

Thomas Pratt
(b.1849, d.1916)

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Thomas Pratt was born in 1848 in Copt Hewick, a village near Ripon, the second child of parents Robert and Maria Pratt, née Sherwood (1). In the 1841 census, Maria was employed as a female servant in Copt Hewick Hall (2). The couple were married in Ripon Cathedral on 27th July 1844 (3), and five months later Maria gave birth to their first child, a baby girl, Jane (4,5). In the 1851 census, Robert, Maria and Thomas are recorded as living in Copt Hewick. Robert, born in York in 1814, is a tailor; Maria was born in Stainton in 1819 (6). An apprentice tailor, John Swiers, was also resident with the family, however, their daughter Jane, now 7, is to be found in Stockton-on-Tees as a 'Visitor' in the house of her grandmother, Jane Sherwood (7). Also in this household are Jane Sherwood's widowed daughter Elizabeth Watson, (Maria's sister), and her daughter, Jane Watson, aged 2.

At the time of the 1861 census, Thomas and his father, Robert, were still living in Copt Hewick, but now with a housekeeper – his mother Maria having died in 1860 (8,9). Thomas's sister Jane was also living in Ripon, where she was employed as a housemaid (10). Their father Robert married his second wife, Mary Turner, in 1861 (11), but was to die just a year later in tragic circumstances. A report in the Richmond & Ripon Chronicle of February 22nd 1862 details an inquest held at the Royal Oak Inn, Copt Hewick, on the body of Robert Pratt, age 49. The inquest found that he committed suicide by cutting his throat. The report states, "*The unfortunate man was a civil, steady, industrious individual, and no cause is assigned for him committing this rash act. His wife stated that for the last three weeks he appeared to be labouring under mental despondency. Verdict 'Temporary Insanity'*" (12,13).

Thus, Thomas lost both parents by the age 14. Some nine years later, in the 1871 census, his step-mother Mary, an annuitant, was living in Stammergate, Ripon with her sister Frances, who is recorded as 'slightly mentally deficient' (13a). The record shows that the sisters were born in Manchester.

In 1870, Thomas's sister Jane had married George Field, a blacksmith from Huddersfield, with notice of the marriage being published in the Richmond & Ripon Chronicle (14). In 1871, they were living in

Huddersfield – the record shows that George, at 49 years old, was considerably older than Jane, who was then 27 (15). Visiting the household were a young granddaughter and niece, presumably George's relations. Perhaps with responsibilities towards her husband's family, Jane was not in a position to also support her brother.

In fact, in 1871 we find Thomas living in Stockton with his aunt, Elizabeth, (formerly Watson), who was now married to John Elders, a farmer of 50 acres (16). John Elders died in 1878, leaving an estate of less than £100 (17). Two years on, it appears that Elizabeth was no longer able to continue maintaining her nephew, and Thomas was admitted to Ripon Workhouse on August 7th 1880, then being described as a labourer (18). At the time of the census in 1881, he remains an inmate at the Workhouse, now aged 33 with no occupation; in addition, he is recorded as 'Blind' (19).

Thomas also spent time in the South Yorkshire Asylum, later known as Middlewood Hospital, which was located on the northern outskirts of Sheffield. He was admitted there from Ripon Workhouse on 15th August 1884 (20). His 'Cause of Insanity' was recorded as 'Unknown', and on his discharge about six months later, on 27th February 1885, the 'Outcome' was recorded as 'Recovered'.

Thomas appears to have found a settled home for his remaining years. In both the 1891 and 1901 censuses, he is living as a boarder with the family of Hannah Bowman, a widow, in Sharow. Again, he is recorded as 'Blind' on the census returns, and as living on his own means, perhaps on money inherited from his parents (21,22). Hannah Bowman died in 1907 at the age of 59 (23), however in the 1911 census, Thomas is still living in Sharow with Joseph Bowman, her son, a market gardener (24). Thomas is thought to have died in 1916, with his age at death recorded as 66 years (25).

References

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