HERStory: Making Invisible Women Visible

Research notes

| Group Number and Researcher Name: 1 - Team Quintuple Dragon | |
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| Name of Research Focus: Lucy Sturdy (alias. Freeman) | |
| Date of Birth: 1860 | Date of Death: 1943 (?) |
| Main Reason to Research: Representation of a female prisoner in the York area with links to York Castle and Clifton Hospital | |
| Are there any other connections to key geographical locations or people?Dr Tempest Anderson, resident surgeon at the York Castle prison, certified Lucy as insane and unfit for trial in her 1885 trial. She was thus committed to Clifton Hospital in York. | |
| Key Words: prisoner, lunacy, theft, criminal, insanity, poverty | |
| Synopsis for website | |
| *[Max 150 words]*  Lucy Sturdy (b.1860) is just one woman among many who was disenfranchised by a system of crime and poverty in 19th century York. At the age of 14, poverty forced Lucy to steal for survival, trapping her into a cycle of crime and by 1885, she had already been arrested four times. A child-bride, this was only made more inherent when Lucy had her first-born aged 15. By 1885, aged 25, Lucy was declared unfit to plead due to insanity after being caught for stealing a coat and a postal order and was committed to Clifton Hospital. Lucy only spent one month in the prison; she stole the keys, escaped under the cover of night and seemingly disappeared from the records. Lucy’s story is one of hardship and survival, a narrative not uncommon for working-class women in Victorian York. Trapped in a cycle of crime and survival, Lucy is just one victim in a wider historical trend. | |
| What have you found out? | |
| **FAMILY AND BACKGROUND**   * Lucy Sturdy was born in 1860 * She was either born in Dublin, Ireland[[1]](#footnote-0) or in Carlisle, in the north west of England[[2]](#footnote-1). If the latter is correct, her father was John Sturdy; her mother Ann, older brother John and younger brother Joseph[[3]](#footnote-2). * Before or in 1871, the family moved to Bradford, England[[4]](#footnote-3). There is no record of why they chose to do this, however it may have been guided by the surging global trend of urbanization that arose in the nineteenth century, as a byproduct of the industrial revolution. For example, between the years of 1700 to 1830, the English population living in cities of more than 5,000 inhabitants rose from 15 percent to 34 percent[[5]](#footnote-4). * Bradford, in particular, became significant in this century as a giant of textile manufacture, particularly wool; as such, it became one of the earliest industrialised settlements[[6]](#footnote-5). * The Sturdy family may have moved to Bradford for the wealth of new job opportunities, particularly as members of the family were cotton weavers. * In the nineteenth century, working conditions in the mills across England were infamously poor. Workers were subject to labour exploitation, low wages, long hours (often stretching to sixteen hour days) and dangerous machinery, which meant that accidents and fatalities were frequent. * While the motives behind Lucy’s crimes are unknown, it could be that stealing, to financially support herself and her family, were a less strenuous resort in comparison than the exploitative mills.   **MARRIAGE**   * In 1875, Lucy married Thomas Freeman[[7]](#footnote-6) and the following year (possibly) had a daughter, Ann Freeman, who stayed with her family whilst she was in prison[[8]](#footnote-7). * Whilst this cannot be proven, we theorized that the couple’s marriage and birth of their daughter may have coincided in order to conform to the social norms of marriage and childbirth that were prominent in the nineteenth century. Assumably, the couple would have faced rejection and alienation from wider society had Ann been born out of wedlock. * Thomas Freeman was arrested three times (1884[[9]](#footnote-8), 1893[[10]](#footnote-9), 1897[[11]](#footnote-10)) for being drunk and disorderly - could this be a reason that Lucy committed so many crimes of theft, to financially support her family when her husband was not around? * Census records from 1881 document Lucy’s family during her time in prison. Within this household, there is a John Sturdy, his wife Ann Sturdy, and then a 5-year old girl also named Ann.[[12]](#footnote-11) Alongside this, Lucy is reported as being in prison.[[13]](#footnote-12) It is likely, then, that John Sturdy raised his granddaughter during this period. * When Lucy disappears from the records in 1886, Ann Freeman seems to disappear with her.   **LUCY’S CONVICTIONS**   * She was charged 7 times in the Bradford and Leeds area 1874-1885, with the theft of coats, boots, postal stamps and money. * 1874, Bradford, stole 2 petticoats and tried to sell them to a pawnbroker, imprisoned for 1 month. A newspaper article says she was arrested alongside another woman the same age, Elizabeth Farrell, and that they were working together.[[14]](#footnote-13) * 1875 Bradford, stole boots from the Stafford Boot and Shoe company and tried to sell them to a pawnbroker, imprisoned for 3 months. * 1878 Bradford, stole a jacket, imprisoned for 1 year and was given 2 years of police supervision. * 1880 Bradford, 2 separate charges of stealing coats, imprisoned with hard labour for 5 years in Woking female prison, and 2 years police supervision. * 1884 Leeds, stole jacket, coat and shawl, imprisoned for 9 months.[[15]](#footnote-14) * 1885 Bradford, stole a coat and postal order.