

Croker Prize for Biography

Entry 1406

Louisa Ellen Ogilvie

The blackest sheep in my family's flock was

LOUISA ELLEN OGILVIE

Louisa Ellen Ogilvie, sister of my great-grandfather, was born at Norton, County Durham, in 1846¹, only daughter and eldest of the five children of Robert Wall Ogilvie and Eliza Louisa (nee Dixon)

By 1851 at the time of the census², the family had returned to Robert's home town of Newcastle upon Tyne; Louisa's age is given as 4³ while the 1861 census records her as a 14 year old boarder at school in Tynemouth⁴.

Tragedy and sadness seems to have dogged the family during Louisa's early years, with the deaths of her maternal uncles Alexander Richard Dixon at Moulmein, India 1849 and William Ogilvie Dixon at Whampoa, China 1851⁵. Both were mariners. As well, Louisa's infant brother, Richard Jellico Ogilvie died in 1851⁶ followed by the death of her paternal grandmother, Mary Ogilvie (nee Wall), in 1853⁷.

Her father's continuing problems with insolvency⁸ and eventual disappearance at sea in 1854 must also have put a strain on the family. Robert Wall Ogilvie's occupation has been variously described as wine merchant and exporter, ship and insurance broker and general commission agent, having trading connections in Scotland and with two of his brothers in Philadelphia, USA. First charged with bankruptcy in 1845 and later spending a short time in prison for debt as well as time away from home, living in lodgings in Liverpool and later on the Isle of Man, in March 1854 while facing further bankruptcy charges, Robert set off from Liverpool on the ill-fated "*City of Glasgow*". The ship was never heard of again, although a few timbers were later found by passing ships and thought to be from her. It is believed the ship struck an iceberg and went down with no survivors, possibly in the same area where the "*Titanic*" was later to founder; there were some 480 on board.⁹ The matter was widely reported at length in many newspapers in England as well as in overseas papers such as the *New York Times* and *New York Tribune* in America and the *Shipping Gazette & Sydney General Trade List* and *Maitland Mercury* in New South Wales.

More family losses occurred with the deaths of Louisa's maternal grandfather, Alexander Dixon in 1861; her half-sister, Sarah Jane Cooper in 1864; her maternal grandmother, Sarah Jane Dixon in 1865; and in 1869 the loss at sea of her brother, Charles Wall Ogilvie and the death of her mother¹⁰.

Perhaps it was the cumulative effect of these tragedies which caused her to turn to the use of laudanum.

One bright spot in Louisa's life was probably her marriage, when in 1865 at St Andrew's Newcastle upon Tyne, she married William Pateman (born in London 1842, son of a publisher). Their marriage certificate showed William was of full age, a widower, occupation Accountant, residing at Hammersmith. Louisa stated she was 19, a spinster, her father Robert Wall Ogilvie, merchant.¹¹

The 1871 census shows the Patemans living at Hammersmith with William's occupation now cashier to an insurance company. Louisa is shown as 22 years of age and her half-brother, George Eugene Cooper (aged 11) is with them.¹²

Louisa next appears in 1876 when William Pateman filed for divorce on the grounds of adultery.¹³ The case was apparently a bit of a cause célèbre at the time and the divorce papers as well as the many newspaper reports make interesting reading.¹⁴

From the newspapers, some of which give a fairly full account of the divorce proceedings, it appears there was one child of the marriage and who had died by 1876. William alleged that at various times in 1875 Louisa had committed adultery with Thomas William Seir of Harwich, that from the time of the marriage she had treated her husband with great cruelty and in November 1875 she wilfully administered to her husband a large quantity of a certain poisonous drug (laudanum) with the intention of harming him. Twice on the same day she administered poison, which made him ill, but obviously didn't kill him (apparently he had recognised the "peculiar taste" of the tea as opium). Mr Seir, when examined, said he believed Louisa to be a single woman, alleged nothing improper had taken place between them, although he had kissed her, and he intended to offer her marriage. He alleged she wore no wedding ring and none was visible in the photograph she gave him.

