HERStory: Making Invisible Women Visible

Research notes

| Group Number and Researcher Name: Group 3 - Madeline Brace, Abigail Santaney & Lauren Holliday | |
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| Name of Research Focus: Ethel Maud R Steigman[n] | |
| Date of Birth: circa. 1883 (records vary) | Date of Death: unknown. |
| Main Reason to Research: Link to York, German heritage, work as a photographic black and white artist | |
| Are there any other connections to key geographical locations or people?  Germany - Warrtmoor  UK - York | |
| Key Words: Immigration, Butchers, Photography, Artist | |
| Synopsis for website | |
| Ethel Maud Steigman[n] was a black and white photographer born to German immigrant parents. She presents as a person of interest in contextualising foriegn integration into the York community at a time of growing anti-german sentiment, and the growing photographic market that working class women were increasingly able to be a part of. | |
| What have you found out? | |
| **Overview:** Ethel Steigman[n] was born circa. 1883[[1]](#footnote-0) to Rosine and John Christian Steigmann, German immigrants who became naturalised citizens in 1888[[2]](#footnote-1). She was one of 8 children.[[3]](#footnote-2)  **German Immigration & Family Context:**   * It is possible that Ethel’s family already had affiliations with Britain prior to immigrating from Germany, as immigrant communities usually grew from pre-existing contacts who acted as a point of knowledge.[[4]](#footnote-3) Ethel’s father John Christian was a butcher,[[5]](#footnote-4) and there is evidence that he immigrated with his brother, who also opened a butcher shop.[[6]](#footnote-5) Throughout the 1800s, Germans were the second largest group of immigrants in Britain, with a recorded 33,000 Germans living in England and Wales in 1871.[[7]](#footnote-6) The immigration of German Pork Butchers to the UK was mostly from Hohenlohe in the South West,[[8]](#footnote-7) largely due to agricultural depression and crop failure.[[9]](#footnote-8) There was a need for specialty pork sellers in expanding English cities[[10]](#footnote-9) and estimates suggest there were around 1,200 German butchers in 1891 in England.[[11]](#footnote-10) Ethel’s family present a case study for the reaction to these immigrants in the York locality, and more specifically to the experience of German women. * Records suggest that Ethel’s parents were married on October 15th 1879, in York St Crux Church.[[12]](#footnote-11) They did not become naturalised citizens until 5 years after Ethel’s birth, however in the 1911 census Ethel is stated as a British subject. Having been born in the UK, Ethel may have benefitted from English schooling and easier integration while her parents may have spoken limited English.   **Family life in York:**   * Ethel’s father John Steigman[n] had a shop on 14 Bridge Street, as recorded in the York directories of both 1885[[13]](#footnote-12) and 1895[[14]](#footnote-13). Ethel is also recorded as being born here[[15]](#footnote-14). However, in 1901 they lived on 10 Southlands Road, Micklegate,[[16]](#footnote-15) suggesting the family business aided in an expansion of wealth and assets. The family also employed a servant and three butchers assistants,[[17]](#footnote-16) further evidence of wealth. Hence one explanation for Ethel’s route into photography may be through familial wealth which provided the means to equipment and schooling. * John Steigman[n] was recorded as attending the Royal Agricultural Society,[[18]](#footnote-17) and was also a member of the York and District Butchers Association and an overseer of Micklegate.[[19]](#footnote-18) Membership suggests a certain level of integration into the community which may have further aided Ethel’s social standing and connections. * In the 1901 census, Alice Steigman[n] (Ethel's older sister) is recorded as living with the Windass family in Dunnington, of whom the head was an artist,[[20]](#footnote-19) presenting another possible explanation for Ethel’s emergence into the art world. * John Christian Steigman[n], Ethel's father, is recorded as dying in 1902 in York, aged 46.[[21]](#footnote-20) In the years after his death, the three daughtersmarried. On 21st May 1905, Lillian Brand Steigman[n], was married in York to Mark Stickland.[[22]](#footnote-21) In 1907 Alice Mary Steigman[n], is recorded as marrying either Herbert Kendall or Edwin Frank Fox.[[23]](#footnote-22) Their husbands had traditional English names, suggesting the family had links outside of the German community in York, emphasizing their place outside of the typical immigrant communities that usually gathered around the UK. * In 1912, an Ethel M R Steigman[n]is recorded as marrying Frederick Richardson.[[24]](#footnote-23) There is limited information on Richardson and his social standing. Outside of a death certificate for a Ethel M R Richardson in 1967, there were no other census records to fill in the gaps of her married life. This is where in many ways where our knowledge of Ethel ends. * There is a Steigman[n] memorial in York cemetery where several family members are listed, however there is no mention of any of the adult daughters.[[25]](#footnote-24) There are reports that after the death of John Christian his wife and sons changed their last name to ‘Davis,’[[26]](#footnote-25) a fact with significance in the time of war and growing attacks on local German butchers,[[27]](#footnote-26) specifically 4 attacks in York in 1914.[[28]](#footnote-27) Hence Ethel may have found safety from anti-german sentiment in taking her husband's name. * **Ethel as a Photographer:** In the census records of 1911 Ethel is recorded as a ‘photographic black and white artist’.[[29]](#footnote-28) The death of her father in 1902 may have had a significant impact on her family life and wealth, as by this time her family no longer employed a maid, and it appears that all of her siblings (herself included) were working or married.[[30]](#footnote-29) It is possible then that their change in fortunes prompted Ethel to pursue a career outside of the home. This tells us a lot about who Ethel might have been as an individual, using her connections and resources to keep the family afloat while not only having to challenge gendered perceptions but growing anti-german sentiment. * The context of photography at this time may also be significant. Women who had previously been barred from artistic circles and unable to train in academies could engage with photography, coinciding with a period in which more women challenged prevailing ideas about gender roles.[[31]](#footnote-30) Earlier photographers who were women often needed the requisite wealth and leisure time to pursue it, owing to how costly it was.[[32]](#footnote-31) However, after Kodak's breakthrough camera was invented in 1888, many of the camera advertisements were aimed at women, and captured the spirit of the ‘New Woman’ seeking social and economic freedoms.[[33]](#footnote-32) Ethel presents as one of these ‘New Women’ perfectly.   From the 1850s, while more wealthy women experimented with photography as artists in their own right, many working class women were employed by studios as assistants.[[34]](#footnote-33) During the 1880s and 90s a number of photography studios were operating in York. As recorded in George Stevens Directory of York, there were 18 photography studios listed in York in 1885.[[35]](#footnote-34) The next decade, in 1895, there were 12, but this was in addition to two photographic dealers.[[36]](#footnote-35) This may be how Ethel was involved. | |
| Why is this interesting and what impact have they had? | |
| Overall Ethel’s family appears to have had a significant impact on the city of York. The end of the Victorian period leading to the war was a time of growing anti-German sentiment, specifically towards butchers as reports of food fears were linked largely to the German sausages[[37]](#footnote-36), and yet the family’s wealthier status suggests their business did well. Furthermore, there is evidence that the family was somewhat integrated into the community, which may have been enhanced by the children’s [Ethel’s] English language skills to further social standing and connections. It is evident that such connections and wealth may have aided Ethel’s emergence into the world of photography and art. Thus, Ethel does not only provide an interesting insight into what it was like for women in this emerging business but also how immigrant women fought for a place in the wider community at the time. She is an interesting individual because she had to establish her life in a different society to where her parents grew up and probably faced discrimination from the community around her, yet she pursued what she was interested in, photography. | |
| Are there opportunities for follow up research? | |
| * Filling in the gaps in her later life, perhaps how far she excelled in her career, and whether stayed in York. Some records suggest she may have later remarried, but we are not certain of this. * Where she potentially studied, if there is any surviving evidence of her work and whether she continued employment after marriage. * The details of how she became involved in photography * German immigration to the UK during this period. This was also a period when many German Jews came to the UK to escape anti-semitism. How far were they accepted into wider society, ie schooling and business. * The legacy of her family's butcher’s shop in York - did she help to keep the family business running when she wasn’t working? * We have found records that she may have died in 1967 in Claro when she was 84, but have not yet had the opportunity for further research | |
| In your research have you discovered any connection to the Castle Museum collections/sites | |
| The history of Ethel and her larger family helps to shape a picture of the impact the immigrant community had on high street’s such as Kirkgate. To what extent is this currently hidden where it should be more prominent? Did immigrant communities fill gaps where English businesses were failing? The Steigman[n]'s story could prompt further research into this.  Furthermore, if archives of Steigman’s work were to be found, they would aid in building a greater portfolio of female artists in Victorian York, and enhance our understanding of this part of York’s history. | |

