

**HERStory: Making Invisible Women Visible**

**Research Proposal**

| **Group Number and Researcher Name:** Team 4 (Rebecca Harper, Piper Hedges, Evie Sausman and Serenity Xu) | |
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| **Name of Research Focus:** Mary Ann Craven - Identity as a single mother and widow. | |
| **Date of Birth:** 15 September 1826. | **Date of Death:** 31 July 1900 |
| **Main Reason to Research:** She is a key local figure, with lots of research into her professional life being carried out. However, there is little information on her personal life. Using the social context - Victorian expectations of women - we wanted to try and gauge an idea of her identity as a single mother and widow. | |
| **Are there any other connections to key geographical locations or people?**  ***People***  Mary’s main link to key people in York were through the closest men in her life, one of whom being Thomas Craven, her husband and business partner.[[1]](#footnote-0) Her other significant connection was to Joseph Hick, her father and the partner of ‘Kilner and Hick’, the business that Mary would later take over in 1860 after merging it with her own.[[2]](#footnote-1)  ***Locations***  Mary’s centrality to York is mainly displayed through the fact that her father’s business, Kilner and Hick, was based in York, on 47 Coney Street, where she would also later have a property on.[[3]](#footnote-2) Mary also had a business property on Foss Islands Road,[[4]](#footnote-3) and lived with her three children on 21 Pavement Heworth Croft,[[5]](#footnote-4) later moving into a manor house in Heworth Green.[[6]](#footnote-5) Her sweet shop was also based in the Shambles,[[7]](#footnote-6) a place especially notable in York, which got its confectionaries from a factory in Coppergate. [[8]](#footnote-7) Mary’s funeral service was also held in All Saints Church,[[9]](#footnote-8) and she is buried in York City Cemetery,[[10]](#footnote-9) forever residing in York. As Mary’s business and home were all placed in the heart of York, her link to the town can be clearly seen. | |
| **Key Words**: Craven, Confectionary, Widow. | |
| Synopsis for website | |
| Born in York on the 15th September 1826[[11]](#footnote-10) to Isabella and Joseph Hick, Mary Ann Craven went on to run a successful confectionery company until her death on the 31st July 1900.[[12]](#footnote-11) After becoming a widow at thirty-three (1862), she had three children and a full time business to run.[[13]](#footnote-12) She was an admirably formidable woman - rumoured be “stronger”[[14]](#footnote-13) than her husband - who merged two major companies so successfully that she was in a position to purchase a notably large house in the 1870s on Heworth Green.[[15]](#footnote-14) Despite her hardships, she was a “wonderful little old lady”[[16]](#footnote-15) who frequently participated in charity work; visiting “sick workers with blankets, clothing and food.”[[17]](#footnote-16) | |
| What have you found out? | |
| Overall, we have found out that Mary was a successful business woman and her opportunity to prove herself as an entrepreneur only arose after the passing of her father (1860) and husband (1862). We found out that she was born (15 September 1826) into the confectionery business (Kilner & Hick) and in 1851, she married Thomas Craven, another famous confectioner who was 12 years her senior. Alongside running a full-time business (she merged the two by her death in 1900)[[18]](#footnote-17) and her husband dying, she had three young children to bring up - Joseph, Annie and Susan.[[19]](#footnote-18) She was known to be a short woman who had a chair built to oversee her workers.[[20]](#footnote-19) Before she carried on the business for another forty years, success came after a period of poverty, as she attempted to sell the business shortly after Thomas’ death.[[21]](#footnote-20) After passing it on to her son, Joseph,[[22]](#footnote-21) She remained in York for the entirety of her life. In her spare time, it has been reported that she frequently visited the homes of sick workers with items such as ‘blankets, food and clothing’, displaying her reportedly kind personality.[[23]](#footnote-22) Those who knew her also described her as having a “sense of humour and firm discipline”[[24]](#footnote-23) this seems apt from what we know about her achievements.. In researching the context, we found out about the strict mourning process Victorian women have to undertake.[[25]](#footnote-24) Whether or not Mary abided by this we don’t know. However, given her public profile and wealth, it would be reasonable to assume. We also looked into how her identity as a legal person changed. After Thomas passed, she became a legal entity and could therefore own property and assets.[[26]](#footnote-25) Furthermore, whilst it seems women took a step back into the ‘separate sphere’ during this time, Women such as Mary Ann demonstrate this was not always the case, in line with the recent trend of historians reconsidering the accuracy of this theory.[[27]](#footnote-26) | |
| Why is this interesting and what impact have they had? | |
| We think this is interesting because of the strict ideals of middle-class womanhood at the time. The concept of a working middle-class woman, let alone an entrepreneur, seems so ahead of its time we were intrigued as to how she got there. We also found it fascinating that the prime of her life appeared to be as a single mother and widow and couldn’t help but notice this conflicted with her expected role as a mother and wife. We can only assume the inspiring effect a public figure such as herself would have on other women in York at the time. | |
| Are there opportunities for follow up research? | |
| We think it could be beneficial to uncover more on her personal life and discover how and if the death of her husband in 1862 affected her emotionally and possibly financially. As well as this, it could be insightful to research, despite being outside the time period given, what her long term impact upon the company was and her legacy. In exploring how people remembered her, this will help us gain a deeper understanding of who she was. Furthermore, there is the opportunity for genealogical research to uncover living relatives and the development of the family since the business closed. | |
| In your research have you discovered any connection to the Castle Museum collections/sites | |
| Some connections that our research on Mary Ann Craven could link to at YMT is if the museum had any evidence or items to do with the suffragette movement, as it would possibly shed light on what being a woman was like in the Victorian era. As well as this, if the YMT had any archives or items from the confectionary industry from the period, then they could link these with Mary Ann Craven. There is potential for the museum to add a M.A. Craven & Son Ltd. storefront to the Victorian street as a representation of Mary Ann’s presence in York trade and industry. | |