The newspapers make mention of the letters between Louisa and Seir - including some extracts from them - and that she had sent him her photograph. Regarding the attempted poisoning of her husband, apparently urging him to have a cup of tea and later in the day a cup of coffee, the paper reported she had "taken some laudanum herself for medicinal purposes and might have stirred the cups with the spoon which she took it in". Pateman suspected something was amiss and had the contents of the cups analysed, the chemist finding there was enough opium in the cups to produce "great danger or fatal results". Louisa's brother in Newcastle was sent for and declared the situation was preposterous and took her back to Newcastle. She stayed with an aunt but apparently her behaviour was such that she was forced to leave there, going to stay with her brother but he refused to have her for very long. William Pateman even visited Seir to discuss the matter with him - and Seir returned Louisa's letters. It also seems Louisa was suffering delusions of grandeur (perhaps an effect of the laudanum), writing in her letters to Seir that her mother would not allow her any suitors (her mother had died several years previously); she mentioned a sister (she was an only daughter), wrote of owning exotic animals - pigeons, cockatoos - and of attending grand parties and having drives in the park; none of which was true.

Judicial separation/divorce was granted in December 1877 on the grounds of the wife's cruelty, but the jury found the co-respondent not guilty of adultery..

The *Ipswich Journal* of 22 December 1877 has a long and fairly full account of the divorce hearing and there's more than a passing mention in the *Newcastle Courant* of the same date, as well as reports in other English papers - and the case was considered newsworthy enough to warrant a mention in an Australian paper, the *West Australian* of 19 April 1878, in an article entitled "Extraordinary Case".

By the time of the 1881 census Louisa had returned to London and was employed as a nurse to a Dr Martindale Ward of Lambeth.¹⁵ She's listed as Ellen Ogilvie, married, servant, "nurse under", aged 25; a few months later, at the Brentford Register Office, she married George Augustus Horton, aged 31, a bachelor, Sergeant in the 11th Hussars. The remarkably youthful Louisa stated she was a spinster, aged 24 and her father was Robert Wall Ogilvie, deceased, wine merchant.¹⁶

In 1891 Louisa and George were living in Alverstoke, Hampshire. George aged 41 and a grocer/army pensioner and Louisa, 34 and a dressmaker. There were no children.¹⁷

George and Louisa moved again and by 1901 were living in Combe Martin in the Barnstaple area of
1406 – Louisa Ellen Ogilvie

North Devon and Louisa is listed in the census as a bootmaker, aged 44.¹⁸

Louisa died in May 1904, the cause of her death given as "accidental death caused by overdoses of chlorodyne self-administered". Her death certificate claimed she was 47 although she was really much older.¹⁹

There was an inquest and the matter was reported in the local Devon papers.²⁰ George Horton reported that a few days before her death she had asked him to buy some gin and when he returned he found her on the couch. He went for a doctor who came at once but she died a short time later. He said his wife had used chlorodyne for bronchitis and on the previous Saturday had received three bottles. Two of the empty ones were found but the third was missing - she generally obtained two bottles at a time. The doctor reported Louisa had been given to the excessive use of narcotics for many years and said if she had used three bottles since the previous Saturday it would have been dangerous - she must have taken over a hundred full doses.

A sad end for someone whose life, it seems, had so much sadness a part of it.

William Pateman doesn't seem to have pressed charges against Louisa for attempted murder. I wonder what he would have thought about the cause of her demise. Poetic justice perhaps?

George Horton died in 1910 at Comb Martin; William Pateman is recorded in the 1901 census, still at Hammersmith, aged 58 and a widower, his death has not been traced.

One question remains unanswered: was the laudanum found in the coffee and tea cups accidentally or deliberately added?

References:

