

Mary Isabella (Isabel) Clapham (née Fairburn)

(b.1868,d.1949)

Elizabeth Barker
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Mary Isabella (or Isabel) Fairburn was baptised on 16 August 1868 in Wortley, near Leeds (1). She was the child of George Fairburn, (born c.1828, date of death not known), railway worker and former miner, and his wife Isabella Prest (born 1832, d. 1874)(2,3,4). The 1871 census shows the family living in Wortley at 16 Pickards Buildings, Hoyle Street, and shows that Mary had two brothers, Thomas William born in 1865, and George Prest born in 1870 (5).

The family seems to have been split up following the death of their mother Isabella in 1874 (6). Mary's elder brother Thomas was convicted of stealing from his father's lodgings in 1875, sentenced to 6 years in a reformatory, and was admitted to Leeds Industrial School. The records of this institution also reveal that Thomas, his father George (given erroneously as Thomas William Fairburn) and his younger brother George Prest were living at 4 Second Avenue, New Wortley with Jane Wilburn, Thomas's aunt. Mary Isabella is not mentioned (7).

Possibly after their mother's death, both Mary and her younger sister Kate, born in 1873, went to live with their uncle and aunt in Ripon (8). Mary and George were admitted together on 25 May 1876, and they were brought in by their aunt. The aunt's name is Mrs Mary Nicholson, but in the register she is given as "Mrs Fairburn", living at Darnton's Yard, Ripon. The name given at the date of admission was "Mary Bell Fairburn"(11). The 1881 census reveals that Mary and her younger brother George are inmates of the Ripon workhouse (9). The census also reveals that their brother Thomas and sister Kate are living in Ripon with their uncle and aunt in Darnton Yard, Queen Street, Ripon (10). The reason for their admission to the Ripon Workhouse rather than in Leeds may be due to the fact that both their parents came from the Ripon area, George from Wath or Melmerby and Isabella from Topcliffe (5).

The Workhouse records show that Mary was well behaved. At the age of 14, she was discharged on 18 May 1883, "gone on trial to a situation" (12). As she was under the age of 16, further records had to be kept, and these show that she went to work for a Captain with the surname l'anson, or possibly Imeson/Janson/Jameson in Thirsk. It was reported that she was "doing very well indeed" (13).

After her discharge from the Workhouse, she dropped the name Mary and became known as "Isabel Fairburn". The 1891 census shows her working in Harrogate, in the house of Augustus Dimmock, physician and surgeon, and his wife Laura as a cook and general servant (14). On Christmas Day 1891, Isabel married Samuel George Clapham, a plumber, at Christ Church, High Harrogate (15). The 1901 census shows Isabel and Samuel living at 5 Denmark Street, Harrogate with three children, Stanley aged 8, Ethel aged 6 and Harry aged 4 (16). They were still living there at the time of the 1911 census, but without Ethel, who had died in 1910 (17,18).

Samuel died in 1923 ((19). Isabel turns up in the records once more, in the Electoral Register for Harrogate, 1939, shown as "widowed, incapacitated" living in the home of Norman and Kitty Wilkinson at 17 St. John's Drive, Harrogate ((20). She died in April 1949 at the age of 81, survived by her two sons (21).

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