1. ‘Mary Ann Hick in 1851’ (Find my Past) <[Record Transcription: England & Wales Marriages 1837-2005 | findmypast.co.uk](https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=BMD/M/1851/2/AL/000895/020)> accessed 24th November 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Dinah Tyszka, ‘Mary Ann Craven (1826-1900)’ (York Civic Trust) < [Mary Ann Craven (1826-1900) – York Civic Trust](https://yorkcivictrust.co.uk/heritage/civic-trust-plaques/mary-ann-craven-1826-1900/) > accessed 24th November 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Dinah Tyszka (n 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Dinah Tyszka (n 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Dinah Tyszka (n 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Dinah Tyszka (n 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Dinah Tyszka (n 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Dinah Tyszka (n 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. Dinah Tyszka (n 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. Dinah Tyszka (n 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. ‘Mary Ann Hick in 1826’ (Find my Past) <[Record Transcription: England Births & Baptisms 1538-1975 | findmypast.co.uk](https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=R_963653232)> accessed 24th November 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. Dinah Tyszka (n 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. Dinah Tyszka (n 2).  [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. Anonymous Author, ‘The “Art, Trade and Mystery of a Confectioner”: The History of M.A. Craven & Son LTD York’, Specialised Publications LTD (Surrey, 1949) 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. Dinah Tyszka (n 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. Anonymous Author (n 15) 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
17. Anonymous Author (n 15) 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
18. Dinah Tyszka (n 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
19. Dinah Tyszka (n 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
20. Dinah Tyszka (n 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
21. Anonymous Author (n 14) 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
22. Dinah Tyszka (n 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
23. Anonymous Author (n 14) 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
24. Anonymous Author (n 14) 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
25. Sonia A Bedikian, ‘The Death of Mourning: From Victorian Crepe to the Little Black Dress’ 2008(57) Omega Journal of Death and Dying, 35, 38-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
26. Jennifer Aston and Paolo Martino, ‘Risk, success, and failure: female entrepreneurship in late Victorian and Edwardian England’ 2017(7) Hoboken Wiley, 837, 843. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
27. Jennifer Aston and Paolo Martino (n 25) 837. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)