- 1 General Register Office of England & Wales, birth registered September quarter 1846 Stockton, Durham XXIV/252 - Louisa Ellen Ogilvie
- 2 Census Returns of England and Wales, 1851, TNA, Kew, Surrey, England. HO107; Piece 2405; Folio 348; Page 37; Address St Thomas's Crescent; Civil Parish Newcastle upon Tyne, St Andrews; County Northumberland. Robert Wall Ogilvie (29); Eliza Louisa Ogilvie (26); Louisa Ellen Ogilvie (4); Charles Wall Ogilvie (1); Richard Jellico Ogilvie (1 mth) and two servants Agnes Jane Crighton (20) and Hephzibah Dafter (20)
- 3 *Ibid.* HO107; Piece 2045; Folio 349; Page 37; Registration District; Newcastle upon Tyne.
- 4 Census Returns of England and Wales, 1861, TNA, Kew, Surrey, England. RG9; Piece 3839; Folio 62; Page 22; Address Preston Road, Tynemouth, Northumberland. Civil parish Preston; Registration district Tynemouth; Sub-registration District North Shields.
- 5 Information recorded on headstone, St Andrew's Cemetery, Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne, Northumberland. (Transcribed by Kath Willans http://www.jwillans.freemove.co.uk/st_andrews_cemetery_inscriptions.pdf) Alexander Richard Dixson, Captain of the *Stalkart*, died 22 July 1849 from severe injuries by fire, aged 34; Hugh Donald Dixson who died at sea 8 February 1842 aged 22; William Ogilvie Dixson died at Whampoa in China 1 July 1850 (sic) aged 30
- 6 General Register Office of England & Wales, death registered December quarter 1851 Newcastle T 25/238 Richard Jelliese (sic) Ogilvie
- 7 *Ibid.* Friday, 13 May 1853 Issue 9310. In Victoria Villas, Upper Claremont, on 6th inst, aged 75, Mary, relict of the late Mr John Ogilvie of this town.

- 8 Entries relating to his insolvency appear several times from 1845-1854 in the "London Gazette", the "Edinburgh Gazette" and the "Scottish Jurist"
- 9 *Newcastle Courant* (Newcastle upon Tyne, England) Friday 9 June 1854, Issue 9366. 19th Century British Library Newspapers. At sea aboard the 'City of Glasgow' which left Liverpool on 1st March last for Philadelphia, aged 32, Mr Robert Hall (sic) Ogilvie, spirit merchant of this town; he has left a wife and four young children to deplore his untimely fate.
- 10 Information recorded on headstone, St Andrew's Cemetery, Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne, Northumberland. (Transcribed by Kath Willans http://www.jwillans.freeserve.co.uk/st_andrews_cemetery_inscriptions.pdf) Alexander Ogilvie Dixson, late Collector of HM Customs at Stockton on Tees and formerly Comptroller of this Port, died 17 May 1861, aged 75; also Sarah Jane wife of the above who died 11 January 1865 aged 76. Also Sarah Jane Cooper granddaughter of the above who died 25 September 1864 aged 7 years and 6 months; Eliza Louisa Cooper daughter of the above who died 3 November 1865 aged 43. Also Charles Wall Ogilvie second son of the late Robert Wall Ogilvie of this town, who was washed overboard from the barque *Windermere* of Sunderland in a heavy gale off the Cape of Good Hope on 18 May 1869 aged 19 years
- 11 General Register Office of England & Wales, marriage registered June quarter 1865 Newcastle T 10B/63
- 12 Census Returns of England and Wales, 1871, TNA, Kew, Surrey, England. RG10 Piece 63 Folio 100 Page 45 Address Wilton Road, Hammersmith; Registration district Kensington Civil parish Hammersmith
- 13 TNA Kew, Surrey, England, Divorce papers 1878 J Sep 1878 385/4591 (copy to hand)
- 14 Newspapers reporting the divorce include: *Manchester Evening News* and *Newcastle Journal* 20 December 1877; *Ipswich Journal* and *Newcastle Courant* 22 December 1877; *Ipswich Journal* 26 January 1878; and the *West Australian Times* 19 April 1878.
- 15 Census Returns of England and Wales 1881, TNA Kew, Surrey, England. RG11 Piece 1343 Folio 16 Page 25 Address Saltburn, Hampton Road, Twickenham, Middlesex Registration District Brentford
- 16 General Register Office of England & Wales, marriage registered December quarter 1881 Brentford 3A/176
- 17 Census Returns of England and Wales 1891, TNA Kew, Surrey, England. RG12 Piece 880 Folio 60 page 10 Address Hardway, Alverstoke, Hampshire Registration District Alverstoke
- 18 Census Returns of England and Wales 1901, TNA Kew, Surrey, England. RG13 Piece 2147 Folio 10 Page 12 Address Retreat Cottage, Combe Martin, Devon Registration District Barnstaple
- 19 General Register Office of England & Wales, death registered June quarter 1904 Barnstaple 5B/279 age 47 (sic)
- 20 *The Western Times* (Devon) 10 May 1904; *North Devon Journal* 12 May 1904