1. England & Wales Birth Records 1883, accessed from FindMyPast.com [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Friends of York Cemetery 1st World War Military Trail, 2017, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Ibid., p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. ‘Germanophobia and World War 1’, accessed from ourmigrationstory.org [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Census 1901 England and Wales, Stiegmann Family, 10 Southlands Rd. York, accessed from FindMyPast.com [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. York Explore Image Archives Online, Asset ID: 1001244 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Amy J. Lloyd, ‘Emigration, Immigration and Migration in Nineteenth-Century Britain’, University of Cambridge, Gale Primary Sources. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Margrit Schulte Beerbühl, ‘Migration, Transfer and Appropriation: German Pork Butchers in Britain’, Berghahn Journals, p. 101 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. ‘German Pork Butchers in Britain’, accessed from exodus2013.co.uk [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. ‘Pork Butchers Stories’, rmford.co.uk/index.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. Beerbühl, German Pork Butchers, p. 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. Yorkshire Marriages, 1879, accessed through FindMyPast.com [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. Directory of York 1885, accessed from University of Leicester Special Collections online [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. White’s Directory of York 1895, accessed from University of Leicester Special Collections online [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. 1901 Census England and Wales, Steigmann family [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
17. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
18. Yorkshire Herald, 1899 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
19. York Herald, Friday April 6 1894, issue no. 13365, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
20. 1901 Census England & Wales, Windass Family Osbaldwick, York, accessed from FindMyPast.com [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
21. England & Wales Death Records, York, 1902, accessed from FindMyPast.com [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
22. England & Wales Marriage Records, York, 1905, accessed from FindMyPast.com [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
23. England & Wales Marriage Records, York, 1907, accessed from FindMyPast.com [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
24. England & Wales Marriage Records, York, 1912, accessed from FindMyPast.com [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
25. Friends of York Cemetery 1st World War Military Trail, 2017, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
26. Ibid., p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
27. Beerbühl, German Pork Butchers, p. 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
28. Keir Waddington, “We Don’t Want Any German Sausages Here!” Food, Fear, and the German Nation in Victorian and Edwardian Britain’, *Journal of British Studies* 52 (October 2013): p. 1017. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
29. 1911 Census England and Wales, Steigmann family, 10 Southlands Rd. York, accessed from FindMyPast.com [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
30. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
31. Tirza Latimer and Harriet Riches, Oxford Art Online, Women and Photography [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
32. Latimer & Riches, Women and Photography [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
33. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
34. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
35. Directory of York 1885 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
36. White’s Directory of York 1895 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
37. Waddington, ‘Food, Fear and the German Nation’, p. 1017. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)