841) *Census return for Grewelthorpe, Yorkshire West Riding*. Class: HO107; 1285; Book 3; Folio 24, Page 1. Available at: <https://ancestry.co.uk> (Accessed 8 November 2019)
- (4) 'Dawes, Mary' (1847) *Civil Deaths and Burials, England, Ripon District*. Vol. 23, p. 397. Available at: <https://Findmypast> (Accessed 8 November 2019)
- (5) 'Dawes, Mary Ann' (1851) *Census return for Grewelthorpe, Yorkshire West Riding*. Class: Ho107; 2281; Folio 489; Page 10. Available at: <https://ancestry.co.uk> (Accessed 8 November 2019)
- (6) 'Dawes, Edward' (1864) *England and Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index 1837-1915*. Available at: <https://ancestry.co.uk> (Accessed 9 November 2019)
- (7) 'Dawes, Mary Ann' (1871) *Census return for Grewelthorpe, Yorkshire West Riding*. Class: RG 10; 4278; Folio: 24, Page: 8. Available at: <https://ancestry.co.uk> (Accessed 8 November 2019)
- (8) 'Davis, Jean' (1981) *Straw Plait*. Shire Publications Ltd. No.78.
- (9) Pigot and Co's (1841) *Directory of Yorkshire*. J. Pigot & Co. Fleet Street, London.
- (10) 'Dawes, Mary Ann' (1861) *Census return for Grewelthorpe, Yorkshire West Riding*. Class RG 9; 3198; Folio: 24, Page: 2. Available at: <https://ancestry.co.uk> (Accessed 8 November 2019)
- (11) 'Dawes, Robert' (1874) *England and Wales, Civil Registration Death Index 1837-1915*. Yorkshire West Riding. Available at: <https://ancestry.co.uk> (Accessed 8 November 2019)
- (12) 'Dawes, Mary Ann' (1881) *Census return for Ripon District, Yorkshire West Riding*. Class : RG 10; 4275, Folio: 84; Page: 41. Available at: <https://ancestry.co.uk> (Accessed 8 November 2019)
- (13) 'Dawes, Mary Ann' (1885) *Annual return of lunatics, Ripon Union*. QSB 1885 2/12/30. North Riding of Yorkshire Quarter Sessions. Available at: North Yorkshire County Record Office.
- (14) 'Dawes, Mary Ann' (1886) *Annual return of lunatics, Ripon Union*. QSB 1886 2/12/46. North Riding of Yorkshire Quarter Sessions. Available at: North Yorkshire County Record Office.
- (15) 'Dawes, Mary Ann' (1886) *England and Wales, Civil Registration Death Index 1837-1915*. Ripon, Yorkshire West Riding, vol. 9a, p.56. Available at: <https://ancestry.co.uk> (Accessed 10 November 2019)

- (16) 'Edward Dawes' (1901) *Census return for Ripon, Yorkshire, West Riding*.  
Class: RG12; 35100; Folio 83, Page 13. Available at: <https://ancestry.co.uk>  
(Accessed 10 November 2019)
- (17) 'Dawes, Percy' (1886-1918) Private, Welsh Guards, died 24 August 1918.  
Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Vis-en-Artois Memorial, France.  
Available at: <https://ancestry.co.uk> Commonwealth War Graves (Accessed 26  
November 2019)