[[16]](#footnote-15)   **LIFE IN WOKING PRISON**   * ​​1880 Lucy was sent to the first purpose-built female prison in the UK, in Woking. It had been established in 1869, and by the 1880s held around 300 inmates. * Lucy was given 5 years hard labour, but must have been released from prison on license, as she was convicted again in 1884. * The women’s prison used much less arduous labour than men’s, since women were not believed to have the capacity for difficult physical labour. The inmates were given off-cuts of marble which they then cut down to size and arranged in a pattern to create mosaics, some of which are thought to have been used in St Paul’s Cathedral.[[17]](#footnote-16) * The prison had a focus on rehabilitation which was designed around Victorian gendered values of domesticity and motherhood. This was because women were expected to have a social, moralising role in society, and so by breaking the law they were deviating from this role. Consequently, they needed both rehabilitation as law-abiding citizens, and as women. * Female prisoners were kept in solitary confinement for the first few months of the sentence, where they ate, slept and worked. Deprived of conversation as a disciplinary tool, as this was seen as the appropriate punishment for women’s social role.[[18]](#footnote-17) * Female prisoners were often volatile, depressed and suicidal during their confinement. They commonly had mental breakdowns where they would destroy everything in their cell. Perhaps this is a factor in Lucy’s lunacy diagnosis?   **THE 1885 TRIAL**  To summarise, Lucy Sturdy was arrested in late 1885 for stealing a coat and a postal order. The jury decided she was unfit for trial as she was certified insane at this point by Dr Tempest Anderson. The following sources highlight the events as told through two newspaper articles and \_ criminal records.  **Transcripts from two newspaper articles on the 1885 trial**   * *Lucy Sturdy was placed in the dock on the charge of stealing a coat and a postal-order from a warehouse in Bradford. Mr Thompson appeared for the prosecution. Dr Anderson, the medical officer of York Castle, stated that the prisoner was quite insane, and his Lordship ordered her to be detained during her Majesty’s pleasure*[[19]](#footnote-18) * *A Sturdy and Rougish Mill-hand - At the Borough Court, on Monday, Lucy Sturdy (34), mill-hand, Eastbrook Lane, was charged with stealing a coat, value 15s, and a postal order, value 10s, the property of W. H. Lister, on the 13th August. Prosecutor is a manager at Messrs. Lister and Sutcliffe’s Globe Mill, Hall-Lane. Prosecutor’s coat, which had a postal order, value 10s, in one pocket, was stolen from the office in the mill. The same afternoon prisoner met a lad named George T. Ward, schoolboy, and induced him to go to a branch post office, and change the order. Prisoner gave him a six-pence, having told him that if questions were asked he was to say that it was for his mother and that she was ill. Prisoner, who pledged the coat, was committed for trial.[[20]](#footnote-19)*   The differences between these articles can be questioned for validity (Lucy was in fact 25, not 34, for example), however the overarching narrative correlates with the criminal records below:  **Criminal Records**   * *Stealing a coat and Postal order of the value £1 5s., the property of William Henry Lister, at Bradford, on the 13th August, 1885...Not tried. Medically unfit to appear for trial. Postponed until next sessions.[[21]](#footnote-20)* * *Lucy Sturdy was at the Assizes holden at York in and for the County of York on the 6th day of November 1885 assigned upon an Indictment against her for stealing a coat and a postal order and being found upon such assignment to be insane by a jury...[[22]](#footnote-21)*   **Details from Borthwick Archives - Asylum Admission Forms[[23]](#footnote-22)**   * Admitted to North Riding of Yorkshire Lunatic Asylum at Clifton York on December 5th 1885; aged 25; married to Tom Freeman; a weaver; previously living in Armley Gaol [Jail in Leeds], chargeable to [Prison Commission?]; medical certificate signed by Tempest Anderson on 4th December 1885, certified as suffering from melancholia, cause unknown, in good bodily health, mental health condition apparently having existed for 4 months, the first and only affliction she has suffered from. * At the time of admission she had two children, the youngest 16 months * She attempted to commit suicide by cutting her own throat, though she isn’t presumed to be dangerous. * The evidence that Tempest Anderson gave to indicate that Lucy was insane was as follows:   *on admission here was in a state of most acute mania talked about having married the Prince of Wales or the Lord Lieutenant who had taken her child to India and left it in the woods. The Prince of Wales took her [dog?] away from her. The Queen made her a new [dress?]. Still frequently asks for her child.*   * Recorded to have no education, was religiously affiliated with the Church. * Her crime was considered felony, and she was tried at the York Assizes on 6th November 1885. The jury found her unfit to plead, and she was thus sentences to be detained in Strict custody.   From this information it should be noted that nearly 3 months passed between her arrest and her admission to the asylum - during this time it seems she was kept at Armley Jail in Leeds. This is a longer time than she spent in the asylum, since the following information will show how she escaped after only a month there. Was her experience at Armley Jail the reason she pleaded insane at her trial?  **CONSIDERED SUFFERING OF MELANCHOLIA ON THE 1885 TRIAL**  Melancholia was perceived as a form of mental disease in which emotion was the main, or only, faculty affected, and as such it could present without delusion of thought. It was described as a ‘depression of spirits’ and is contrasted with mania—the opposite state of ‘mental excitation’. By the end of the century, melancholia was not only one of the most common forms of mental disease diagnosed in British asylums, it was also one of the most written about in medical literature.