

From Bad comes Good

Everyone eventually will find scandal and death in their family tree, whether it is illegitimacy which has been hidden, a lunatic locked away, a prison record or a murderer. Attitudes change over the decades and now, with modern finding aids, old hidden secrets are more likely to come to light.

The war memorial at Ferryhill lists two brothers, William and John Joseph Fletcher.

John Joseph was killed on 11 June 1917, while serving with the 9th Battalion, Yorkshire regiment, and can be found on the Ypres (Menin Gate) memorial. William originally enlisted with the Durham Light Infantry, but was transferred to the London Regiment (London Rifle Brigade and was killed on 4 November 1918. He is buried in the Cambrai East Military Cemetery.

The 1901 census shows the Fletcher family living in Ferryhill. We can see that John Joseph was born in Merrington Lane in 1895 and William was born in the USA in 1893. There is an older sister, Clara, born in Windleston, mother Margaret Fletcher (widow) and they are living with Sarah Edwards (widow).

We find a marriage entry of Margaret Edwards and Joseph Fletcher in Spennymoor St. Paul, 3 December 1890. Margaret's father is shown as William Edwards.

Obviously, as William was born in the U.S.A., at some point Margaret and Joseph departed for America. On checking the New York Passenger Lists on Ancestry, we can find Joseph, Margaret and Clara leaving Liverpool on the *Umbria*, which arrived in New York on 8 May 1893. Margaret, Clara and William returned to her mother in Ferryhill, England, on the death of another son and also of Joseph.

Margaret subsequently remarried to a Robinson Kell in 1901 and had another son, also called Robinson, who was baptised in Ferryhill, St. Luke, on 1 December 1901

Tracing back through the life of Margaret in the census returns, the 1891 census shows Margaret and Joseph living in Merrington Village.

The 1881 census shows Margaret Edwards living with parents William and Sarah Edwards at 865 Leasingthorne.

The problems begin when trying to trace the birth of Margaret Edwards. Mary was actually the 'adopted' daughter of William and Sarah Edwards. Her real name was Margaret Edith Quickmanning Cotton, daughter of Mary Ann Cotton,

who was executed in Durham Gaol in 1873. She was baptised in the parish of Durham, St. Oswald, 19 January 1873.

1873 January 19	Margaret Edith Quickmaning	Illegitimate daughter of Mary Ann Cotton	County Gaol	—	J.C. Lowe Chaplain
No. 200					

Reference EP/Du.SO 125, entry number 200. Reproduced by permission of

The Edwards family of West Auckland took Margaret on the death of her mother. The family moved from West Auckland to Leasingthorne and Margaret often returned to the family home throughout her life.

Being the daughter of England's most notorious poisoner is something the family would have tried to keep secret. Whether either of her husbands' knew of her background is not known, although it is documented in books that her first husband certainly knew and did not treat her well because of it. I presume, however, that he would have been proud of their sons' sacrifice in the Great War.