*. [[24]](#footnote-23)*  **LIFE IN THE ASYLUM**  With the information on her admission to and experience within the Clifton Hospital, two hypotheses can be proposed. (1) She was genuinely insane, suffering from mania or melancholia, as a result of her life’s experience - she lived through a cycle of poverty and imprisonment which would have a dire effect on anybody’s mental health and the melancholia may have introspective links to post-partum depression. (2) She was not as insane as Dr Anderson claimed she was, and her acts of insanity were faked to avoid a prison sentence which was worse than those she had previously experienced. Either hypothesis is plausible, and the evidence of her personal experience is limited, so the circumstance encourages us to think critically about the ways in which working-class women were oppressed by their systematic oppression by class and gender, potentially forcing them into a cycle of crime.  **ESCAPING THE ASYLUM[[25]](#footnote-24)**   * Sturdy is recorded as having escaped the asylum. * January 6th 1886, she is recorded as having stolen scissors and snapped the key chord on one of her nurses. Though she was caught for this * January 27th 1886, she is described as having ‘escaped into the night’. * More records appear on 8th February, June 16th of 1886 and then further again on January 24th 1887 as still being absent. * She was officially stricken from the asylum’s record books on 10th October 1887, stating that ‘she wins’. * At this point, Sturdy completely disappears from records along with her presumed daughter, Ann Freeman. It is likely that she escaped, grabbing her children and then fleeing the system altogether and hiding from the law.   **LATER YEARS**   * In 1939 she (possibly) worked as an unpaid servant in Leeds. * Lucy (possibly) died in the winter of 1943, age 82, in Leeds.   **LOOSE ENDS** (contradictions and uncertainties)   * It is not known for certain whereabouts she went after escaping from the Clifton Hospital Asylum in 1886. * It is also not know what happened to her or what kind of life she lived after this episode, as there are a gap of about 40 years (there are no records), the only one after that stating that she might have died aged about 82 and that she was working as a unpaid servant in Leeds, but there is no information or records about her family (daughter, husband). * Difficulty with locating these records lies in the fact that there are two women born around 1860 that go by the name of Lucy Sturdy around the Leeds-Bradford,-York area. Most distinctive in following each Lucy is their division of class; however, this becomes more veiled in the later records, maintaining Sturdy's anonymity. | |
| Why is this interesting and what impact have they had? | |
| *[What is it about their life that is interesting to you]*  Lucy Sturdy appears to exist solely in records through her crimes, and it is interesting to speculate about the other aspects of her life beyond this. Why was she stealing these clothes? Is it an accurate reflection of a young girl experiencing poverty in the late 19th century? Did she steal out of poverty, mental illness, or both? Likely, as we have seen that she pawned her stolen items, it came out of necessity for survival.  She was recorded as insane at 34, but was she really insane, or was this just a label they gave to a woman who had struggled all her life and was demonized for it? She was treated as a criminal and a lunatic, so it is interesting to think about what this says about poor women in the time period, and what percentage of women in the York Castle women's prison were from a poor background as opposed to presenting a more serious risk to the public.  Overally, Lucy Sturdy is just one narrative plucked out of thousands of women systematically disenfranchised by the lack of agency created by the prison system in York. Sturdy appears to be someone left with very little choice but to steal for survival, for which the records will forever remember her as an insane felon. By contextualising her life story, we are acknowledging and discovering the hidden story of someone trapped in a cycle of crime for the survival of herself and her family, just one representation of a victim of a much wider historical trend. | |
| Are there opportunities for follow up research? | |
| *[If you had more time or resources, where would you go to next]*  Look for information at the York Castle Museum archives - West Yorkshire Registry Office - volume 9c, page 535  Marriage record at 9b, 270 (England & Wales Marriages, 1837 - 2005)  Research further about Lucy’s Family, and the victims of her crimes.  Research on Elizabeth Farrell, recorded as being charged alongside Sturdy for a crime of theft. Recorded as being committed to the House of Correction for a month (1874).  Revisit the Borthwick Archives. They have content here regarding dismissals, patient writings and account books in their Female Case Books that might help piece together information about Lucy’s time within the asylum. | |
| In your research have you discovered any connection to the Castle Museum collections/sites | |
| *[Key collections/buildings or items held by YMT to support the research ]*   * Certified insane by Dr Tempest Anderson (resident surgeon at the York Castle Prison): his signature appears in much of Sturdy’s documents. * York Castle Museum’s padded room. | |

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